A volatile external environment
The essays collected in this volume trace the evolution of Japanese strategic thought from the beginning of the 1960s to the start of the third decade of the twenty-first century. By the start of this journey, Japan had already re-established itself after the post-Second World War hiatus as an important actor in the world economy and was emerging, in the words of one of the authors in this book, as an economic ‘great power’. Following the large-scale public protests against Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke’s pushing through of revisions to the US–Japan Security Treaty in 1959–60 – the largest protests in Japan’s modern history – and until the renewed turbulence of the 1980s, Japan’s domestic political trajectory settled into what may now be seen as the ‘core period’ of the ‘1955 system’ (jisshitsu teki imi no 55 nen taisei). The main characteristics of this system were the continuous dominance of the ruling LDP, despite prolonged periods of intra-party conflict; the pre-eminence of the Yoshida Doctrine, which prioritised economic growth and saw Japan relying on the United States for security while it maintained only minimally armed mili-
tary forces; and the deferral of socially divisive issues, such as formal constitutional reform, despite the LDP’s formal commitment to revision.²

Japan was, however, far from strategically inert during this period. The 1960s–1980s were marked by major events that changed the international balance of power and had a significant impact on Japan’s foreign-policy thinking. Three such examples stand out. Firstly, in October 1964, while Japan was hosting the summer Olympic Games, China became a nuclear power when it carried out its first nuclear test, conducting further tests in 1965–66 and detonating a thermonuclear bomb in 1967. Against a background of deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations and the ongoing Vietnam War, China’s nuclearisation transformed its ‘international bargaining power’ and raised Japan’s fears about its own security, not least the vulnerability of US bases in Japan to nuclear attack, even triggering debate about whether Japan should develop its own nuclear capability.³ Secondly, in July 1971, the first of what remain known in Japan as the two ‘Nixon Shocks’ (Nikuson Shokku) of that year came with US President Richard Nixon’s announcement that his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, had visited Beijing to prepare for a presidential visit in 1972 to establish diplomatic relations.⁴ Nixon intended US rapprochement with China to balance against the Soviet Union, but the lack of US consultation with Japan before the announcement – the Japanese government was only informed shortly beforehand – highlighted the precariousness of Japan’s reliance on the US.⁵ Finally, Mikhail Gorbachev’s appointment as Soviet leader in 1985 proved to be a further external shock to Japan, heralding the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

Against this background, one can discern increasing efforts by Japan’s governments to take advantage of international
geopolitical change to increase Japan’s strategic agency. For example, Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei’s swift restoration of diplomatic relations with China in 1972, in order to stake out a more independent Japanese foreign policy; Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo’s eponymous doctrine of 1977, which provided the first geo-economic blueprint for Japan’s engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); and Prime Minister Ohira Masayoshi’s Pacific Basin Cooperation Concept of 1979, a first for post-war Japan in terms of geographical range and strategic coverage, including political, diplomatic, economic and cultural issues. But it was not until the administration of Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro in 1982–87, the longest-lived Japanese government at that point since that of Prime Minister Sato Eisaku in the late 1960s, that the taboo on openly discussing military matters was lifted. Nakasone sought to tighten Japan’s security relationship with the US by advocating, as he said in the 1984 IISS Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture (see Chapter Thirteen), Japan’s ‘shift from a passive posture of responding to events, to an active posture of influencing events positively’. One example of this was the 1983 amendment of Japan’s 1967 ban on arms and military-technology exports, and the approval of the transfer of Japanese military technology to the US.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 dovetailed with the bursting of Japan’s economic bubble of the late 1980s and the end of the 1955 system, as a series of scandals involving the LDP and its failure to introduce promised political reform drained it of public support, leading to its fall from power in 1993. The impact of the disappearance of the stabilising domestic and external frameworks that had long guided Japanese strategic policy was evident in Japan’s prevaricating response to the First Gulf War of 1990–91. Despite the direct threat to Japan’s interests posed by Iraq’s flagrant breach of international law
in invading Kuwait and Japan’s overwhelming reliance on the Gulf for oil imports, Japan was unready to assume global responsibilities commensurate with its economic power. But the trauma of the withering international response to Japanese failure also served to galvanise reforms in the late 1990s, which transformed Japanese decision-making and its strategic culture. These included Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro’s administrative reforms, implemented in 2001, which sharply increased the power of the prime minister, and Hashimoto’s overseeing in 1997 of the first update to the Guidelines for US–Japan Defense Cooperation since they were first issued in 1978. These reforms provided a base on which the subsequent long-lived Japanese administrations of Prime Ministers Koizumi Junichiro (2001–06) and Abe Shinzo (second administration, 2012–20) could develop policy to realise their own political agendas of making Japan a more proactive global actor.

**Consistent trends in Japanese strategic thought**

Notwithstanding the considerable global flux of the past 60 or so years, the essays in this volume allow us to identify consistent ingredients in Japanese strategic thinking. One of the most important of these is the centrality of Japan’s perennial need to triangulate its relations between the great powers in the region, and the ebbs and flows of its views of these bilateral relationships. The most important of these was and remains the security relationship with the US, a core interest of Japan since the signing of the US–Japan Security Treaty in 1951 – or, as Matsumoto Shigeharu notes in ‘American–Japanese relations’ (see Chapter Four), ‘life insurance for which [Japan] must pay premiums’. Nevertheless, as the *Adelphi Papers* and articles in this book show, bilateral differences with the US frequently erupted. For example, the Vietnam War was unpopular with the Japanese public despite, for example Prime Minister Sato’s
political support and indirect assistance for the US during the conflict by allowing US bombers on missions to Vietnam to use US bases in Okinawa Prefecture. Conversely, another issue was Japan’s concerns about the durability of the United States’ commitment to the Asia-Pacific. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Japan–US bilateral friction intensified, driven by US irritation at perceived Japanese ‘free riding’ on security and the widening bilateral trade imbalance in Japan’s favour. It was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that US–Japan relations began to stabilise, as Japan increasingly sought to demonstrate greater proactivity within the bilateral security alliance.

The pieces in this volume also illustrate Japan’s long-standing ambivalent relationship with its other great-power interlocutor, China. Writing in 1967, in ‘The Asian balance of power: a comparison with European precedents’ (see Chapter Five), Royama Michio describes China as ‘a Japanese obsession’ and Asia as ‘essentially an arc round the periphery of China’. Ogata Sadako’s 1965 Survival piece ‘The Japanese attitude towards China’ (see Chapter Three) opens with the Johnson–Sato communiqué of 1965 in which Sato emphasises Japan’s pragmatic policy towards China ‘on the basis of the principle of separation of political matters from economic matters’. Known in Japan as seikei bunri, the intention of this policy was to allow Sino-Japanese engagement despite differences in ideology. She also notes that this communiqué was the first in which Japan and the US had disagreed over China policy. Ogata cites Japan’s ‘cultural affinity’ and ‘geographical proximity’ with China as the reason why in Japan ‘[a] good neighbour policy has general appeal’. More recently, one can detect traces of this view in, for example, Abe’s assertion in his de facto political manifesto from 2006, Utsukushii Kuni E (Towards a Beautiful Country), that Japan–China relations are ‘unseverable and reciprocal’.
While differing in their views about the scale of the challenge and coloured until the 1990s by the threat from the Soviet Union, our authors are also alive to the growing risks to Japan associated with China’s rise. In the 1960s, Royama writes presciently of China’s ‘tacit national objective of achieving great-power status … and eventually to defeat, Soviet leadership of the socialist world and American leadership of the “imperialist” or “bourgeois” world’. In 1987, in ‘Prospects for security and co-operation between East Asia and the West’ (see Chapter Seventeen), Okawara Yoshio warns that the ‘Western industrialized nations should not take for granted the present Chinese posture towards the West’, at a time of increasing Western warmth towards Beijing as China sought to modernise its creaking economy. The two Taiwan crises of the 1990s, rising concerns over China’s needling on territorial disputes in the region – including in the South China Sea and around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands – and intensifying concerns over North Korea’s weapons-of-mass-destruction programmes made integrating China more closely into the rules-based international system a more urgent priority for Japan. But as Bessho Koro suggests in ‘Identities and security in East Asia’ from 1999 (see Chapter Twenty-One), this was unlikely to be straightforward given China’s history, in which ‘in theory, there were no boundaries between the Empire and neighbouring nations’ and ‘thus, China is not part of Asia; Asia is China’s periphery. Given this history, the belief in modern China as a world power comes naturally, while partnership with other Asian states does not.’ Funabashi Yoichi echoes this point in his 2019 Alastair Buchan Lecture when he notes that China is ‘rapidly becoming a revisionist power’ rather than joining ‘existing institutions under the current rules of the game’ (see Chapter Twenty-Five).

Another recurring strand noted in this collection is that of Japan’s own non-nuclear policy and its consistent commitment
to nuclear non-proliferation. In his *Survival* article ‘Japan’s non-nuclear policy’ from 1973 (see Chapter Eight), Kishida Junnosuke even goes as far as to advocate the denuclearisation of northeast Asia. The continued existence of the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, introduced by the Sato administration in 1967, in which Japan pledges not to possess, produce or introduce nuclear weapons to Japan, and the release at the 2023 Hiroshima Summit of the first G7 document to address nuclear disarmament underscore the deep roots of this stance in Japan. Thus, all the authors who write on the subject are agreed that Japan should not possess nuclear weapons, despite its latent capability to become a nuclear power as a result of its endeavours in civilian nuclear-power and space development. Given Japan’s status as the only country to have suffered nuclear attack on the one hand and its desire to avoid antagonising its large, nuclear-armed neighbours – the Soviet Union, then Russia, and China – on the other, this is not surprising. But our authors fail, however, to resolve the contradiction between this resolute stand against nuclear weapons and the security provided by the United States’ nuclear umbrella, which is seen as essential for the protection of Japan.

**Strategic evolution**

While some of the key preoccupations of Japanese strategic thought remain constant, the routes by which it seeks to achieve its aims have evolved, as this volume shows. One illustration of this is the proliferation of channels of interaction between Japan and the outside world, as Japan moves away from the Yoshida Doctrine and sheds the ‘low posture’ that Kosaka Masataka cites in his 1973 *Adelphi Paper*, ‘Options for Japan’s foreign policy’ (see Chapter Nine). This is especially evident after the end of the Cold War. Although, as noted above, the US was and remains Japan’s most important security partner, geopo-
litical flux after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Japan’s desire to use its geo-economic power to maintain US post-Cold War interest in Asia and to engage China in regional issues led to more proactive Japanese foreign policy in the region. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, launched on the initiative of Japan and Australia in 1989, is one example of this – Sasae Kenichiro writes in 1994 that APEC was established to ‘confound Samuel Huntington’s theory that there will be civilisational conflict in the unique Asia-Pacific geo-economic setting’ (see Chapter Twenty). The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which was launched in 1994 and for which Japan was an early agitator, is another example. Although the ARF has failed to live up to early hopes that it would play an active role in managing the region’s security problems, it remains an important dialogue channel, including, in addition to ASEAN members, major regional powers such as India and China as well as the US and Russia.

Starting in the 2010s, there has been a marked transformation of Japan’s foreign-policy activism. This largely reflects Japan’s response to China’s rapid economic and military rise following its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Okamoto Yukio’s *Survival* essay, ‘Great-power relations in Asia: a Japanese perspective’, from 2009, illustrates Japan’s particular maritime concerns around the expansion of China’s influence in the region when he writes that ‘it is as though the East China Sea, the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea have become China’s internal waters’ (see Chapter Twenty-Three). Here Okamoto prefigures the concern that Prime Minister Abe expressed in 2012 after his return to power that the South China Sea might become ‘Lake Beijing’. China’s overtaking of Japan as the world’s second-largest economy in 2010 and Japan’s brief experience of Chinese economic coercion in the same year – when an escalation of the Senkaku/Diaoyu
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A territorial dispute resulted in what was in effect a Chinese ban on exports of rare earths to Japan—were further triggers for the step change in Japanese external activism.

Japan’s geo-economic influence in Asia developed rapidly under the second Abe administration in particular. This was expressed through an emphasis on Tokyo’s support for and increasing desire to shape the rules-based order in the face of China’s attempts to change the status quo. Abe’s keynote address to the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue in 2014 (see Chapter Twenty-Four), in which he stated ‘Asia for the rule of law. And the rule of law for all of us’, was an important strategic marker for Japan in this regard. Abe’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept of 2016 and his leading role in the rescuing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership—after US President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the bloc in 2017—and its rebirth in 2018 as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) were two prominent examples of Abe’s geo-economic strategy for the region. FOIP continues to function as an organising principle for Japanese statecraft in the region, and several ‘like-minded countries’ (dōshi koku) have since developed Indo-Pacific strategies of their own. The CPTPP, meanwhile, with its high standards for entry, has become an important vehicle for supporting the rules-based order in the region in the face of China’s increasing economic gravitational pull. (China applied to join the CPTPP in 2021.) Japan’s engagement of ‘like-minded’ partners from outside the Indo-Pacific in contributing to regional stability—for example, the Japan–UK Reciprocal Access Agreement, which was signed in early 2023, and the UK’s accession in mid-2023 to the CPTPP— is a continuation of the FOIP policy.

The intensification of Japan’s engagement with NATO since Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022 underscores how Japan’s geopolitical focus has become increasingly global. In
his 2022 IISS Shangri-La Dialogue keynote address, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio links European and Asian security in his remark that ‘Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow’ (see Chapter Twenty-Six). In June 2022, Kishida gave physical expression to this point, becoming the first Japanese prime minister to attend a NATO summit (in Madrid), and in March 2023 he visited Kyiv, becoming the first Japanese prime minister since 1945 to visit a war zone. This Adelphi refers to Tokyo’s previous tentative efforts to deepen Japan–Europe relations – the ‘special relationship’ between the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in the early 1990s (from 1995 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and Japan, for example. But overall, for many of the years this book covers, Japan–Europe relations were, as Takahashi Fumiaki writes in 1993 in ‘What role for Europe in Asian affairs?’ (see Chapter Nineteen), ‘remote’, with Japan concerned that Europe might ‘further concentrate purely on European affairs’ despite the importance of European engagement to the interests of the Asia-Pacific region. This and the comparison with Japan’s tardy and limited contribution during the First Gulf War illustrate the strategic distance travelled by Japan since the 1990s.

This Adelphi also throws into sharp relief Japan’s evolving thinking on military power since the 1960s. In the 1960s–1990s, our authors eschew Japan’s building up of its military strength in favour of deploying its burgeoning economic power. Royama, for example, in 1967 cites the public resistance to ‘countering force by force’, and fresh and negative memories of the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy. Writing in 1972, Saeki Kiichi’s Adelphi Paper ‘Japan’s security in a multipolar world’ (see Chapter Seven) argues that Japan should ‘organize economic resources and activity as a means of diplomatic influence’ and to mobilise ‘diplomatic influence by means of culture,
science and technology’. This foreshadows Ohira’s ‘comprehensive security’ thinking of the late 1970s, although he died in office before he could implement it, and even elements of the ‘comprehensive national power’ concept outlined in Japan’s December 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS). In 1981, Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko determined that, although Japan had the right of ‘collective self-defence’, to exercise it would exceed the use of force needed for individual self-defence and thus be unconstitutional.

As we have already seen, there were inflection points from the mid-1980s to the 1990s under the Nakasone and Hashimoto administrations. The need for a strategic shift in the 1980s reflected Japanese concern at the Soviet military build-up in the Asia-Pacific, which included the deployment of SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missiles in the region. These two administrations laid the groundwork for the security reforms of the 2000s. Those initiated under Koizumi’s 2001–06 administration – for example, to allow the Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF, Japan’s de facto navy) to provide logistical support for the US-led coalition’s campaign as part of the United States’ ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan – set new operational boundaries for the Self-Defense Forces (SDF, Japan’s de facto armed forces) well beyond Japan. In another important landmark, legislation passed by the Diet (Japan’s parliament) in 2015 by the second Abe administration expanded the scope of SDF activities by enabling ‘collective self-defence’ if Japan’s survival was threatened. This legislation enabled implementation of the revised Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation, also in 2015. The December 2022 NSS in turn marked a decisive break with the Yoshida Doctrine along the lines that Kishida had suggested in his Shangri-La Dialogue speech, envisaging a ‘fundamental reinforcement of Japan’s defence capabilities’ to boost its defence, deterrence and response credibility.
A ‘belief in world interdependence’
Linking the consistent and changing aspects of Japanese strategic thought is Japan’s view of its connectedness to its external environment – or, as Kosaka writes in his 1973 *Adelphi Paper*, a ‘belief in world interdependence’. During the early period covered in this book and despite its economic size, Japan was a reactive player, defining its strategies largely in response to the actions of others. For Kosaka, this low posture ultimately did not serve Japan’s interests, and he argues that it was ‘essential for Japan to contribute to the making of the global economic order, both by taking a more positive attitude in international economic relations and by improving her domestic structure’. Kosaka was thus an early advocate for Japan as a rule shaper.

In his 1965 book, *Kaiyō Kokka Nihon no Kōsō* (Japan’s Vision as a Maritime Country), Kosaka situates Japan as a ‘maritime power’ but describes its often inward-looking foreign policy as that of an ‘island nation’ (*shima guni*), contrasting it unfavourably with the UK as a ‘maritime nation’ (*kaiyō kuni*) with an outward-looking foreign policy. Japan’s post-war strategic trajectory can therefore be read in part as a journey towards a more proactive role to, in Abe’s phrase from his 2014 speech, ‘make the world something more certain’. An important part of this is Japan’s desire to be, as Funabashi said in his 2019 lecture, a ‘rule shaper and proactive stabiliser in the Asia-Pacific and beyond’. But Japan has now moved beyond Kosaka’s global economic order, as shown by its recent efforts to bolster its defence capabilities, secure greater agency within its security alliance with the US and preserve stability in the Indo-Pacific.

While the authors represented in this *Adelphi* volume were often prescient, like many others, they also failed to predict some key turning points. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapidity of the emergence of a less-than-benign China are two obvious examples. The speed of Japan’s own stra-
tegic evolution over the past 15 years might also have taken some of the authors by surprise. The constraints of space have meant that we have had to omit many other excellent articles penned by Japanese authors for the Institute. The process of selecting the pieces has, however, been useful for illuminating current Japanese strategic thinking and for placing it in historical context, as well as highlighting the IISS’s long history of association with Japan and its contribution to Japan’s strategic culture. We hope that readers of this volume will find the writing in these chapters similarly enlightening.
NOTES


2 The LDP was formed in November 1955 from the merger of two conservative political parties, the Japan Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. The merger came in response to the regrouping of the Japan Socialist Party, which had previously split, in October of that year. The LDP was in power continuously from 1955 until 1993. For a discussion of the 1955 system, see Sakaiya Shiro, Sengo Nihon Seiji Shi [Political History of Post-War Japan] (Tokyo: Chuko Shinsho, 2023), p. 53.


4 The second ‘Nixon Shock’ came in August 1971, when Nixon suspended the convertibility to gold of the US dollar and imposed a 10% surcharge on imports into the US. The United States’ ending of the global fixed exchange-rate system resulted in a sharp appreciation of the yen against the US dollar from the rate of ¥360:US$1 that had been fixed in 1949 during the Allied occupation of Japan, destabilising the Japanese economy and threatening export competitiveness.


8 Abe’s exact phrase was ‘Nihon to Chūgoku wa kitte mo kirenai “gokei kankei” ni aru no ro n wo matanai’. (There is no arguing that Japan–China relations are unseverable and reciprocal). See Abe Shinzo, Utsukushii Kuni E [Towards a Beautiful Country] (Tokyo: Bunshun Shinsho, 2006), p. 151.


