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Research Article

Position, Transportation, and Resources: Japan's Potential and Strategic Choices Under Analytical Geopolitics

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Abstract: Japan is a very poor country in terms of natural and mineral resources. Consequently, it remains heavily dependent on maritime transportation. Japan's proximity to a competing China, the ever-strengthening Sino-Russian partnership, and an aggressive North Korea constitute a hostile regional environment. This article offers an in-depth analysis of Japan's capabilities (i.e., potential), predominantly demonstrating the weaknesses of the country. We argue that the flaws associated with Japan's potential can be explained by both (i) geomisguided Japanese geopolitical agents, and (ii) the Japanese pacifist strategic culture. We deductively apply the model of analytical geopolitics. Our findings are that Japanese geopolitical agents are "geomisguided" as they have pursued policies of insufficient stockpiling and disregarded Japan's dependence on the sea lanes of communication. Furthermore, Japanese public opinion does not sufficiently grasp the current threats Japan faces, and this fact limits the capacities of Japanese geopolitical agents. The paper addresses a gap in the literature by applying an innovative methodological analytical approach.

Keywords: Japan; Geopolitical Analysis; Potential; Maritime Transportation; Resources

Highlights:

- Japan is heavily dependent on maritime transportation, and the number of Japanese-flagged vessels is insufficient.
- Japanese maritime currents have a military impact concerning floating mines.
- Postwar Japanese pacifism clashes with security imperatives and encourages weaknesses in Japan's potential.

1. Introduction

Japan is a resource and energy-poor country and, at the same time, one of the world's largest consumers of resources and energy. The island nation depends on imports by sea for most of its food, energy, and raw materials. In this way, Japan is extremely vulnerable to disruptions in the sea lanes of communication (SLOC), such as oil supplies from the Middle East (Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, 2024, p. 159).

Building on studies by Iizuka and Kikuchi (2014), Medzini (2017), Koga (2018), Heginbotham and Samuels (2018), Sakai (2019), Hanssen and Koppenborg (2023), and Lim and Xu (2023) that have examined Japan's potential from different angles, we find that this literature do not adequately link Japan's potential (as we define it in Section 2, including an identification of its strengths and weaknesses) to Japan's maritime transport capacity and domestic stockpiling system within a volatile regional geopolitical setting. We have, therefore, identified a research gap that we aim to fill. Moreover, we aim to go further and examine the Japanese geopolitical agents' capacity to manage this potential, assessing it in relation to the perceptions of weaknesses by the same agents, in line with earlier research (Morgado, 2022). While it is acknowledged that Japan's geopolitical agents have recently recognized the need to improve the country's security policy and have consequently initiated gradual changes, we argue that Japan's geopolitical agents' perceptions and capacities remain one of the main reasons why Japan's potential is still currently so weak. This argument is closely related to Japan's strategic culture, strongly influenced by a postwar pacifist public sentiment, which is characterized by a tendency to avoid engaging in any public discourse connected to the perception of war.

As an island nation poor in natural resources, Japan relies heavily on imports of food, resources, and energy, most of which are transported by sea. This significant dependence drastically constrains Japan's relative potential. Therefore, it is essential to assume a worst-case scenario in which SLOCs may be completely severed. In this context, securing domestic food production systems, developing alternative sources of resources and energy, and ensuring the availability of ships, seafarers, operational frameworks, and an insurance system for maritime transport become critical priorities. Particularly considering the increasing challenges that are emerging within the "gray zone" between peace and armed conflict, it is likewise necessary to analyze geopolitical agents' perceptions of wartime preparedness, as well as to identify the domestic factors that inhibit such preparedness.

In this context, and with respect to ever-growing international pressure on Far East Asia, our main research question is therefore: What is Japan's overall relative potential? This question is completed by two others: What may be the causes of Japan's weaknesses in potential, and would these weaknesses impact Japan's ability to resist warfare? Although connected to the topic, the military strength of the Self-Defense Forces

(SDF), Japan's stockpile and military reserve system, and the state of the civil defense system are subjects for another study due to the current word limits. Likewise, while acknowledging that soft power and cultural diplomacy (Bukh,2014) constitute important means for enhancing international support for Japan, these aspects fall outside the scope of this paper.

We conducted our research deductively, applying the theoretical and methodological framework of analytical geopolitics, which we explain in Section 2. In Section 3, we investigate the contingencies of Japan's position and circulation. In the following section, we explore Japan's resources. In the last section, we analyze Japan's political structure and the role of public opinion with the purpose of tracing the causes of Japan's weak potential.

Apart from filling the mentioned gap in the literature, the unique contribution of our research lies in the application of a cutting-edge development in the theory of geopolitics (i.e., the model of neoclassical geopolitics, or analytical geopolitics). Finally, this research paper also demonstrates that to increase resilience associated with food supplies, energy, and resources, Japan should (1) strengthen relationships with suppliers, diversify the latter and develop new means of procurement; (2) expand and strengthen stockpiling systems; (3) develop alternatives and reduce consumption, (4) increase recycling, and (5) intensify public awareness and institutional engagement aimed at fostering government-society relations and highlight the risks of *contingency* situations.

2. Theory and Methodology

This article contributes to the research agenda of the European Journal of Geography by applying the model of neoclassical/analytical geopolitics created by Morgado (2023) to the case of Japan. It is, therefore, a deductive research paper. The model posits that the state's behavior results from a two-level set of variables: (i) an independent cumulative variable that joins (a) the potential of a certain state (assessed using six geopolitical factors: (1) geographical space, (2) geographical position, (3) circulation/transportation, (4) resources, (5) psychosocial projection on the territory, and (6) politico-military structures)[1] with (b) the distribution of capabilities (Morgado, 2023, pp. 15-16) and (ii) an intervening variable subdivided into (c) the geopolitical agents' perceptions, and (d) their capacities (Morgado, 2023, pp. 17-19).

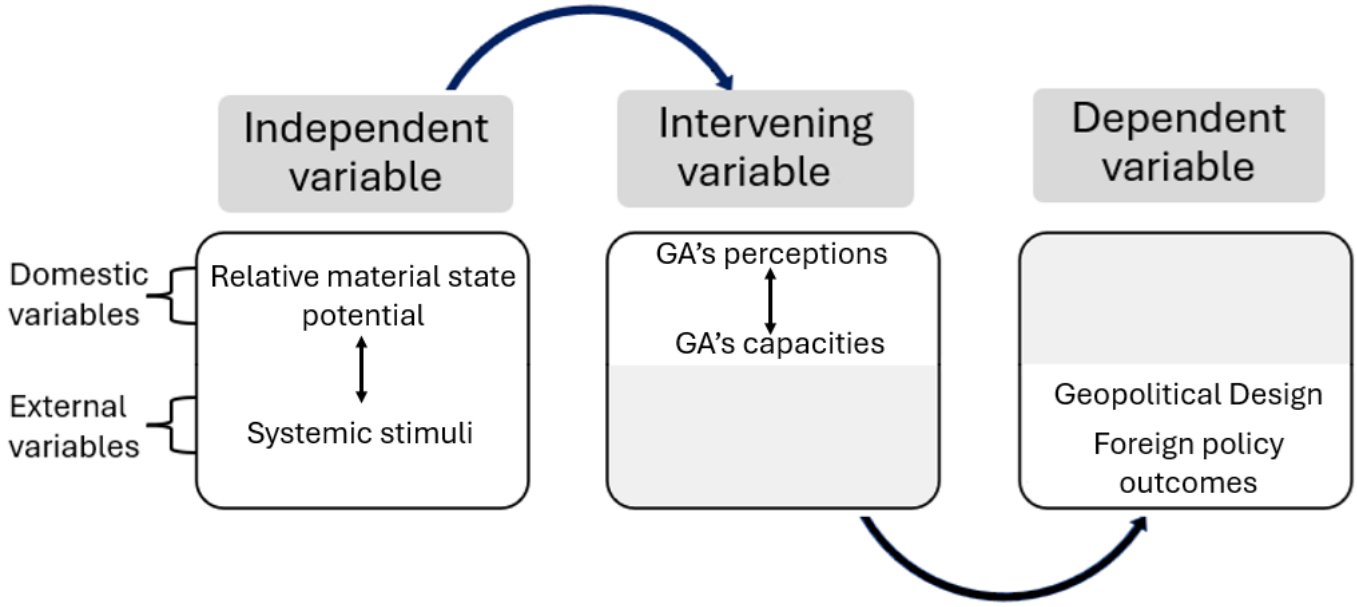

Figure 1. Model of Analytical Geopolitics (Morgado, 2023, p. 14) (adapted)

In order to proceed with the application of the model and, in this way, operationalize the analysis, due to the formal constraints of a lack of space, the current research presents only the most important results concerning the selected geopolitical factors of: (2) geographical position, (3) circulation/transportation, (4) resources, and (6) political structure in terms of the analysis of (a) state potential, and continues the application of the model with an assessment of (c) the geopolitical agent's perceptions, identifying the concept of "geomisguidance" (Morgado, 2023).

In other words, to explain our case – Japan's strategic choices concerning its potential and subsequent external abilities, or state behavior – , which directly impact the aptitude of Japan to resist international turmoil, we hypothesize that these selected and tested variables have enough explanatory capacity. This is so because, unlike liberal, Marxist, or constructivist theories – the model of analytical geopolitics absorbs both structural and agency-level variables. As the paper covers simultaneously systemic constraints, weaknesses of potential, and decision-makers' intentions and perceptions, the methodological choice seems reasonable. As for the concept of "geomisguidance," this characterizes the phenomenon that the geopolitical agent's perception of space fails to understand (or is unaware of) the geographical setting's incentives, or even consciously refuses to take advantage of them, for a variety of reasons (Morgado, 2023).

The methods and techniques that were used include the application of theory, qualitative content analysis, and semi-structured interviews (further information on the latter is contained in Footnote 5).

We consider "neoclassical geopolitics" and "analytical geopolitics" to be synonyms.

[1] Another means of clustering indicators to calculate a potential index is offered by Szántó et al. (2024).

3. Weaknesses of Japan's Position and Transportation

As a nation physically separated from the continent by the ocean, Japan relies on maritime transport for 99.6% of its trade volume (Shipping Now 2024-25, 2024), including imports of food, energy, and raw materials, and exports of products. In other words, maritime transport is Japan's lifeline. Japan experienced the worst-case scenario 80 years ago during World War II, when it lost about 83% of its shipping capacity, resulting in the disruption of maritime transport and an extreme shortage of goods.[2] For Japan, the importance of SLOC and the vulnerability of its defense have long been recognized. Japan's threat perceptions, areas of response, and means of addressing SLOC defense have shifted in response to evolving threats. Based on an analysis of Japan's past security-related documents and the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines, it is evident that while the importance of SLOC defense is acknowledged, the focus remains primarily on maritime domain awareness during peacetime. In contrast, references to SLOC defense in contingency situations—particularly with regard to drifting and floating naval mines—are extremely limited.

Since Japan's period of rapid economic growth, those SLOC that facilitate crude oil imports from the Middle East to Japan have been regarded as the most critical, with the maintenance of favorable relations with Middle East countries positioned as one of the key pillars of Japanese foreign policy. Separately, the SLOC defense "pledge" under the Suzuki administration, which envisioned protecting "several hundred nautical miles around Japan and a 1,000-nautical-mile navigation zone (from Guam to Japan)," and the Nakasone administration's enhancement of the Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) anti-submarine and air defense capabilities, responded to U.S. requests not only to contain the Soviet Far East Fleet in the Sea of Japan (Kotani, 2006) but also to ensure the seamless transportation of U.S. reinforcement troops to North East Asia. Therefore, the argument about SLOC defense at that time tended to concentrate on Japan's prospective role in defense cooperation with the United States (Graham, 2006). At that time, the entire naval power of China and North Korea, as well as that of the surface naval vessels of the Soviet Union, was limited, and the situation of the total destruction of Japanese commerce by them, as occurred in World War II, was not anticipated.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid rise of China, Japan's defense posture underwent an era of a "southwest shift." Since China's rise, Japan's geopolitical debates have shifted toward addressing how to manage China's growing blue-water navy and how the U.S. and its allies, including Japan, can maintain stability in the Western Pacific Ocean (Wirth, 2017). Furthermore, under the Abe administration's doctrine of making a "proactive contribution to peace," Japan has transformed into a nation not only determined to secure its own defense but also to actively contribute to the security of the regions surrounding Japan, as well as the global community. In this context, the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" vision, launched under the Abe administration, acknowledges that Japan alone cannot continuously monitor SLOC as a global public good spanning the Pacific and Indian Oceans. A key objective of the vision is to enhance the maritime domain awareness (MDA) capabilities of ASEAN countries, Indian Ocean rim countries, and Pacific Island countries by "capacity building" their maritime law enforcement and MDA capacities. This perspective aligns not only with Kosaka's emphasis on "supporting developing countries" and "promoting ocean development" (Kosaka, 1965), which has influenced Japan's maritime policy, but also aligns with the spirit of the "Fukuda Doctrine (1977)," which promotes equal partnerships with ASEAN countries. However, these efforts do not specifically include military capacity-building, although non-lethal military equipment and technology support through newly established Official Security Assistance (OSA) is anticipated.

Nevertheless, the lessons from the Russian invasion of Ukraine since February 2022—where floating or drifting mines[3] in the Black Sea severely disrupted commercial shipping—should be considered in Japan's SLOC defense strategy. Notably, Japan's previous SLOC defense frameworks recognize submarine or anti-ship missile (ASM) attacks, ship-to-ship transfers conducted by North Korea, maritime terrorism, and acts of piracy or armed robbery—challenges that have traditionally been recognized as threats to SLOC. However, they have not accounted for the possibility that, during a security event involving Taiwan, mines used for offensive or defensive purposes deployed in large quantities could become drifting or floating mines, carried by the Kuroshio currents to waters near Japan (see Figure 2).[4]

Trade may be disrupted not only by submarines, ASM, aircraft, or drones but also by drifting and floating naval mines. Russia has the world's largest stockpile of naval mines (¹25,000) (Douglas, 2023), and China has the second largest (50,000-100,000 mines) (Erickson et al., 2009, p.11). Floating mines can be laid not only by Chinese mine-laying ships, frigates, submarines, and naval aircraft but also by Chinese Coast Guard cutters and maritime militia vessels placed under the command of the People's Armed Police, and more than 9,400 merchant ships owned by Chinese state companies (UNCTAD, 2024). The Kuroshio flows northward along the Pacific coast of Taiwan and eventually northward along the Pacific coast of Japan (where industrial areas and important ports are concentrated) at a speed of 4-7 km/h, while the Oyashio flows southward from the Bering Sea to the Pacific coast of Japan. If drifting or floating mines were to drift, navigation by merchant vessels would be hazardous. While discussions on Japan's SLOC defense primarily focus on the "Malacca route" from the Middle East through the Malacca Strait to Japan and the "Lombok route" via the Lombok Strait to Japan, other critical SLOC include the "North-South route" connecting Japan to Australia's west and east coasts (Ogi, 2025) for imports of thermal coal and metallurgical coal, the "Trans-Pacific route" linking Japan and the United States, and domestic coastal routes that tightly integrate Japan's logistics network. Drifting and floating mines pose a threat to all of these. If a region is identified as a High-Risk Area (HRA) or shipowners and crew refuse to operate, operating costs may increase due to higher marine insurance premiums, and shipping companies may well decide to stop vessels from sailing.

The Hague Convention VIII on the Laying of Automatic Submarine Contact Mines (1907), the only international law on naval mines (to which the U.S., China, and Japan are parties, but Russia is not [USINDOPACOM, 2023, p.2]), prohibits the laying of unfixed mines other than those that become inoperable within one hour after being laid in order to ensure the safety of international shipping routes and to protect vessels not involved in conflict. Of course, modern mines that detonate upon sensing acoustic or magnetic signals or hydraulic pressure are not regulated by the convention, but the basic tenets of the law function as customary international law covering all mines (Haines, 2014). However, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) emphasizes mine warfare, including deploying floating mines, in violation of the Hague Convention VIII, and the latter is estimated to be fully capable of blockading Taiwan, the Western Pacific region, and elsewhere. An analysis of the operational PLAN handbook indicates PLAN's recognition that "the national interest necessarily takes priority over legal norms" (Erickson et al., 2009, p.19).

[2] In 1941, Japan owned 1,962 merchant ships (of over 100 gross tons) with a tonnage of 6.09 million tons, ranking third in the world. By 1945, the number of vessels had declined to 796 with a tonnage of 1.34 million (Masuda, 1986). Many Japanese merchant ships were destroyed by submarines (56.5%), air strikes (30.8%), mines laid around Japan (6.7%), and other means (4.9%).

[3] A floating mine refers to a naval mine that is deployed without being anchored to a fixed location and remains suspended on or near the sea surface. In contrast, a drifting mine is a one that becomes adrift as a result of the accidental or intentional severing of the mooring wire or chain that originally anchored it to the seabed or another fixed point.

[4] Ocean currents are not always constant as the flow changes with the seasons and other factors, but the direction of the flow is usually as shown in the image.

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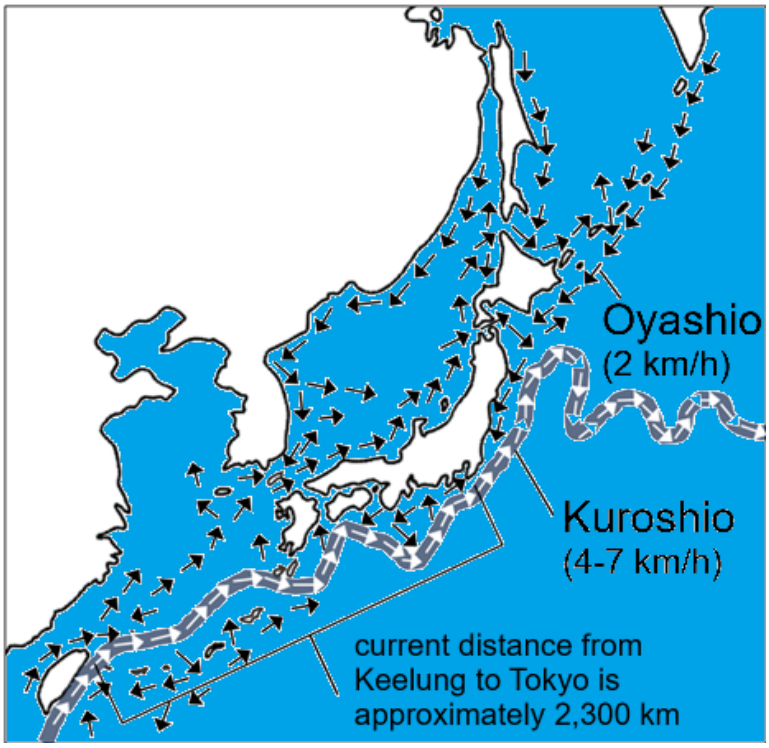

Figure 2. Simplified model of currents around Japan, including the Kuroshio and Oyashio (Authors' image created using data publicized by the Japan Meteorological Agency, December 27, 2023)

Furthermore, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, one must clearly assume not only solo Chinese military activity in the event of a Taiwan contingency but coordinated diversionary military action by China, Russia, and North Korea, while China and Russia continue to strengthen their comprehensive strategic partnership (Morgado & Hosoda, 2024). A bilateral treaty on a comprehensive strategic partnership was signed by Moscow and Pyongyang in June 2024 (and ratified in November 2024), and North Korean military personnel participated as observers in the Russian "Ocean-2024" naval drill, which was coordinated with Chinese forces, for the first time in September 2024. Therefore, it is necessary to consider a scenario in which, during a Taiwan contingency, Russia and North Korea coordinate with China, with Russia deploying floating (and "drifting") naval mines via the Oyashio Current and North Korea deploying naval mines in the Sea of Japan, thereby disrupting SLOC around Japan to overwhelm Japan's response capabilities.

Of course, a total disruption of SLOC around Japan would also mean a disruption of China's SLOC. However, even if SLOC are severed as a result of Chinese leaders' attempts to change the status quo by force to prioritize securing its "national interests" instead of expected future economic benefits, the fact that China has communication routes with Central Asian countries (Morgado & Druhalóczi, 2024) and with Russia on the Eurasian continent, but Japan has no alternatives should be perceived. Furthermore, the tidal flow is advantageous to PRC (see Figure 2).

In the latest National Security Strategy (2022 NSS), approved by the Kishida cabinet in December 2022, the importance of promoting maritime security through monitoring the maritime situation and training with other countries to deal with threats to SLOC, as well as the importance of stockpiling energy, food, and other resources and promoting a stable international environment are pointed out. However, there is no specific mention of the type of contingency envisioned. In addition, the impact of the "Taiwan contingency," which has increasingly been mentioned in recent years (Morgado & Hosoda, 2025), is often perceived to be limited only to the waters surrounding Taiwan.[5] In other words, even in the post-Cold War period, a situation in which Japan's SLOC are totally blockaded is not envisioned (Ikeda, 2023), which is the first hint of the concept of geomisguidance. Therefore, it is important to appraise Japan's ability to deal with (i) a situation of peacetime concern, such as a disaster or difficulty in obtaining energy, resources, or food on the international market, (ii) the physical closure of SLOC in a limited maritime area, such as around Taiwan, and (iii) the worst-case scenario of a total disruption of SLOC around Japan.

According to the 1997 and 2015 U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines, Japan is tasked with "conducting operations to defend key ports and straits, as well as anti-submarine operations in surrounding waters, ship protection operations, and other missions as the primary actor." While the MSDF has reduced its dedicated mine countermeasure vessels, it has increased the deployment of *Mogami*-class multi-role frigates (FFM), which include mine countermeasure capabilities. In contrast, both the U.S. Navy and the Royal Australian Navy are clearly reducing their mine countermeasure fleets (e.g., the ongoing retirement of USN Avenger-class and RAN Huon-class vessels[6]). Moreover, due to China's maritime expansion and the relative decline of U.S. naval power, Japan finds itself compelled to allocate resources toward territorial defense rather than ensuring the security of SLOC (Kotani, 2024).

[5] Semi-structured interviews were conducted on November 9–10, 2023 (each approximately one hour), including with: (1) three Japanese public servants (ages 30–40; 2 males, 1 female) from a relevant ministry concerning food security and SLOC perceptions; (2) a male food security researcher (60s) on Japan's food security challenges and SLOC-related views; (3) a male security researcher (60s) on SLOC-related defense perceptions; and (4) a maritime logistics expert (male, 40s) on current threats to SLOC from a shipping industry perspective. As researchers in semi-structured interviews often take on an investigative rather than purely facilitative role (Ruslin et al., 2022), an interview guide was used to help maintain objectivity.

[6] The RAN Huon-class is scheduled to be replaced by the Arafura-class Offshore Patrol Vessel; however, due to delays in the program, the future of this plan remains uncertain.

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3.1. Further aspects of Japan's Maritime Transport

Japan relies heavily on marine transport by ship, and 66% of its total maritime trade is carried by the "Japanese merchant fleet" (311 national flag ships and 1,900 foreign flag ships – total 2,211 vessels, 242.36 million deadweight tonnage: DWT), which consists of Japanese-flagged ocean-going vessels owned by Japanese shipping companies and ocean-going vessels owned by overseas subsidiaries of Japanese shipping companies (Shipping Now 2024-25, 2024). Japan's combined tonnage of ocean-going and domestic merchant vessels was surpassed by China's in 2021, making it the world's third-largest merchant fleet after the Greek (394.97 million DWT) and Chinese (309.87 million DWT). In addition, Japan's shipbuilding capacity, which was once the largest in the world, was 11.04 million tons of newly built ships in 2021, the third largest in the world after China (27 million tons) and South Korea (19.64 million tons), due to the competition among China and South Korea for low-priced orders.

According to international legal norms such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the basic principle regarding jurisdiction over ships is the flag-state principle. Therefore, in order to ensure stable international maritime transport, including contingencies, it is necessary to secure a certain number of Japanese-flagged vessels that are unaffected by the jurisdiction of foreign governments. However, 85.9% of the Japanese merchant fleet is foreign-registered (i.e., flag-of-convenience ships: FOC of Panama, Liberia, etc.), and only 14.1% (311 ships) were Japanese-registered in 2023. In addition, there are only about 2,017 Japanese seafarers, and the majority of Japanese-flagged vessels are operated by Filipinos (68.9%), Indians (13.3%), and other foreign nationals. As a result, the government has not been able to meet the goal of securing the 450 Japanese-flagged vessels and 5,500 Japanese seafarers needed to ensure a minimum level of national livelihood and economic activity, as recommended to the government by the International Transport Subcommittee of the Council for Transport Policy in December 2007.[7]

The number of Japanese-flagged vessels, which exceeded 1,000 in 1985, and the number of Japanese seafarers, which exceeded 30,000 in 1985, have decreased since shipping companies increased the number of low-wage foreign seafarers and foreign-flagged vessels in place of high-wage Japanese seafarers and Japanese-flag vessels to maintain international competitiveness after the Plaza Accord agreement in 1985. The number of Japanese-flagged vessels had decreased to 92 and Japanese seafarers to approximately 2,600 by 2007 (Yamagoshi, 2023). In response to this decrease, tonnage-based standard taxation instead of taxation on annual profits was introduced, laws to secure Japanese-flagged vessels and seafarers were also imposed, and a training system was established according to the recommendation of the 2007 report of the Council for Transport Policy. Since then, the number of Japanese-flagged vessels and seafarers has gradually increased, but the growth trend has plateaued in recent years.

The Fourth Basic Act on Ocean Policy (updated every five years since 2008), formulated in April 2023 and reflecting the policies of the National Security Strategy 2022, recognizes that major changes in the competitive security environment and global economic structure, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the shift in industrial structure, require major changes in ocean policy as well. The act adopted a "comprehensive maritime security" approach, which includes not only measures applicable to maritime security guaranteed by the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) and Japan Coast Guard (JCG) but also supporting economic, scientific, diplomatic, and other measures to be implemented in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Specifically, in addition to deterring attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by strengthening Japan's defense capabilities and maritime law enforcement capabilities, building a favorable international environment based on the rule of law through a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and enhancing international competitiveness, the proposal also includes strengthening economic security initiatives (promoting the development of marine resources, increasing the number of Japanese-flagged ships and Japanese seafarers, strengthening the international competitiveness of shipbuilding and other industries, and promoting science and technology).

However, the Japanese government retains a peacetime mindset without prioritizing national defense regarding maritime transportation. The prevailing view is that transportation can be procured from the market (Okawa, 2022), which, from the strategic point of view, can also be linked to the concept of geomisguidance. In addition, it is noteworthy that the Joint War Committee (JWC), consisting of Lloyd's (U.K.) and underwriters related to marine war insurance, determines the ship insurance premiums and high-risk areas (HRA) for ships in operation.

4. Weaknesses associated with Japan's Resources

4.1. Food

Japan's food self-sufficiency rate on a calorie basis peaked at 73% in 1965 and has declined since then, reaching 38% in 2022 (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries: MAFF, 2023). In other words, 62% of Japan's food supply depends on imports, making Japan vulnerable (Kabuta, 2012). According to the 2020 Basic Plan under the 1999 Basic Act on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, a master plan for Japan's agricultural policy, MAFF has set the target of improving food self-sufficiency on a calorie basis to 45% and feed self-sufficiency to 34% by 2030.For Japan, ensuring food security measures primarily involves strengthening domestic production capacity, expanding government stockpiling systems, and securing stable food imports. However, domestic food production may not easily be expanded due to structural challenges such as the decrease in farmland and the aging and declining agricultural workforce.

First, concerning domestic food production, the self-sufficiency rate for rice is high at 99%, but very low for soybeans (25%), livestock products (17%), wheat (16%), and oils and fats (3%). Livestock feed grains are associated with a self-sufficiency rate of 26%, which would make it challenging to sustain livestock if feed imports stopped. In addition, the import share of vegetable seeds is also high at 85%, although such seeds are primarily imported from the country of origin to maintain quality, and could be produced domestically. In 2024, however, when the market price of rice soared, it was revealed that MAFF was unable to keep track of the 206,000 tons of rice in domestic distribution. Although this is apparently because of the abolition of the food control law in 1995, there has been increasing concern that the domestic production of rice, Japan's staple food, is declining to the extent that full self-sufficiency may no longer be achievable. Factors contributing to this decline include the conversion of farmland due to changes in the industrial structure, the decrease and aging of the agricultural population, and the increase in consumption of livestock products, oils, and fats. The agricultural population, approximately 14 million before World War II, was 1.36 million in

[7] It should be noted that with the increasing size of vessels and the trend toward labor-saving vessel operations, there is criticism of defining the number of ships as a simple target. In addition, it has been pointed out that Filipino seafarers are considered to exhibit greater loyalty than Japanese seafarers, whose actions are more influenced by union directives. In this regard, there is concern that, in times of emergency, the Philippines may prioritize its domestic policies and impose restrictions on its nationals boarding Japanese vessels, which could have a serious impact on the operation of Japanese-owned ship operations.

FY2020. In addition, at the end of the war, there were six million hectares of arable land, but this area has now declined to 4.36 million hectares (rice fields: 2.366 million hectares, fields: 1.983 million hectares [Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2021]). More than 10 million hectares of farmland would be needed to sustain Japan's population (123.44 million in January 2025). However, it would be impossible to restore the missing 6.44 million hectares (equivalent to the area of Kyushu and Shikoku) to farmland. Some agricultural products are not suited for domestic production, and it is physically and theoretically impossible to raise the food self-sufficiency ratio to 100%.

Second, regarding the state food stockpiling system, the current size of the state stockpile of rice is estimated to be approximately one million tons (with an annual storage cost of about 11.3 billion yen), enough for about 18 days' supply, assuming a per capita consumption of 430 grams per day. Annual rice production in 2024 is expected to be about 6.83 million tons, and annual demand is estimated at 6.74 million tons. In addition to rice, the private sector is required to stockpile 2.3 months' worth of wheat for food (about 900,000 tons as of May 2023, with storage costs of about 4.2 billion yen) and about one million tons of corn and other feed grains (storage costs of about 1.5 billion yen). Domestic stockpiles of vegetable seeds also exist as private inventories, amounting to about one year's demand. Fertilizer is an essential commodity for agricultural production, but the majority of its raw materials are imported. It was designated a "specified critical commodity" under the 2022 Act on the Promotion of Ensuring National Security through Integrated Implementation of Economic Measures, and a system was established to support the government's goal of building a private stockpile of ammonium phosphate and potassium chloride equivalent to three months of domestic demand by FY2027. However, the variety and quantity of the latter are still small (Sugiyama, 2023).

The adoption of the 2022 Policy Outline for Enhancing National Food Security indicates that Japan's geopolitical agents have become increasingly aware of the importance of food security in light of events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The outline proposes two key strategies: (i) expanding domestic production of highly import-dependent crops such as wheat, soybeans, and feed grains; and (ii) ensuring the domestic replacement of agricultural inputs by increasing the use of compost and sewage sludge as fertilizers. The revised policy outline was adopted in June 2023 and expands measures not only intended to reduce excessive reliance on imports but also to promote structural transformation aimed at enhancing the resilience of the entire food supply chain. In line with the outline, the Basic Act on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, enacted in 1999, was revised in May 2024 for the first time in 25 years The 2024 Basic Act prioritizes ensuring food security by promoting the domestic production of food, diversification of import sources of feed and fertilizers, and reinforcing strategic reserves. It also promotes the export of domestic agricultural products to sustain and expand domestic production. To ensure stable imports of agricultural products that cannot be sufficiently supplied domestically, the government shall implement the necessary measures, including diversifying supplier countries and promoting investment through public-private collaboration. However, the Act makes no reference to the potential physical disruption of SLOC. In addition, the Act on Emergency Measures for Food Supply Disruptions came into force on April 1, 2025. This legislation grants the government the authority to request that domestic producers and suppliers provide information on their production and supply status, and encourages (but does not enforce) increasing production and supply. It is important to note that the law is not intended to address scenarios involving the suspension of food imports during emergencies. In an interview, an official from the Ministry of MAFF stated that "defense is not within the Ministry's jurisdiction," suggesting the existence of institutional challenges in coordinating food security and national defense.

4.2. Energy

Japan is extremely poor in energy resources, with an energy self-sufficiency rate of 12.6% in 2022, which is the lowest rate among all developed countries (Basic Energy Plan, 2025). Among fossil fuels, 99.7% of oil (91.9% from the Middle East), 99.6% of coal (from Australia, Indonesia, etc.), and 97.8% of LNG (from Malaysia, Brunei, etc.) are imported (Shipping Now 2023-24, 2023). In addition, uranium for fuel, which requires about 1,180 tU per year, also depends on long-term contracted imports from Canada, Australia, Kazakhstan, and other countries.

In the 1960s, about 50 million tons of coal were mined annually from 860 coal mines in Japan, generating 43% of primary energy and covering 70% of energy self-sufficiency (Yada, 1982). However, changes in the energy consumption structure toward oil and stronger environmental protection have led to a decline in coal use, and many of the country's micro-oil and natural gas fields have also been eliminated for economic reasons. Currently, there are 58 oil and natural gas mines in Japan, producing about 70,000 kl of crude oil and 2.3 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually. However, the share of domestic energy in the total supply is only 0.3% for crude oil and 2.2% for natural gas.

In Japan, the oil stockpiling of private companies began in 1972, followed by state oil stockpiles in 1978. The current oil stockpiling system is based on the Oil Stockpiling Act. It consists of the national stockpile (stockpiling target for FY2022 to FY2026: not less than 90 days of domestic consumption, IEA standards), private stockpile (not less than 70 days), and joint stockpiling by oil-producing countries in Japan – under this system, Japanese private tanks are leased to oil-producing countries to serve as relay and storage bases and for use by Japan in the case of an emergency. As of January 2025, the national stockpile was 41.3 million kl of product equivalent (120 days' supply based on IEA standards), and the joint stockpile of oil-producing countries was 2.7 million kl (seven days' supply) at ten stockpiling facilities in Japan. Combined with private stockpiles of 25.8 million kl (76 days' worth) of product equivalent, the total volume is 204 days' worth (Petroleum Refining and Stockpiling Division, 2025).

The stockpiling system for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) is also based on the same Act. It is implemented in two ways: national stockpiling (stockpiling target for FY2022 to FY2026: equivalent to about 50 days of imports) and private-sector stockpiling (equivalent to 40 days of imports). At the end of January 2025, the national stockpile was 1,393,000 tons at five facilities in Japan, enough for 53 days, and the private stockpile was 1,580,000 tons, enough for 58.6 days, for a total of 111.6 days (Office of Fuel Distribution Policy, 2025).

There is no specific national stockpiling system, but about 30 days' worth of coal is also stored as part of the operating inventory of private companies in two forms: outdoor coal storage and indoor coal storage.

In the Seventh Basic Energy Plan approved by the Ishiba administration in February 2025, Tokyo maintains its "S+3E," which prioritizes Energy (supply) security as the foremost objective, based on the fundamental premise of safety, while simultaneously striving to enhance Economic Efficiency and ensure Environmental compatibility. The plan outlines the clear policy intention to promote a "GX (Green Transformation)." Japan declared in October 2020 that it would achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, and in December 2024 announced a 73% reduction target for greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. Nonetheless, although the plan outlines key measures such as the development of new energy (hydrogen, ammonia, and synthetic methane), the acceleration of decarbonization, and the diversification of fossil energy supply sources, it remains completely silent on the issue of SLOC. This explicitly reflects the perception that SLOC defense falls outside the jurisdiction of METI.

While the plan advocates an early phase-out of coal and shift to LNG, coal-fired power plants—characterized by their low cost, operational flexibility, and low geopolitical risks of supply—continue to contribute roughly 30% of Japan's electricity supply, indicating their persistent significance within the national energy mix. Restarting nuclear power plants from 2015 onward, the redevelopment of domestic coal resources – whose

theoretical minable reserves are expected to be about 14.4 billion tons and remaining recoverable coal reserves about 3.2 billion tons (Yada, 1982)—and the utilization of high-efficiency combustion technology and CCS (carbon capture and storage) technology are necessary for improving energy self-sufficiency (Sugiyama, 2021). However, Japan currently relies heavily on imports for the majority of its coal resources, and the utilization of domestic coal has not progressed, although the development of next-generation high-efficiency thermal power generation technologies, such as Integrated Gasification Combined Cycle (IGCC), is being actively promoted. In addition to developing renewable energy, exploratory drilling has been conducted for undersea methane hydrate around Japan, which is expected to be one of the world's largest reserves. However, there are various challenges to its commercial production, such as the development of advanced mining technologies.

4.3. Raw Materials

Japan is an industrialized country that processes a wide variety of resources, enabling it to produce and export materials, intermediate parts, and finished products. However, Japan is rarely self-sufficient in 'underground' resources, relying 100% on imports of metals such as iron ore (major suppliers: Australia, Brazil, Canada, etc.), copper (Chile, Peru, Canada, etc.), bauxite (Australia, UAE, New Zealand, etc.), and seven rare earth minerals. Japan depends on China for 92% of its rare earth imports, and the hollowing out of the domestic resource industry due to the transfer of crude steel production and other operations overseas is also an issue.

On the other hand, Japan can meet 100% of its total domestic demand for limestone (130 million tons annually). Japan also produces 9,000 tons of iodine, which is used in contrast media for X-rays, disinfectants, antifungal agents, and polarizing film for LCD panels, second only to Chile's 20,000 tons (the latter being the world's largest producer). Chile and Japan together cover 97% of the global market. In addition, the potential scale of 'urban mining' that can recover indium, palladium, gallium, platinum, and other rare metals from discarded digital equipment seems large by global standards (National Institute for Materials Science, 2008). However, it is difficult to meet demand solely from domestic recovery.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), through the Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security (JOGMEC), has been working to develop a stockpile of not only oil and natural gas but also 33 types of rare metals and rare earths, including vanadium, chromium, manganese, cobalt, nickel, molybdenum, and tungsten, which are difficult to replace and are unevenly distributed among supplier countries. The stockpiling system started in 1983, and the total national stockpile now covers 42 days of domestic standard consumption, and the private stockpile 18 days. The stockpile secures a total of 60 days' worth (30 days' worth for some ore types) of standard domestic consumption. Actual stockpiles average about 23 days (as of the end of 2007). However, in the New International Resources Strategy approved by Abe's cabinet at the end of March 2020, the degree of government involvement was strengthened by the decision to establish a national policy on stockpiling targets, information management, and other matters to ensure that the stockpiling system is implemented as a national policy and METI approves the target volume of resource stockpiles. While maintaining the basic policy of stockpiling for a 60-day supply, stockpiles of some ore types associated with high geopolitical risk will be increased to about 180 days, while those with easy access will be reduced to about 30 days.

Base metals such as iron, aluminum, and copper are also important but not subject to the national stockpiling system. In the event of an emergency, their supply will depend on private-sector inventories. Domestic inventories record ordinary steel (inventory for 1.3 months in February 2025)[8], and aluminum mill product (about 15 days in January 2025)[9], but it should be noted that private companies are adjusting production to hold as little inventory as possible.

Recognizing the vulnerability of Japan's dependence on imports for energy and resources, the Japanese government has been (i) strengthening relations with energy and resource supplier countries, (ii) strengthening ties with international organizations and promoting international coordination and cooperation, and (iii) improving the efficiency of energy and resource use. For example, the New Growth Strategy approved by the Hatoyama cabinet in June 2010 incorporates the decision to consolidate information on mining development trends, trade policies, and supply risks in resource-rich countries and to use this information to strengthen multilayered cooperative relationships with resource-rich countries. However, in relation to countries like China, which arbitrarily regulate exports of resources as part of their strategic card playing,[10] it is necessary to strengthen the stockpiling system for critical resources and enhance domestic resource-processing capabilities. In 2022, the Law for the Promotion of Economic Security (2022 LPES) was formulated to establish four key pillars: (1) to ensure the stable supply of critical goods, (2) to ensure the stable provision of key infrastructure services, (3) to support the development of cutting-edge key technologies, and (4) to keep patent applications unpublicized. The 2022 LPES defined eleven critical goods (antimicrobial agents, fertilizers, semiconductors, storage batteries, permanent magnets, critical minerals, machine tools and industrial robots, aircraft parts, cloud programs, natural gas, and ship parts) to help develop a stockpiling system.

5. Japan's Strategic Culture and Geopolitical Agents' *geomisguidance*

In this section, the focus moves to the intervening variables of the model. In post-war Japan, there is a specific public sentiment that is very critical of all war and military-related matters due to the horrific experiences of the atomic bombings and air raids on significant Japanese cities, the direct experiences of the death and injury of relatives, and impoverishment due to lack of commodities (Hosoda, 2021). Katzenstein (1996) and Berger (1998) have pointed out the existence of an "antimilitarist culture" that involves aversion to anything military or authoritarian. The authors identified these aspects as social norms that influence Japan's foreign and security policy. Some structural realists – who tend to perceive state behavior as based on rational choices that respond to external system inputs – tend to disregard the influence of non-material variables, such as norms, on policy formation. Nevertheless, in the Japanese case, the existence of antimilitarist norms is central, hence its pertinence in analytical geopolitics. In spite of this situation, the dissolution of ideological confrontation in domestic politics (following the collapse of the Cold War structure), the stagnation of peace movements (which had heavily depended on the intergenerational transmission of wartime experiences), and generational turnover have collectively contributed to some decrease in the intensity of public opposition to institutional reforms aimed at

[8] *Preliminary Supply and Demand Report for Ordinary Steel Products – February 2025*, The Japan Iron and Steel Federation, March 2025, https://www.jisf.or.jp/data/zaiko/index.html

[9] *Summary of Aluminum Production and Shipment*, Japan Aluminum Association, January 2025, https://www.aluminum.or.jp//sys_img/files/1743464297_0.pdf

[10] Since August 1, 2023, China has mandated the acquisition of export licenses for eight types of gallium products and six types of germanium products that can be used for both military and civilian purposes. In addition, since December 1, 2023, China has been strengthening its export control of rare earths, including requiring export licenses for certain graphite products used as anode materials in lithium-ion batteries.

creating a more pragmatic security policy, such as under the Kishida and Ishiba administrations. Since the approval of the three strategic security documents under the Kishida administration in December 2022, (i) the planned increase in defense spending to 2% of GDP by 2027, (ii) the acquisition of "counterstrike" (long-range) strike capabilities through the introduction of cruise missiles, (iii) the revision of the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology, (iv) the promotion of the GCAP project in cooperation with the United Kingdom and Italy, and (v) the expansion of a "like-minded countries" network through defense equipment transfer agreements and Reciprocal Access Agreements (RAAs) are often cited as markers of Japan's rapid shift toward a realist orientation in its defense policy. As O'Shea and Maslow (2024) pointed out, changes in Japan's policy are not necessarily "incremental"; rather, they are characterized by fundamental shifts prompted by necessity in response to events such as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Nevertheless, this mentioned decrease in the intensity of pacifism does not mean its disappearance. The normative legacy of postwar pacifism, cultivated over decades, remains deeply embedded in the consciousness of political elites, bureaucrats, and society in general. As Johnston (1995) argued, such normative structures are not easily or rapidly transformed. Consequently, economic rationality and cost-efficiency continue to be prioritized, while broader public debate concerning the societal costs of national defense—particularly in anticipation of contingencies—remains largely absent. It is also important to note that even the recent, seemingly more pragmatic measures adopted to strengthen Japan's defense behavior have remained fundamentally constrained by pre-existing pacifist norms and rules, focusing primarily on how to design and implement practical policies, but without transgressing boundaries that prioritize the maintenance of an exclusively defense-oriented policy (Galic, 2024), maintaining civilian control over the SDFs, utmost restraint in the use of force, and the avoidance of the transfer or export of highly lethal weapons with the exception of the GCAP.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, there was heated political debate between idealistic reformists (mainly Japan's Socialist Party) who advocated unarmed neutrality and realistic conservatives (mainly the Liberal Democratic Party) who emphasized the importance of deterrence guaranteed by the Japan-US Security Treaty. While growing anti-war "peace movements" by younger generations criticized the older generation's responsibility for WWII, an anti-Japan-U.S-security-treaty movement arose due to concerns about becoming trapped in wars related to the U.S. This ideological conflict created a social atmosphere that prevented open debate about defense-related issues and turned them into a "third rail" – a taboo topic (Palmer, 2010). In particular, in order to avoid provoking public antimilitarist sentiment and as an excuse for protecting the practical strengthening of the Japan-U.S. security arrangement, LDP-led administrations to date have described postwar Japanese pacifism as a "national credo." Postwar pacifism is symbolized in the preamble to and in Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan, which clearly renounces war as a means of solving international challenges and prohibits the buildup of military strength. As Johnston points out, historically imposed "inertia" associated with decision-making makes strategy less responsive to specific contingencies (Johnston, 1995), and postwar pacifism (Heiwa-shugi) has hindered Japanese security policymaking. Pacifism consists of institutional aspects, such as the principle of exclusively defense-oriented defense and the three non-nuclear principles, and socio-emotional aspects such as a rejection of war, which asserts all acts of war are to be avoided, and an "aversion to lethality," which reflects a societal sentiment that no more lives should be lost, particularly among SDF soldiers. It has been pointed out that "Japanese pacifism is dead" (Gustafsson et al., 2018) due to the Abe administration's adoption of "proactive pacifism," but the desire for a "peaceful state" is widespread (internalized) among the Japanese people (Fujiwara, 2015). While Japanese "peace education" vaguely emphasizes the tragedy of war and the preciousness of peace through the sharing of Japanese experiences of the misery and horror of war that are easy for children to assimilate (Murakami, 2009), there are few opportunities in the Japanese educational system to learn about the Sino-Japanese War or Pacific War in an objective and analytical manner, which approach instead fosters a simplistic sentiment of the "denial of war."

As a result, a shortsighted perception that "if Japan renounces war and does not maintain military strength (and as long as Japan does not export weapons), then its neighboring countries will not attack this peace-loving country, and the world will be at peace" endures in Japan. The majority of the media and part of the public oppose the state restricting private rights in the event of an emergency or creating anti-espionage laws due to past experiences of the abuse of authority by the military during the war. For example, when the act concerning Measures for Protection of the People in Armed Attack Situations (Civil Protection Law) was enacted in 2004 (for the first time in the postwar period), some criticized it because since Article 9 of the Constitution renounces war, it is unconstitutional to enact a law to prepare for a war situation.

Accordingly, the domestic intervening variables have been profoundly influenced by the normative framework of postwar pacifism. Political leaders and bureaucratic elites have consistently exercised caution to avoid invoking memories or imagery associated with war. Therefore, most politicians are reluctant to provoke anti-military sentiment among the public. For example, based on the experiences and narratives of significant damage suffered by requisitioned civilian merchant vessels during World War II, the government has refrained from establishing a legal framework for requisitioning civilian ships in times of emergency, even during the 2015 development of the Peace and Security Legislation, as Japanese bureaucrats consistently avoided addressing this issue. Another example is that the deployment of Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) vessels and aircraft to Djibouti has been limited to non-escalatory missions such as anti-piracy operations that did not involve high-intensity combat. Similarly, during the 2014 debate over the reinterpretation of the Constitution, the possibility of dispatching minesweepers to the Strait of Hormuz was discussed. It was explained at the time that mine countermeasure operations would not be regarded as the direct use of force within another country's territory. While these limitations have gradually been mitigated under the Abe administration's security legislation reforms and, more recently, through a "pragmatic approach" under the Kishida administration, they nonetheless confirm the claim of Japan's continuing inability to behave as a "normal state." In addition, despite the severe impact on Japanese maritime traffic caused by Houthi attacks on civilian vessels in the Red Sea, Japan has not dispatched MSDF assets from Djibouti to the Red Sea for escort or surveillance missions. This restraint is explained by the administration's perception that gaining sufficient public support for sending the Self-Defense Forces on dangerous missions abroad would be very difficult. In this way, the Japanese geopolitical agents have engaged in a certain degree of irresponsibility, resulting in delays or even the complete lack of development of the legal framework that underpins national security. Japan's geopolitical agents have not (or have not publicly) recognized the risk of large-scale disruptions to the operation of SLOC, including the widespread deployment and drifting of naval mines, nor have they considered establishing deterrence by demonstrating preparedness for such emergencies or developing stockpiling and distribution systems for food and essential materials based on the assumption of a complete and prolonged blockade of SLOC – and all this to avoid being criticized by some media as preparing for war. In addition, the narrow purview of the bureaucrats in each ministry and agency who believe that defense is the exclusive domain of the Ministry of Defense limits Japan's ability to comprehensively prepare for security threats. No matter how much bureaucrats and academics argue for strengthening economic security policies, including stockpiling systems, the ultimate responsibility for making contingency plans and final political decisions belongs to the geopolitical agents.

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5.1. "Mercantile realism" and the priority of economic rationality

In the postwar period, Japan continued to follow the so-called "Yoshida Doctrine": Japan would minimize its own investment in national defense, relying on the military presence of the U.S. in Japan and U.S. deterrence capabilities, including nuclear weapons. On the one hand, Japan pursued 'economic rationality' by maximizing investment in economic growth, science, and technology, and prioritized choices based on economic value judgments and economic efficiency on the other (Miyagi, 2015).

However, in the post–Cold War era, amid concerns over the "drifting" of the Japan-U.S. alliance, the Japanese government sought to strengthen the U.S. commitment to the defense of Japan by increasing Japan's role through revisions to the Japan-U.S. Guidelines. This led to the greater assumption of defense-related responsibilities and burdens by Japan, culminating in the Abe administration's advocacy of a policy of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" for fear of abandonment (Heginbotham & Samuels, 2023).

Heginbotham and Samuels (1998) argued that Japan does not conform to the hypotheses of structural realism, which posit (1) that states facing the threat of war tend to subordinate economic interests to maximize military security, and (2) that states seek to limit the scope of economic engagement with hostile states posing imminent threats. They pointed out that Japan has continued to maintain a relatively low level of defense spending, even as defense budgets in the region have increased (only the Kishida administration declared in 2022 its intention to raise defense spending to 2% of GDP by FY2027). At the same time, Japan has continued to trade heavily with China, its largest trading partner. On this basis, the authors characterized Japan's policy approach, which prioritizes economic efficiency and interests, as "mercantile realism." The assessment of whether "mercantile realism" is shifting toward "structural realism" depends on the indicators used to draw such a conclusion. However, at the very least, no major changes in Japan's security policy—such as constitutional revision, the reintroduction of conscription, or the acquisition of offensive strategic weapons, including nuclear arms—have been observed. Although the normative commitment to societal pacifism appears to have weakened, as explained above, the continued presence of risk-averse bureaucrats unwilling to alter established practices and politicians reluctant to assume responsibility has perpetuated inertia aligned with "mercantile realism," thereby leaving Japan's structural dependence on the United States largely unaddressed.

The tendency for economic rationality to take precedence over Japan's national security is factual. For example, since 1977, the national stockpile of salt has been 100,000 tons, based on the population (120 million), the target intake per capita (10 grams per day), and the number of days required to import raw salt (90 days). However, in 2010, the official stockpile was revised down to 20,000 tons to reduce storage costs. Also, in 2023, there were arguments for reducing the stockpile of rice, which is costly to store and 'should' reflect declining national rice consumption, from nine million tons in 2001 to seven million tons in 2022 (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, 2023). Furthermore, the private sector tends to perceive stockpiles as unnecessary inventory and is reluctant to store them because of the cost of warehousing and other facilities. In addition, private companies are reluctant to provide inventory information, which would impose an extra burden in terms of work.

As a result of the Japanese government's emphasis on the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance and deterrence, a sense that "the U.S. will protect us" has taken root, without recognizing that the defense of Japan is a fundamental responsibility of the Japanese. On the other hand, basic measures for strengthening state resilience in the case of war, such as the development of national stockpiling and food rationing systems, which are important in addition to physical deterrence, have not been developed because they "conjure up images of war" and stimulate public anti-war sentiment.

It is an irrefutable fact that the Koizumi, Abe, and Kishida administrations, which had enough political capital and public support, developed domestic legislation in response to changes in the international environment. Under the Koizumi administration, the National Emergency Legislation (2003), including the 2004 Civil Protection Law, which limits some private rights of citizens and private assets related to civil defense in the event of an emergency, was established. The Abe administration promoted the Peace and Security Legislation (2015 military legislation), which made possible the limited exercise of the collective right to self-defense for the first time (passed by the Diet in September 2015). The Kishida administration established the 2022 LPES and 2022 National Security Strategy, which adopts a pragmatic approach to ensuring a security strategy while adhering to the principles of postwar pacifism. As a result, Japan's security policies and domestic law arrangements have gradually changed. However, contingency assumptions in Japan still primarily involve natural disasters and the disruption of international markets and do not publicly define worst-case scenarios such as the total disruption of SLOC. Although national security and economic rationality are in a trade-off relationship, Japanese geopolitical agents are expected to prioritize security preparedness in response to the growing tensions in their surrounding security environment. As an island nation, the Japanese government is expected to take measures to prepare for the possibility that resources and other goods may not only be unavailable for purchase but also unavailable for transport.

6. Conclusions

It is clear from this research paper that Japan, which depends on imports for much of its food, energy, and resources, is severely limited in terms of its material potential. Our research indicates that Japan's geopolitical agents are gradually changing their perception of the security environment and threats, and relevant ministries and agencies are promoting policies and domestic arrangements to strengthen Japan's defense, deterrence capabilities, and stockpiling system. However, the current stockpiling system is based on assumptions about international market instability instead of the worst-case scenario of a total disruption of Japan's SLOC. Hence, research results show that Japan's ability to face certain contingencies is extremely weak. If Japanese geopolitical agents determine that a worst-case scenario is extremely unlikely – and therefore does not require planning for – it is expected that such perception is justified, which has not happened thus far. Moreover, they should also adequately explain to the public that, in the event such a scenario does occur, a certain level of damage and loss would have to be tolerated. For these reasons, Japan's geopolitical agents are assessed as geomisguided overall.

In this context, expanding the "comprehensive security" concept beyond narrow defense-related enhancements to include food and resource security – which process the then-Prime Minister Ohira started initiating in 1978, but remained unrealized due to his sudden death – is required. However, related ideas have been reflected in various forms, such as in the 2022NSS and the FOIP. Yet, as Kanehara (a former deputy director-general of the National Security Secretariat) has noted, Japan still lacks a "comprehensive security policy" that integrates SLOC defense, food security, and resource security across ministries in a functional manner (Kanehara, 2025).

As mentioned, at the core of the problem concerning Japan's weaknesses of material potential is the fact that Japan's geopolitical agents are expected to inform the public about the worst-case scenario that could directly impact the Japanese and, accordingly, promote the required

preparedness of state stockpile measures, thereby emphasizing national security rather than economic rationality and relying on the private sector. As demonstrated, the current state of Japanese public opinion limits the capacities of the geopolitical agents.

In addition, the research has also shown that the enhancement of Japan's potential would require increasing the number of Japanese-flagged vessels as well as both Japanese and reliable foreign seafarers, developing a multi-layered MDA capability, including the use of space-based infrastructure and drones, and strengthening anti-submarine warfare and mine countermeasure capabilities. Japan would also need to strengthen its stockpiling systems (under the mentioned assumption of a total disruption of SLOC), promote the development of domestic resources, and establish pre-arrangements with the Joint War Committee to coordinate the adjustment of insurance premiums and the designation of HRAs. All these measures would prevent Japan from becoming the weakest link in the security chain in the Indo-Pacific.

Finally, the paper identifies strategic culture—shaped by historical narratives of collective experience—and the government-society relations influenced by such culture as the most critical aspects (within the intervening variables), that directly impact the geopolitical agents' decision making involving a refusal to establish a national defense behavior that incorporates contingency scenarios and, therefore, to strengthen national resilience. Tracing the variables that constrain the perceptions and, consequently, the strategic choices of geopolitical agents and analyzing the structure and background of these variables not only contributes to understanding the behavior of the agents but also increases the possibility of predicting their future actions. These research results thus constitute a major contribution to evaluating Japan's security policy and decision-making processes.

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