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# **CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

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## **Why Japan cancelled the deployment of the Aegis Ashore missile defense system**

Master's thesis

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2. I hereby declare that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. I hereby declare that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.
4. I agree that this work might be published for research and study purposes.

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Shuhei Aritake

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## **Abstract**

Despite the worsening security situation in East Asia, in 2020, Japan suddenly and abruptly canceled the deployment of the Aegis Ashore missile defense system. Why is that? I argue that neither the often-cited neorealist theory nor the official government explanation well define the reasons that lead to the cancellation. Instead, I build on the neoclassical realist paradigm and illustrate three key components that led to this abrupt political change: Shinzo Abe's leadership, changes in domestic political decision-making process, and the role of external actors (US and China). The research found out that personal and politico-cultural factors play essential roles in Japanese decision-making in addition to systemic pressures. The relationship with China also had played a vital role in making security policy. The combination of individual, domestic and systemic factors provide a holistic picture of how and why such a decision has transpired.

## **Keywords**

Japan, Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD), Aegis Ashore, neo-realism, Neoclassical realism

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# 1 Introduction

On June 15th, 2020, then-Defense Minister Taro Kono's announcement to halt the plan to deploy two Aegis Ashore defense system shocked not only the Japanese public, but also many of the high government officials of Japan and the United States. When deployment plan was approved in 2017, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) guaranteed that the booster engine of the interceptors to fall on the exercise area of the Japan Ground Self Defense Force (JGSDF) or in the ocean to avoid damages in the populated area. Initially, MOD expected that modification of software could solve such issue. However, later it revealed such a modification requires not only the alteration in software, but also hardware as well. Such a modification requires extra 200 billion JPY (1.8 billion USD) and another decade to develop, while the ability to intercept remains the same standard. After calculating the cost and time, Kono told PM Abe that he does not want to move forward (NHK 2020, The Ministry of Defense of Japan 2020).

Reportedly, this decision was not made after reaching agreement of many stakeholders. Before the official announcement, only Kono himself and Prime Minister (PM) Shinzo Abe together with governors of Yamaguchi and Akita, where Aegis Ashore were expected to be deployed, knew about the cancellation. Kono officially announced the main issue was that MOD cannot guarantee what it promised upon deployment and that it would require unnecessary time and expenses to fix.

Simply put, the decision to build the Aegis Ashore was a solution for the deteriorating

external security environment. Not only North Korea keeps acquiring more sophisticated nuclear and missile capabilities, but also Chinese military extends quantitative lead and closes the qualitative gap (Yoshihara 2020). However, upgrading missile defense had been a long subject of Japanese defense planning. The main purpose was to reduce burdens on Aegis ships and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF). Safeguarding Japan's archipelago from possible missile attacks seamlessly using Aegis ships have been challenged due to the heightened security conditions in East Asia.

Indeed, the deployment plan had severe issues since its first decision in 2017. The MOD had not given precise information to the insecure locals. While people are anxious whether the radar could endanger public health, MOD dodged the questions and kept answering using irrelevant information (The Genron 2020). This set of dishonesty from MOD reached at its height and the local anger erupted when the MOD official fell asleep in the meeting to explain to local residents of Akita (Asahi Shimbun 2019). Thus, an opposition Diet member vaunts that it is a triumph of the democracy and local autonomy that kept opposing the deployment while government proceeds with the selfish plan (Inoue 2020).

Nevertheless, Unbehauen and Decker (2020) point out that governments usually consider the increase of cost as the plan proceeds thus doubt if the cancellation was due to the increase of cost. What is more, it does not make sense to give up the missile defense system which can potentially prevent the catastrophe of nuclear attack in the metropolitan area with

thousands and millions of casualties while booster rocket may or may not cause fragmental damage in the suburb. James Schoff says, “a chance of booster damage outside an SDF base is still a lot better than a North Korean missile striking a Japanese city” (cited in Craft 2020, Panda 2020). Although cynical and perhaps unethical, upon considering missile defense, military planners are used to calculate what to defend primarily according to the priority under various scenarios (Unbehauen and Decker 2020) Therefore, the cancellation of additional missile defense system for the reason given by the Japanese government does not make sense. Given the heightened and unstable security situation in the Northeast Asia, Japan needs to increase defense capability now more than ever before. Why did, then, the Japanese government cancel the deployment of the system? What factors were essential in making the decision and what theoretical understanding provides the most plausible interpretation?

Neorealist theory of international relations has often been used to interpret such scenarios, and even in the Japanese case (Green and Self 1996, Hughes 2016). The theory predicts that states increase their power according to the surrounding security environment. In a way, the situation drove Japan to think of getting a missile defense in the first place got even worse, and thus the neorealist interpretation fails to plausibly explain this decision. This thesis therefore aims to find the alternative explanations why Japan canceled the Aegis Ashore using three intervening variables suggested by neoclassical realism. It proceeds in several steps. First, it lays out the theoretical argument based on neoclassical realism. Then it introduces the variables

that will be essential for my inquiry, namely the China factor, the US factor and Japanese specific political and security culture. It then proceeds with an empirical part in which I illustrate the validity of these factors in Japanese decision to halt the missile defense plans.

I will base this research on a variety of English and Japanese sources stemming from academic articles, news and think tank reports to primary material acquired from government webpages and from key public discussions regarding the cancellation of Aegis Ashore that took place in Japan over the last two years (The Japan Institute of International Affairs 2020, The Sasakawa Peace Foundation 2021, The Genron NPO 2020). The panelists included former JSMDf admirals, namely Tokuhiro Ikeda, Yoji Koda, former head of Japan Defense Agency (JDA) and Defense Minister Gen Nakatani). I have also carried out one extensive personal interview with a Japanese expert and advisor to the government, who has been involved in the decision-making process. This source selection is justified by the up-to-date nature of my research. There has been almost no academic work done on this topic, and thus there is a looming research gap that I aim to fulfil.

## 2. Theoretical Analysis of Japanese Foreign Policy

### 2-1 The Neorealism of International Relations Theory

To grasp the state's behavior, in international politics, neo-realism must be one of the most persuasive international relations theories. In general, neo-realism shares the same assumption with classical realism that the state is the primary actor, and the state pursues power. Classical realism, however, did not give a clear-cut explanation of why states pursue power. Unlike the classical realists, tracing back to Thucydides from ancient Greece, Machiavelli from the Renaissance era to Hans Morgenthau and E. H. Carr of the post-World War II who pointed out that the egoistic human nature was a cause of conflict, however, neo-realists point to the structural nature of the international system to predict the states' behavior. Kenneth Waltz, the prophet of neorealism, argues that, because of the anarchic nature of the international system, states are never sure about other states' intentions, which will lead states to pursue power for their survival. This will thus make cooperation among states very difficult. In the anarchic system, states prefer relative gains vis-à-vis their potential enemy to absolute gains. What makes worse in anarchy is that, on the contrary to the hierarchic politics, force serves, not only as the "ultime ratio", but as the first and constant one on the international politics (Waltz 1979, p.113). Therefore, states increase their military capabilities enough to protect their own survival, and sometimes forces were used.

While this sounds utterly pessimistic, defensive realists argue that there is a way to

prevent a military conflict. Charles Glaser, for example, tends to focus on the intention of the states rather than solely focusing on material powers. He argues that Western European states and Japan believe in U.S. benign intention so that they will not challenge U.S. unipolar system (Glaser 2010). In the end, while states must seek self-help in the anarchic system, maximizing its security and feverishly aggressive towards any other states are different. Another point is that, since most of the IR academic approach has focused on the conflict that actually occurred, there has been much less research on the cases where conflicts were avoided (Schweller 2004). There have been cases where states did not pursue power although the security environment created by anarchy would otherwise benefit them to do so.

Offensive realists, on the other hand, argue that great powers try to maximize their capabilities and predict a much more pessimistic future out of great power politics. John J. Mearsheimer, a prominent offensive realist scholar, argues that states try to become the hegemon in the system because it is the best way to preserve their own security. Because Waltz's argument of how much power is enough to protect its country is difficult to estimate, it inevitably leads states to maximize their power to become the most powerful state in the system because it is the best way to survive. This pessimistic idea must lead the hegemon to try full power to prevent emerging power to become a hegemon, including its intervention in the economic realm (Mearsheimer 2001). While his main focus is the great powers' behavior, he suggests similar logic, if not the same, should apply to less powerful states.

This parsimonious neo-realist theory gives an overall explanation of how international politics works. However, it sometimes lacks an explanation of the individual international outcome. For instance, even while the surrounding environment becomes more and more insecure, some states prefer to proceed with other strategic options, which can be explained better in another international relations theory. This is the case for Japan. The subsequent part will discuss Japan's foreign policy after World War II until the end of the Cold War.

### 2-1-1 Security Dilemma

Another very important concept of realism is the security dilemma. In a world where states prefer relative gains over absolute gains, unfortunately, an “increase in one state’s security decreases the security of others” (Jervis 1978, p. 186). In an anarchic world system, a state’s actions to defend itself often cause a counterreaction by its rivals, which in turn leaves all states less secure, because it is often difficult to distinguish offensive capability from defensive ones. As the intention of the state cannot be clear, any military build-up for defensive purposes can be seen by the rival state as offensive. Even a fortification can signal an offensive intention to the opposite side of the enemy because the fortification might have been built to increase its defense on one part, then attack the other side first. This ambiguity will inevitably lead other states to increase their own military capabilities to counter it, and thus lead to the security dilemma. Jervis (1978) illustrates that psychological, geographical, and technological

factors are the determinants of the severity of the security dilemma. Although security dilemma can be triggered by many factors, ultimately, the anarchy and the fear that the state might become malign in the future is the attributable nature for the security dilemma (Tang 2009)

The security dilemma is especially acute when two conditions are met. One of the variables is whether the offense or the defense has the advantage, and the other is if offensive postures can be distinguished from defensive ones (Jervis 1978, p. 211). In such cases when it is difficult to distinguish defensive capabilities from offense and when the offense has advantages, one state's increase of defensive force triggers its enemy to increase its capabilities to counter such increase. Such defense-oriented buildups could strengthen opponents' capability, and thus decrease its security rather than increase it. When the differentiation of defensive and offensive capabilities is difficult, it makes states feel insecure and proceed with acquiring offensive capability, which will lead to an arms race.

The nuclear era is something close to this hopeless scenario, although the nuclear weapon is somewhat distinguishable from the defense. Nevertheless, nuclear weapons have massive offensive advantages, nuclear powers mostly have relied on Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) for deterrence. Thus, under such twisted conditions, even though the missile defense system just aims to destroy incoming warheads in principle, any attempts to reject the enemy's missile attacks are considered "offensive." This is a complexity of the missile defense.

## 2-2 Japan's long Pacifism

Post-World War II Japan has been considered a peaceful and status quo state who did not aggressively pursue military build-ups. By relying most of the defense on its powerful ally of the United States, Japan mainly focused on techno-economic growth to establish its international status which is coined as “Mercantile Realism.” This policy of prioritizing techno-economic development while paying less attention to military buildups is well incorporated in Yoshida Doctrine. While such an approach contradicts the neo-realist theory, it is indeed another “realist” approach to achieve its survival. Believing that economic power is more salient than military power, focusing on techno-economic development does not contradict the prime goal of realist theory; state survival (Heginbotham and Samuels 1998). Even Waltz (1993) writes after the Cold War ended, that “(t)he increase of a country’s economic capabilities to the great-power level places it at the center of regional and global affairs” (p.64). This had been accelerated because of nuclear deterrence. Unlike the previous understanding, in the nuclear era, “the connection between a country’s economic and technological capability, on the one hand, and its military capability, on the other, is loosened.” (Waltz 1993, p.51). This thus explains that Japan’s approach does not necessarily contradict neo-realist theory as it seems.

Although Heginbotham and Samuels' research is one of few English research attempts to understand post-War Japan's foreign policy from the “realist” perspectives, little research managed to explain Japan’s behavior from the realist school of thought. This is arguably due

to the uniqueness of Japan in the international system. The facts such as Japan's peace-loving society, there is no constitutional military, led post-positivist scholars to argue Japan is an abnormal state which simply cannot be understood by the existing western international theories.

One of the reasons for tireless support for pacifism might be the huge demand from the Japanese public. Bitter remorse triggered by the wartime experiences, most notably the atomic bombs victimhood of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Peace education based on the tragedy of atomic bombs, if not other Japanese aggressive behavior towards Asian neighbors, is well embedded in Japanese peace education. Not a small number of students nationwide travel to Hiroshima and/or Nagasaki to learn the value of peace from the nuclear attack survivors, especially the world without nuclear weapons (Gustafsson, Hagström, & Hanssen 2019). Thus, civilian support for Article 9, Three Non-Nuclear Principles of not possessing, not producing, and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japanese territory, have prohibited the Japanese government to acquire offensive military postures. Another aspect of pacifism is that it is the best way to assure its suspicious neighbors that Japan has no longer holds aggressive nor revisionist intentions (Midford 2002). Neighboring countries, notably China and Korea, still have revulsion against Japanese wartime aggressions, and it worked best for Japan to refrain from any activities to trigger their suspicion.

For half the century, this pacifism and mercantile realism worked well. Hinting from

Johan Galtung's conceptualization of peace, Akimoto (2018) argues that, Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida interpreted the Japanese constitution's peace clause as absolute pacifism and non-violence, which denies the "use of force even for self-defense". (p.12). Such antipathy has been dominant among the Japanese public, at least until the end of the Cold War, and what is more, it worked well under the relatively stable international environment.

### 2-2-1 Japan's turn to Realism?

Nevertheless, Japan's behavior in today's international system resembles what neo-realist would predict. Compared to when Japan could enjoy its economic growth under bipolar competitions between U.S. and Soviet Union, the recent rise of China and nuclear bellicose North Korea opened more discussions for realists in the case of Japan. Green and Self (1996) point out the increase of Japan's military expenditure and note that troops in the northern part of Japan which were deployed in the contingency against the Soviet Union were re-deployed in the southwest of Japan to counter rising China. Hughes (2016) argues that Japan turned to "resentful realism" after China failed to show Tokyo its benign motive to cooperate and tackle regional security using assistance on Asian countries' development under multilateral cooperation with Japan and South Korea. Hughes points out this is partially due to the lack of communication between the politicians and bureaucratic level due to the abnormal transitions inside China as well as the ephemeral government in Japan. Such a heightened distrust in

Chinese benign motives coupled with its massive military expenditures led to Japanese military buildups. As a result, Tokyo's attitude towards China shifted towards “Soft Containment and Balancing” and “Hard Military Balancing.” Soft containment and balancing can be represented by Japanese activities in the South China Sea to support states who have bitter sentiment with China, such as Vietnam to build cooperation under western shared values. In the meantime, Japan increased military cooperation with Indo-Pacific nations. Multilaterally, Japan actively engages in Quad cooperation with India, Australia, and the United States. Although it is not limited to military cooperation only, Japan uses this to counter China's activities in the South China Sea based on the collective identity with other democratic power in the Indo-Pacific region. (Smith 2021). Realizing the soft-balancing is not as effective, however, Japan turned to hard-balancing by increasing its military capability. It includes the purchase of massive military equipment from the United States (Hughes 2016). For instance, Japan purchased a further 105 F-35 Lightning II stealth fighters. Even as the mixture of both, recently Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force’s helicopter-carrier JS Izumo is being transformed to airplane-carrier. Japan has cooperated with the United States in the joint mission and successfully launched and landed U.S. Marine Corps’ F-35B fighters on JS Izumo (Valenzuela 2021). It also plans to pursue a similar transformation for JS Kaga another helicopter-carrier of Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force (Gady 2018). How can this be possible today which was unthinkable during the pre-Cold War pacifism? Neo-realist explanation best explains such a turn in recent Japan’s military

expansion.

### 2-3 Need for Intervening Variables

As read in Kenneth Waltz's caveat, we should be careful not to mistake a theory of international politics for a theory of foreign policy (Waltz 1979, 121). The neo-realist theory might be able to explain the large portion of state behavior, however, other intervening variables are imperative to inspect each state's ongoing foreign policy. Perhaps this might be needed the most for the non-western states where traditionally distant from the western International Relations theories.

While the neo-realists start to explain the post-Cold War Japan's foreign policy in its response to the rise of China and the nuclear threat of North Korea, it is too early to judge that Japan returned to a normal country trying to regain power endlessly. With the current perceived threat in the international system, Japan could consider getting more extreme military capabilities, for instance, the capability of pre-emptive attack against enemies' bases in order to defend its own land. Expanding robust missile defense is of course another sphere to focus on. Ultimately, the discussion to acquire nuclear capabilities is another possible response against the current international system. Although not a few politicians started to raise questions about pre-emptive attack capability and missile defense, discussion on acquiring nuclear capabilities is still taboo.

Here, neoclassical realist theory helps explain the peculiarity of individual states' behavior built upon the neo-realist theory. This paper will focus on three variables for Japan; (1) leader's image, which can be further divided into Prime Minister Abe's geopolitical thought, (2) changes in strategic culture namely the decision-making process, and (3) huge gap of threat perception between Japan and the United States.

### 2-3-1 Leader's image

Byman and Pollack (2001) shed light on the oblivion of individual politicians. Literature of international relations has ignored the idiosyncrasies of individual leaders because it is too complex and diverse to be incorporated into the international relations theory. However, Byman and Pollack highlight the importance of individual leaders stating that today's international relations cannot be explained without individual leaders such as Hitler and Napoleon. It is exactly because of their egoistic ambition to conquer all of Europe which led these leaders to recklessly wage unnecessary wars while domestic population and closest ministers' advice not to (Byman and Pollack 2001).

This implies that the character of the leaders can be sometimes considered a causal factor of the outcome of international politics. Although examples selected by Byman and Pollack are leaders' characteristics that led to, or prolonged the war while neo-realist theory would predict otherwise, or cases they did not wage wars, this logic can be well applied to the peacetime

leadership.

### 2-3-2 Shinzo Abe as a revisionist

Shinzo Abe, who had been the longest served prime minister in post-World War II Japan, had attracted a lot of scholars' attention. While his economic policies known as Abenomics which aim to revitalize Japan's long-stagnant economy was given big write-ups in the papers domestically, his right-wing policy towards neighboring countries was cautiously observed both domestically and internationally. Inoguchi named the latter strategic policy "Abegeopolitics." Abe demands to push Japan to "a fully-fledged sovereign country". Thus, to defend its territory and properties, He pronounced its need to strengthen its Self-Defense Forces (Inoguchi 2014). Although Abenomics is the economic policy to overcome the long-stagnated Japanese economy since the 1990s, the purpose of this was to make Japan more powerful and a first-class country (Dobson 2016). Thus, (geo-)politics cannot be clearly separated from Abenomics. For example, Dobson's analysis mentions how economic recovery concerning the change of policy from traditional internationalism into "a more narrowly focused defence of its great power status" (Dobson 2016; 220). Whereas Abenomics holds three arrows of economic policy, Overholt (2014) asserts there is a fourth arrow in Abenomics: Foreign Policy. He argues Prime Minister Abe's attempts to historical revisionism, which are also visible in his annual speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations under the "Clearing away

Northeast Asia's postwar structure" section (Abe 2018) as well as the increase of defense expenditures and rearmament, stubborn attitude towards territorial conflicts in the context of Abenomics because it is an attempt to upgrade Japan to a fully-fledged sovereign country (Overholt 2014).

Such intentions to increase Japanese military capabilities and attempts to change the post-war Northeast Asian structure coated with nationalist discourse such as Japan as a beautiful country with its landscape and culture, its human resources, its economic achievements, its peace-loving nature, its technological advancement gives an idea that Abe could turn Japan into a revisionist power. His visit to Yasukuni Shrine, where Class-A war criminals were enshrined together with other casualties, incited political unrest among the Asian neighbors.

To summarize, Shinzo Abe had a visible intention to increase Japan's military capabilities under the destabilizing Northeast Asia. This seemingly revisionist posture is worth scrutiny upon examining the individual policies. His policy to increase its military capabilities, passing the legislation to allow collective defense with the United States, allowing more flexible mission under United Nations Peacekeeping Operation is called "proactive contribution to peace (sekkyokuteki heiwashugi)." How to understand this policy will be discussed in-depth in the later section. Nevertheless, it is important to note his strategic policy was vastly different from his predecessors during the Cold War period.

### 2-3-3 Abe-Trump relationship

If the idiosyncrasies of individual leaders are important in foreign policy studies, one might wonder how the bilateral relationship between the two resounding leaders would influence the state's strategy. Such a question should greatly concern the bilateral relationship between Japanese and U.S. leaders. This topic is perhaps not new in Japan's foreign policy studies. For instance, the relationship between Yasuhiro Nakasone and Ronald Reagan often become the object of Japanese foreign policy research. This specific first-name diplomacy of Ron-Yasu rectified the unfair trade imbalance, increased Japan's financial coverage of the U.S. bases in Japan, and improved issues of the provision of weapon-related technology to the U.S. (Kubo 2020). Those reforms might have not happened in peace-addicted (Heiwa-Boke) Japan in the 1980s without the special friendship between Ron and Yasu.

Indeed, Byman and Pollack also mention in the aforementioned article that the character of leaders might sometimes influence other countries' foreign policy. Specifically, regarding the bilateral relationship, "special relationship" synergy can lead to "unswervingly close cooperation." For instance, the close relationship between Churchill and Roosevelt overcame "diametrically opposed ideas on World War II of each state" (Byman and Pollack 2001, p.139). It goes without saying that Abe's partner was a very unique person. Trump's idiosyncrasy and exaggerated "America First" policy, changing Japan's foreign policy can be a good example of this hypothesis in the trans-Pacific cooperation. According to John Bolton, the former United

States National Security Advisor for Trump who was later dismissed recalled that Trump established national security policy relying on a personal relationship with foreign leaders (Bolton 2020). Nevertheless, it is not certain if the “friendship” between Abe and Trump was for real. Or at least something comparable with Ron-Yasu's friendship.

Ostensibly, Abe seemed to have established one of the smoothest connections with Trump compared to other leaders of the U.S. allies. While suspicion is widespread, someone believes that their friendship is for real (Konishi 2019). On the other hand, it was not an easy journey for Abe. He was bothered by Trump many times regarding the trade deficit, threatened to increase financial coverage of the U.S. forward deployment in Japan, and of course, the fear of abandonment. Consequently, Abe’s aim to push Japan to a “tier one” nation in international relations became harshly damaged. This humiliation recklessly exposed that today’s Japan is nothing else but “subordinate to the United States” (O’Shea and Maslow 2020, p.2).

Forced to act under this clumsy situation, Abe had to act to appease Trump’s anger and sometimes irrational folly. The Abe-Trump era was also occupied with rectifying the trade imbalances, securing the U.S. presence in Japan by imputing more money for the U.S. bases, improving military cooperation so much as it was in the Ron-Yasu period. To appease Trump’s demand to normalize the trade unbalance, Japan had to relocate automotive productions to the U.S., purchasing billion dollars military equipment. The decision to purchase Aegis Ashore occurred in this context.

As was the case in individual leaders, the idiosyncratic cooperation among two leaders can be the independent variables to explain the international outcome. It might be particularly important for the eccentric leaders like Trump and Abe, and the imbalanced alliance between the United States and Japan. Indeed, most of the media explained the purchase and scrap of Aegis Ashore's plan using the individual leader's narrative.

#### 2-3-4 Changing strategic culture

The structure of international politics shapes the behavior of the state, it also influences the domestic political environment. Since the early modern period, Japan has shown three different types of strategic cultures; (1) isolationist and non-military before being forced to open its border by the western powers, (2) militarist which led to World War II, and (3) post-World War II strategic culture characterized by great reluctance to use force (Oros 2014). As discussed above, the demand to maintain its peaceful constitution is held among the majority of the Japanese public. While people start to perceive that constitutional reform became more and more necessary, there is still a solid objection to Article 9 revision (Asashi Shimbun 2021). Nevertheless, a gradual shift of ideas can be observed. It can be classified as (1) the change in decision-making structure and (2) changing idea of peace among the general population and politicians.

As the distrust of neighboring countries' military activities disseminated among the Japanese public, new systems were adopted to enable today's strategic reform. In 2007, Japan's Defense Agency was elevated to ministry status. Under Prime Minister Abe, he established National Security Council (NSC) and adopted the first National Security Strategy (NSS) in December 2013. He also replaced the head of The Cabinet Legislation Bureau with his acquaintance (Oros 2014) to enable his policy to be embodied smoothly. Such transformation enables Abe to pass legislation to accept collective defense with allies, arms export, joint development of military technology, and so on. Despite the fact that Japanese public is more or less cautious with such progress, changes in domestic decision-making structure allowed these which was different from the administrations in the previous decades. In other words, Abe's reform undermined the diversified opinions and time-consuming decision-making process based on the bureaucratic system. It is a sign of changing the strategic culture to the fourth generation.

Abe cabinet also tried to change the idea of security. In the contemporary world where the mode of threat shifted from the conventional forces to the threat of nuclear attack, cyber-attack, and activities of non-state actors and terrorism, Japan realized that national defense does not conclude in the homeland territory, but participation in the United Nations Peacekeeping operations as well as joining the collective defense is essential for the sake of broader defense (Singh 2008). In NSS, it asserts that "surrounded by an increasingly severe security

environment and confronted by complex and grave national security challenges, it has become indispensable for Japan to make more proactive efforts in line with the principle of international cooperation. Japan cannot secure its own peace and security by itself.” (Cabinet Secretariat 2013). Based on this principle, Abe urged collective self-defense with the United States, allowing the Self-Defense Force’s activities beyond Japanese territory. In the long tradition of the Yoshida Doctrine where Japan solely relied on the U.S. on its security, any possession of military capability beyond its border triggered suspicion, both internally and externally, that Japan becomes the normal state with aggressive motive. Is the idea of peace while expanding the activities of JSDF abroad compatible with the idea of pacifism? To accommodate such suspicion, Abe proposed “proactive contribution to peace” to adjust to the changing security environment and persuade its population that Self-Defense Force must act beyond its border to assure homeland security, and it is compatible with the “Exclusively Defense-Oriented Policy.”

Although Article 9 of the Constitution is trying to achieve negative peace, which means renouncing direct violence while being settled for structural violence or indirect violence, Preamble of the Constitution try to achieve positive peace (absence of structural violence or indirect violence) “based on international cooperation” (Akimoto 2018, p.13). Therefore, the abovementioned change in the idea of increasing security for the broader pacifism does not contradict the Japanese Constitution in another aspect. It is immature to conclude that Japan turned to a normal state nor even further as the bellicose state with far-right revisionist motive.

### 2-3-5 Threat Perception of Tokyo and Washington

This article discussed two intervening variables to explain today's Japanese foreign policy and military strategy. Both transformations hint at a recent turn to a seemingly more revisionist Japanese strategic stance. However, Japan is still far from a "normal" state with a limitless army which a "normal" sovereign state should possess. Constitution has not been revised and the majority still support the current constitution with a peaceful Article 9 clause instead of the peace under international cooperation. By making sure to not overlook why this is the case, this section is devoted to explaining the gap of threat perception, mainly regarding the rise of China, from Japanese and the United States perspectives.

Indeed, the United States, arguably the declining hegemon, seems to contain China at full power. Waging economic sanctions, increase military activities, collaborating with regional and international power even including afar the United Kingdom in the Pacific are the soft and hard balancing against China. Mearsheimer (2001) predicts, assuming that China keeps growing economically and militarily, it inevitably leads the United States to directly confront rising China, because that is the most certain way to survive this dangerous international system for the United States. And Japan is also in line with this policy to balance against it as mentioned as soft and hard balancing in the South China Sea. While it seems that the U.S. inevitably contains China through the neo-realist lens, this idea is very troublesome, at least certainly for its ally; Japan.

First and foremost, it is vastly unlikely that China will be able to attack and gain mainland America in the foreseeable future. Nor will America invade China's mainland. Considering the offense-defense balance favors defense as well as the army rather than the navy, vast ocean prevents great powers from fighting each other, it is highly unlikely the United States and China will end up in a total war. History tells, that because of the huge Atlantic Sea, the United States and Britain did not fight each other for hegemony (Mearsheimer 2001). He mentions the Pacific Ocean works similarly. Why does the United States dare to prevent China's rise then? Mearsheimer argues that great powers fear that the other might ally with one's neighbors to stir the stability of the other great power. It might be because China might penetrate deep into American Continent in the foreseeable future to contain the United States, which is what Washington is doing around China right now. For instance, the U.S. fears China could ally with Mexico which will be a great security threat to the United States. However, such an argument sounds a little bit troublesome for Japan. Of course, such a case would be a great security threat for Japan, too. However, Japan needs to cope with the "imminent" security threat posed by China, rather than the future threat which might or might not occur. And such threats can be understood with defensive realism than offensive realism. Located much closer to Chinese mainland, China's threat against Japan is more imminent and requires delicate hedging. And much more importantly, geographically, China is and will be one of the most important economic partners for Japan.

The current rise of China and activities in the South China Sea and the East China Sea are perceived as Beijing's aggression and territorial expansion beyond the current status quo. Some officials claim that the Chinese invasion is real. Former Chief of Staff, Ground Self-Defense Force of Japan, Kiyofumi Iwata, warns that China's invasion is imminent. In his war scenarios, China will use complex tactics mixed with cyber, fishermen, and the Chinese population living in Japan to occupy the Sakishima island chain (Iwata 2019). Recently the U.S. Asia Pacific commander Philip Davidson warned that China could attack Taiwan in the next six years. He perceived that China is trying to supplant U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific by 2050, and Taiwan is one of their utmost ambitions. Adding to that, he fears China might go further to target Guam (Davidson 2021). These were the wake-up call of how imminent admirals perceived China's threat is. However, these were the wrong call.

While recent Japanese policies seem to actively contain China, there is reason to believe offensive realism does not work. Randall Schweller, who is considered a neoclassical realist, calls for a revision of realist theory which solely focuses on "territory". He posits that, in the 21st century, no powerful states would dare to invade others based on territorial aggression. In the digital age, the idea of security is more complex, and realists should depart from its fundamental principle of territory (Schweller 2011). There are many Japanese policymakers who believe that China will not invade Japanese main islands. Japan indeed has a territorial dispute with China, but losing the Senkaku islands does not automatically mean China wants

to penetrate Japanese territory, which has never occurred in history. Current China's ostensibly aggressive movement towards Senkaku can be considered a defensive move against Japan. Regarding Taiwan, which is often argued as the target before Senkaku, it is also to counter increasing U.S. activities in the Taiwan Strait and sales of weapons to Taiwan (Okada 2021).

Therefore, we cannot conclude China geared up to invade Taiwan in the next six years.

Defensive realists and neoclassical realists give a much more optimistic future if the United States could retreat from its greedy intention in the Indo-Pacific. Glaser (2011) proposes if the United States could concede in "less-than-vital interests" for example Taiwan, it can avoid full confrontation between the two great powers. Similarly, Kirshner (2012) points out the defect in Mearsheimer's offensive realism, which assumes China will inevitably confront the U.S. for hegemony. Kirshner argues that states try to become a hegemon and bid for hegemon entail totally different risks. In the latter case, the risk of defeat means the risk of survival, China will not try to become a hegemon because bidding for it is too risky and it might harm the ultimate aim of the state; survival. Entering a war is a very dangerous deed for the aggressors. Jervis (1978) asserts "(e)ven if everything they see points to a quick victory, they are likely to hesitate before all the uncertainties" (p.177). Out of seven reasons why China and Japan will not go to war, one suggests that China will avoid a devastating conflict with Japan and the United States. Such a conflict might risk repeating the century of humiliation. Thus, Xi Jinping will not dare to destabilize his political career (Moss 2013).

As we can witness above, defensive and neoclassical realist perspectives give the reason to believe China threat theory can mean differently from Japan and the United States respectively, and the solution to it also differ. For Japan, such a conflict is avoidable, despite the U.S. military men's recent warnings. We still do not know if that dividing line was Hong Kong, Taiwan, Senkaku, Sakishima island chain, or Okinawa. The important thing is the primary aim for Tokyo is to keep the status quo, while not antagonizing Beijing.

Japan should not challenge China if it is not unnecessary. It is much more important to realistically analyze and seek the compromise that can be conceded. The United States, on the other hand, wants to contain China because 'China might one day become a threat to homeland security.' If true, antagonizing China by joining the U.S.-led containment alignment might not be the best idea for Japan's long-term survival, at least in some areas. In other words, Tokyo should follow what the defensive realists suggest to avoid U.S-China conflict rather than following offensive realism which predicts the war is inevitable. Missile Defense strategy should also follow this logic. However, a policy decision is even difficult when it comes to the missile defense system. Japan heavily relies on U.S. nuclear umbrella and missile defense systems. Japan has to find a way to achieve this delicate balance. Not antagonizing China involved by the U.S. future fear. Aegis Ashore is thus a very complex issue and has to be discussed under this threat perception gap.

### 3 Empirical Analysis on Cancellation of Aegis Ashore

#### 3-1 Why was Aegis Ashore demanded in the first place?

Currently, it is very difficult to ascertain which missile defense system targets North Korea, China, or even other unauthorized launches from third countries. This paper will specifically focus on the China factor in the later section. Nevertheless, in the initial stage of the Japanese missile defense thinking, the threat of the North Korean missile attacks was at the top of this agenda. Arguably North Korean missile tests along with the suspected nuclear test in the 1980s and 1990s led Japan to acquire missile defense capabilities in the first place. Although North Korea is a much less powerful state compared to the Japanese ally of the United States, some argue that for the state's survival, Pyongyang will not rule out nuclear attack on South Korea, Japan, or even the United States. Not like the Soviet Union where power was more equivalent to that of the United States thus posing similar retaliatory attacks on each other's population, deterrence might not work against North Korea under this asymmetrical relationship. In such a case, Japan might be targeted by the conventional or unconventional WMD attack after the Kim regime realizes it will not survive the U.S. attack anyway. Under such a scenario, Japan needs to acquire the capabilities to intercept the incoming missile from North Korea to minimize the damage. This is one of the motivations Japan needed to move forward with missile defense. Perhaps it is even more valid and acute today than ever before where such overspill attacks are feasible in the hard-landing scenario with North Korea.

Since the 1980s, Japan started to argue the future deployment of a missile defense system in cooperation with the United States. As responses to continued uncertainty, Japan eventually deployed two-layered missile defense, upper-tier defense using Aegis destroyer and Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) intermediate missiles to intercept a ballistic missile in the mid-course phase, and relying on Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) to hit the remainders of missiles in the terminal phase (Murano 2020a, Unbehauen and Decker 2020). This system has been operated for over a decade to counter a missile threat from North Korea. It could yield strategic importance against the North Korean missile threat. However, as the capability from the north increased, Japan was forced to improve its counterforce accordingly. Despite the economic sanctions, North Korea kept developing its missile capability and often threatens the Japanese with its missile launch tests. Especially in 2017 we saw record-breaking missile launches of 16 times and expected to achieve Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) capability, which represents the imminent threat to the United States. (Karako 2017). Many of these landed near the ocean of Japan. Japanese populations were frightened by the J-Alert, early warning system.

While widely believed that the Aegis Ashore was considered in response to the North Korean missile crisis of 2016 and 2017, the idea to deploy land-based missile defense had been discussed as early as 2012. Before 2012, North Korean missile capability was limited and could be dealt with using the Aegis ships after receiving the signals of possible launches. However, North Korea's continued development of launching capabilities forced Japan to be prepared for

the attack seamlessly throughout the year (The Japan Institute of International Affairs 2020). Such a busy operation of Aegis ships put a burden on Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF). It normally requires over 300 crews to operate one Aegis ship (Jimbo 2020). Thus, the Ministry of Defense suggested a land-based system to reduce pressures on JMSDF and counter such threats from North Korea around the clock. Aegis ships have other conventional missions to defend Japan in other spheres than missile defense. Such missions include maritime patrols and refueling. Therefore, it is the imminent need to relax Aegis ships missions. Especially in the East China Sea and Taiwan Strait, the Chinese increased hybrid activities involving systemic gray zone operations by Chinese militia (Basu 2020), which poses more burden on JMSDF. U.S. Asia Pacific Force Aegis ships have been also used to supplement the missile defense. Therefore, the land-based system was demanded by the United States to enable their fleet in other missions. This is the continuous official explanation of why Aegis Ashore was needed. All these problems unsolved, it is very suspicious why such a long-demanded system was scrapped.

As an alternative to land-based Aegis Ashore, several options had been suggested. For instance, Aegis Ashore could be deployed in other places than Akita and Yamaguchi. If the booster engine was the biggest issue, constructing launchers in the ocean like an oil rig, separating launching capability away from radars and the populated area could have been the alternatives (Jimbo 2020). These would clear the booster issue and fulfill the demand to protect

Japan around the clock.

None of these happened. Assuming the time between halt and cancellation are very short, it is highly doubtful if such alternatives to maintain a land-based system are discussed seriously. In December 2020, the Japanese Diet approved that two additional Aegis ships be constructed to strengthen the missile defense (Nikkei Asia 2020). Presumably, these two additional Aegis ships are to substitute what would have been expected by land-based Aegis Ashore. However, this will impose further burdens on JMSDF operation. Former JMSDF admiral Ikeda Tokuhiro warns that it is impossible to defend all parts of Japan because of the shortage of JMSDF members (Sasakawa Peace Foundation 2021). Recently, JSDF decided to raise the maximum age of enlistment applications to 32 years old from 26 in order to boost its recruitment (Reuters 2018). As Ikeda argues, however, that mission in the Aegis warships is physically tough and not ideal for aged members. Therefore, the proposed solution of increasing the retirement by two years as well as recruiting aged members will not dramatically ameliorate the underlying condition.

All the preconditions which led the Japanese government to consider the land-based system in the first place still apply today. North Korea has not given up its nuclear capabilities. Even more importantly, China emerged as a potential aggressor amid U.S.-China strategic competitions. All these taken into account, there are no rational reasons to stop developing any sort of defense capabilities. A land-based system protecting the Japanese homeland 24/7 seems

to be required now more than ever. This is why this whole cancellation story does not make sense and a reasonable answer is called for.

### 3-2 The US factor

Japan relies heavily on nuclear umbrella provided by the United States. To counter the threat of states who possess nuclear weapon, missile defense system solely is not enough. Therefore, it is imperative for Tokyo to work closely with Washington regarding the BMD in general. Under such asymmetrical environment, the former President Donald Trump posed a unique, but deadly condition on Japanese missile defense thinking.

While his behavior and foreign policy were sporadic and unstable, arguably only one constant policy was “America First.” As we saw during his election campaign and in early years of his presidency, Trump’s attitude toward its allies were far from benign. He criticized trade imbalances with literally all allies, demanding more financial support for the forward-deployed U.S. military to NATO member states and allies in Northeast Asia. Not only did he threaten Japan to withdraw United States Forces Japan (USFJ) if not paying more Host Nation Support (HNS), but also explicitly pronounced Japan should acquire nuclear weapons. To achieve both goals, selling U.S. weapons to Japan to offset the trade deficit was perhaps the ideal solution (Craft 2020). Due to the businessman-style handling of foreign policy, Trump continuously advocated fixing the trade insufficiencies. In the early year of the Trump

administration, this series of behavior shock Tokyo. For Japan, buying billion-dollar worth arms could be seen as a great way to offset the trade unbalance and appease Trump. As to respond to that, the percentage of U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) increased dramatically since 2017 (Tokyo Shimbun Shakaibu 2019). Nevertheless, such a fear of abandonment started to shrink eventually as the U.S. started to engage in the Indo-Pacific region and U.S.-Japan security alliance.

Perhaps it is not entirely new to discuss Trump as the primary motivation for Japan to move forward with Aegis Ashore. Especially in media, we witness stories describing in this context (Craft 2020, Glosserman 2020). Nevertheless, it is still questionable, if Aegis Ashore was purchased to appease Trump. The biggest reason is that the cancellation took place during the same Trump administration. When then-Defense Minister Kono Taro announced the cancellation in June 2020, it was the vital moment for Trump for election for the second term. Hornung points that, as read in the NSS report in 2013, the advancement of missile defense had been discussed before the Trump administration. Choosing between THAAD and Aegis Ashore, after the U.S. successfully planted two systems in Europe in 2014, Japan decided to go with Aegis Ashore, which was before Trump was elected (Hornung 2020, Cabinet Secretariat 2013). Thus, Hornung suggests Japan did not purchase Aegis Ashore entirely to appease Trump. Tokyo needed to purchase a similar system eventually anyways.

It might have been surprising why Trump did not criticize such a sudden cancellation. A

strong advocate who claimed Japan should buy American goods, many expected a strong reaction from Washington. Trump did not show such temper. It is still a mystery why it was tolerated by the United States. Therefore, the Trump factor alone does not strongly support either the reason for deployment and cancelation. Aegis Ashore might have been bought by Abe because of appeasing Trump. But Japan needed such a system anyway to counter North Korea's threat throughout the year. With combination with Abe's ambition (discussed in Chapter: The Domestic factor), it can partially explain why the deployment plan was (mistakenly) upheld at the beginning.

For the hawks in Washington, Aegis Ashore was a favorable improvement, no matter with or without Trump. The rise of China is of the great concern of Washington and presumably, Washington would stop such an increase at full power as Mearsheimer (2001) predicted in the start of the millennium. Trump's comment that he is not interested in short-range missiles but concerns ICBM scared Japanese (Reuters 2019). Although this comment was intended for North Korean ICBM, obviously the primary threat of such must be more powerful and numerous Chinese ICBMs. This implies that U.S. would salivate over additional BMD in western Pacific. Japanese upper-tier BMD systems "might attain the ability to intercept ballistic missiles flying toward the continental United States" (Umemoto 2003, p.199) Japan on the other hand does not aim to protect U.S. homeland, if not entirely. It is important to ensure that United States stays powerful and provide nuclear umbrella, but defending American continent

from ICBM is the secondary interest for Tokyo.

Assuming all BMD deployed under U.S. Theater Missile Defense (TMD) might be used to protect U.S. homeland territory, the deployment of an additional defense system will have the reverse effect on Japanese security. Since China oppose such use by United States, it could intensify arms buildups to counter such improvement. China factor will be discussed in much details in the later section. Through the lens of offensive realism, Washington's decision makes sense. It is important to contain China because to maintain to be the hegemon is the best way to survive. Tokyo seized Aegis Ashore believing that by following the U.S. it will be secure for Japan, too. It is Tokyo's interest to commit to security cooperation with the United States as the relationship between United States and China intensifies. U.S. wants to expand its BMD capability.

As Nicolas Kitchen posits, "states that are very powerful are the most likely to pursue ideas-based policies. We see this in the tendency of great powers with a surfeit of material capabilities to attempt visionary world-making. With their territorial and political integrity secured, interests offer few constraints to check the progress of grand ideas in the policymaking process, and the international system poses few constraints on a state whose material power and ideational dominance largely defines international structure. The question 'what must we do?' is replaced by 'what shall we do?' (Kitchen 2010, p.141). What Tokyo must consider might be "What must we not do?" Japan must not antagonize China blindly following U.S. great

power delusion.

Such a gap in strategic thinking can explain the cancellation of Aegis Ashore. Increase of Chinese military capabilities means differently in Tokyo and Washington. However, the alternative to build two additional Aegis ships will further complicate the picture. Such system would work similarly to Aegis Ashore, and thus reduce the security for China. Therefore, the difference of strategic thinking between Tokyo and Washington cannot entirely explain why Japan canceled nor chose Aegis ships as an alternative.

### 3-3 The domestic factor

Shinzo Abe had a variety of reasons to move forward with Aegis Ashore. This land-based system deployed under U.S. theater missile defense (TMD) would have been an embodiment of his political achievements. Simply summarized, his seemingly hawkish political stance has achieved three important changes that deviated from his predecessors. He changed the interpretation of the constitution to (1) pass the legislation enabling Japan to participate in collective self-defense, (2) share important secret information with allies, namely the United States, and (3) change the condition of exporting defense equipment. Presumably, with Aegis Ashore, it arises discussion of collective self-defense spontaneously, because it entails such a scenario when BMD is used to defend the mainland of United States. By entangling with U.S. TMD, it encourages more information sharing with Washington. Although there are some

differences on emphasis throughout the time, importing cutting-edge military equipment from the United States and spreading spill-over benefits among the Japanese private manufacturers is one of the key factors when it comes to considering its participation in BMD (Swaine, Swanger and Kawakami 2001). This is specifically important now that Japanese defense industry tries to catch up with the up-to-date technology and endure price competition with rivals with advanced and affordable weapons internationally. Initially, the SPY-7 radar developed by Lockheed Martin Corp. could be co-developed by Fujitsu, the Japanese corporation. On balance, the deployment would be expected not only to increase the physical security of Japan but also to strengthen Japan as a normal, international state, under the principle of Proactive Contribution to Peace Abe had cherished. Furthermore, with a more robust BMD system, Tokyo could contribute to future United Nations Peacekeeping activities by providing its actual military capability. This might overcome the bitter experience of the Gulf War. Since the land-based system would relax the burden put on JMSDF, released Aegis ships and members of the JMSDF might be able to be allocated to a much broader mission throughout the world.

Those changes in the official interpretation of the constitution faced great opposition from the public and opposition parties. However, in the "quasi-war" condition like 2017, the Japanese public was more positive towards BMD than ever before. Installing Aegis Ashore might be a great opportunity to gain public support for his controversial political agenda,

namely the right of collective defense, information sharing, and arms export. It is not the first time the Japanese public reacted this way in an emergency-like situation. In 1998, following the Taepodong-1 launch test allowed the government to drastically shift from lukewarm to establishing a study group and increase BMD budget, although previously existing Nodong medium-range missile had posed more threat already to Japan already (Swaine, Swanger and Kawakami 2001).

Trump factor alone discussed in the previous section might not be enough to explain the quick purchase of Aegis Ashore in 2017. However, combined with the motivation from the receiving side, Trump-Abe relationship can explain a part of the complexed reasons why Japan decided to adopt the Aegis Ashore plan in the first place. On the one hand, Abe wanted to expand its international role for the sake of proactive contribution to peace, while on the other side, Trump wanted to fix the trade imbalance and bring the good economy back to the United States. It is like killing two birds with one stone, buying something necessary anyways to stabilize bumpy relationship with President Trump. The Aegis Ashore offer could not come at a better timing. Both intensions could have had a synergetic effect.

Thus, it raises more questions than answers why Abe allowed such an ideal plan to be scrapped. One reasonable answer here would be on the cooperation of technology development. As time passes, it eventually revealed that it would take additional time and cost if Fujitsu is involved, so the radar finally decided to be developed without Japanese participation (Tokyo

Shimbun Shakaibu 2019). Without Fujitsu's involvement, there will no spillover technology in the Japanese defense industry. His decision to cancel can be explained because his perfect plan started to stumble without Fujitsu. “Washington would have to dispel the Japanese suspicion that an emphasis on integration and interoperability might bring only the defense industry of the United States in a position to profit from bilateral BMD cooperation” (Umemoto 2003, p.205), but failed to do so. Additionally, realizing there is some way other than Aegis Ashore to achieve his political goals, Aegis Ashore might not be regarded as the best choice in 2020 anymore. PM Abe’s ambition to contribute to international peace can be still achieved with Aegis-equipped ships since it still requires information sharing with U.S. and enhance collective security. Perhaps Aegis fleet’s mobility might achieve international peace more efficiently because it is more flexible to apply throughout the globe. With extended mobility and flexible system, it can be used in the offshore UN PKO, which is another ambition of Abe to contribute to international peace. Therefore, although the problem of burdens on JMSDF is unsolved, Aegis ships can nevertheless contribute to international peace by collaborating with the United States either way.

### 3-3.-1. Change in Japanese decision-making process

Decision-making process regarding defense and foreign policy significantly changed since 2013, with the establishment of National Security Council (NSC). This establishment is

based on Abe's "proactive contribution to peace" and thus closely connected with Abe's personal political aims (Cabinet Secretariat 2013). Back in the late 1980s and 1990s when missile defense was proposed, there are many stakeholders involved with their respective benefits. Not only the prime minister and the cabinet, but also then Japan Defense Agency (JDA) and each of three Self-Defense Forces, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Ministry of Finance, The Diet, The political parties, The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry and private business, and the public and the media.

For instance, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) tends to have a less political motive and adopts a very cautious stance towards BMD inherently. Since the purchase of billions of weapons involves a significant increase in the Japanese defense budget, the MOF will likely challenge whether such a purchase is necessary. Even the disagreements exist inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) which is traditionally an ally of the Ministry of Defense and former defense agency and tends to prioritize military cooperation with the United States. Although its influence has not been as strong since the 1980s, the Chinese and Mongolian Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs opposed the BMD, to avoid a negative reaction from Beijing. (Swaine, Swanger and Kawakami 2001). Yoji Koda, a former admiral of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), looking back on the time he purchased expensive and controversial weapons from the U.S., says that the Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) took three years to consider its purchase, using mathematics-based simulations to propose at least three

potential plans. He finally managed to purchase equipment according to priority, in this case, Aegis-equipped warship, airborne warning and control system (AWACS), then aerial refueling aircraft over the course of a decade. With Aegis Ashore, however, there was not even Plan B. And it was very simplistic and decided at an unordinary speed. (The Genron NPO 2020).

The rivalry among the three serves of the JSDF could be another factor affecting the deployment of Aegis Ashore. It is worth noting that, as the Aegis Ashore was supposed to be operated by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), while JMSDF has been traditionally operating the upper-tier missile defense using Aegis destroyers. While JGSDF is the biggest force and has the strongest political leverage, JMSDF had the ambition to lead missile defense, so as to establish its status as the prime importance among the JSDF three serves (Swaine, Swanger and Kawakami 2001).

With the establishment of NSC, it is questionable how much of inter-ministry and bureaucratic discussions were taken into consideration. It is symbolic that the Aegis Ashore was chosen as if it is the only option. The behavior of the Ministry of Defense demonstrates how this has already been a previously arranged decision. Abomination such as choosing the location using Google Earth, and lack of explanation to local community suggests that deployment in Akita and Yamaguchi was the only option and MOD made up all the evidence and persuasion to achieve what was already decided. (Tokyo Shimbun Shakaibu 2019).

Akita Hiroyuki, the commentator at Nihon Keizai Shimbun points out that lack of

communication between “uniformed personnel” of the JSDF and “suits personnel” of the MOD. Normally, important strategic weapons should be agreed upon among the JSDF who work in the front line then eventually approved by the ministry, and then ultimately by the prime minister. With Aegis Ashore, the whole process was reversed and came from the top. Without discussion, MOD decided to purchase specific radar and interceptors for Aegis Ashore. Upon deciding the ideal location for deployment, MOD used Google Earth, while JSDF has sophisticated maps and departments for a survey. Such a miscommunication could have helped the government and NSC behave rashly. The time when the State Minister of Defense showed concern about how close the populated area was to the planned deployment area upon his visit to Akita, everything was already fixed, and everyone needed to proceed with the failed plan (The Genron NPO 2020).

Criticism from the opposition party, investigation of the proper location, adjustment of software to safely land the booster rocket, all continued after the formal decision of deployment was made. There is no wonder one would imagine purchasing Aegis Ashore was “a done deal.” As we discussed above, the Trump-Abe curious relationship could partially explain the quick purchase. However, more importantly, such a watered-down decision-making process coupled with what Koda calls “quasi-war status” when multiple missiles are launched in 2017, rushed such an important decision without scrutiny.

This whole dysfunction can be attributable to the reason discussed earlier. To achieve

international peace under the principle of Proactive Contribution to Peace, Abe established National Security Council and excluded a variety of opinions that existed previously. The politically driven approach (rather than bureaucrats-driven) is often described as “Kantei-shudou”, and criticized by the media. Around the time the Cabinet approved Collective Self-Defense under the exclusive defense-oriented policy, Nihon Keizai Shimbun (2014) warns the cabinet should listen to the opposition because they are not entirely against the change of interpretation of the Constitution. These checking dynamics have been diluted under PM Abe’s transformation. Now that issue of swollen budgets and operation failure were disclosed after the sole decision by the prime minister and NSC, the issue became out of control. If all these stakeholders participated in the decision-making process, the declared reason for cancellation, such as cost, the booster could be solved before the final decision or decided not to go on with Aegis Ashore in the first place.

Some people maintain that Japan canceled very costly BMD instead to pursue much affordable and effective enemy strike capability (Unbehauen, M. & Decker, C. 2020, Interview 1). Seemingly, the cancellation looks like a slowdown of the military capabilities expansion. Reducing defense capability to counter the perceived increase of neighboring countries' forces contradicts defensive realists' assumption, needless to mention the offensive realism. However, curiously, cancellation led to more heated discussions on capabilities to attack enemy bases or ultimately pre-emptive attacks, which is more offensive in nature. Hinting that the BMD system

might not be perfect to protect Japan, or sometimes more costly, such a capability had been sporadically suggested by government officials. For instance, Onodera Itsunori, then-defense minister when Aegis Ashore's plan was upheld, openly recommended obtaining such capability to prevent second and third missile attacks from North Korea (Fujita 2017). Most recently, incumbent Prime Minister Fumio Kishida suggested such a capability is one of the options to defend Japan (Jiji Press 2021). Although this capability stimulates more difficult discussion regarding constitutionality, it is important to remember such discussion started to gain momentum after the cancellation of Aegis Ashore.

This sort of discussion has been held in both the strategic and academic arenas as well. Discussions often focus in the context of cancellation and the potential of being the alternative to Aegis Ashore. One expert suggests this is the transition in thinking that deterrence by denial including BMD itself is not enough to protect Japan against massive China anymore. Even with North Korea, it is widely mistaken by the Japanese public, but BMD is not perfect, and not intended to counter full-scale missile salvos without retaliatory attacks. Thus, some extent of deterrence by punishment is imperative for national defense.

BMD is effective to intercept when North Korea's single, or handful missile tests, or intercept marginal missile attacks, but not the full-scale salvos or ballistic missiles launched in a lofted trajectory. Plus, introducing interceptors to prevent "all of North Korea's medium-range ballistic missiles would impose an extremely heavy cost on Japan". (Murano 2020b). In

the context of offense-defense balance, not only that offense holds much more supremacy over defense, but also the defensive interceptor is much more expensive than the missile, so that it could wear out as the offensive launches continue. Therefore, it can be only combined with robust retaliatory attack capability to effectively protect its territory. One might think it is premature to possess enemy base strike capability. "If China and North Korea do not have such capabilities, this argument is correct. However, because they now have the capability to attack Japan unilaterally, a "window of opportunity" is already open to them. Japan's long-range strike capability would not destabilize the region but would rather serve to restore stability and close this window of opportunity for North Korea and China." (Murano 2020b). Rationally thinking, Japan needs to possess some sort of counter-strike capability to deter North Korea. Abe already allowed some standoff missiles to deploy in Japan, which can be potentially used to attack enemy bases (Nikkei Asia 2020). Furthermore, Japan is developing domestic stand-off-missile not only to target North Korea, but China as well.

Murano, one of the proponents of enemy base strike capability argues that the "theory of victory" is very important when discussing the offensive capability. Upon considering counter-strike capability, it is important to speculate how to conclude the war. The BMD system is the last resort to avoid catastrophic damages. It is not originally intended to intercept the unlimited number of incoming warheads. In the hard-landing option where a small number of missiles are unavoidable, it is important to discuss with the United States where to attack to avoid an

insufferable second strike, and for that purpose, how much long-range missiles are required and how severely we can inflict damage on enemy bases to succeed in such mission. And in such a case, how many third strikes are expected, and whether it can be protected using the existing BMD. He warns ill-defined offensive capability without in-depth discussion with the United States, will not strengthen Japanese security on balance. (Murano 2020a). Such a detailed calculation will be essential upon considering enemy base strike capability. Heretofore, this type of discussion is not at least shared with the public.

Nevertheless, many people are very skeptical of such a capability. First and foremost, the pre-emptive attack is against international law and involves heated oppositions not only from its neighboring states but also the international community in general. Even with minimum ability to attack enemy bases, there will be a complexed legal discussion. Although difficult, it is important to distinguish between the enemy base attack and the pre-emptive attack of the enemy's base before the first strike. It is not as simple as regarding enemy base strike capability as the alternative to Aegis Ashore. It entails countless problems of constitutionality and security. This will not only provoke opposition domestically. Many scholars and politicians are opposed to pursuing enemy base strike capability prematurely, in lieu of Aegis Ashore. (The Genron NPO 2020).

This enemy base attack capability has been lively ongoing in politics and media. Nevertheless, with or without such a capability, land-based missile defense capability will

physically improve the security of Japan's security. What is more, it is "cheaper and more effective to combine strike capabilities with existing missile defense in cooperation with the Americans" (Basu 2020). This is the case where a non-nuclear state (Japan) considers conventional offensive capability to counter-attack nuclear states who possess 500 warheads (North Korea). If we consider China, the number will skyrocket. Aegis Ashore and enemy base attack capability are compatible and thus cancellation of this still seems to contradict neo-realist predictions.

### 3-4 The China factor

As discussed earlier, since the late 1980s when the discussion on missile defense system started, there has been a mishmash of intentions of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, three JSDF serves, domestic institutions, and public acceptance and media. There is one more important factor when it comes to missile defense; the China factor (Swaine, Swanger and Kawakami 2001). While the acquisition of capability to counter the sudden rise of North Korean missile capability was important, however, Japan did not want to antagonize China not only because it is the biggest economic partner, but also China could be the biggest military threat.

Bluntly speaking, Japan's BMD strategy has been a dilemma between the United States and China. On one hand, it wants to increase its own security while strengthening security

cooperation with the United States. On the other hand, Japan wants to make sure such an increase in BMD will not reduce security for Japan (Umemoto 2003). China fears that Japan's participation in the U.S.-led Theater Missile Defense (TMD) program might be used to strengthen U.S. National Missile Defense (NMD) program. While the United States has its own strategic goal, "Japan for a variety of reasons related to history and geography perceives an arguably greater need than does the United States to maintain a nonconfrontational relationship with China" (Swaine, Swanger and Kawakami 2001, p88).

Any additional Ballistic Missile Defense system deployed in Japan will not only protect Japanese populations, but also include United States Forces Japan (USFJ). This forward-deployed Indo-Pacific Command operates in wider range even including Taiwan. Therefore, BMD deployment in Japan is not purely defensive from the Chinese perspective. Additional protection for such command can be a great concern for China. What is worse, although it is not official, missile defense system deployed in Japan would be used to protect the U.S. homeland. This is especially visible since U.S. showed its ambition to integrate TMD and NMD rapidly. Therefore, the biggest opposition comes when such a system deployed by U.S. allies in Asia seemed to be used to protect the U.S. while showing a decent understanding of the barrier against North Korea.

Most recently, when South Korea deployed its THAAD (Theater High Altitude Area Defense missile) system in North Gyeongsang Province in 2016, it led to severe economic

sanctions from the Chinese side including prohibition of Pyongchang Winter Olympic Games tickets sales as well as boycotting Lotte products in China. Lotte was targeted because it offered the land to host THAAD. Beijing condemns that THAAD “radar has a range that would extend far beyond the Korean peninsula and into China” (Wroughton 2016). Although U.S. officials claimed it was not aiming at Chinese ICBMs and is currently unable to detect them, it is also true that it can quickly converse from terminal mode to forward-based mode within eight hours. (Yoon 2021). This inevitably concerns Beijing and made officials in Beijing feel that the United States tried to contain China further.

It seems that China opposes anything that potentially damages Chinese security. Chinese authority sees and calculates the missile defense capability differently from the U.S. perspective. Sankaran (2020) calculates the current U.S. and allies’ plan to increase missile defense capability in Asia is reasonable and moderate according to the simulations. To protect against attacks from North Korea, the current capability might not be enough to intercept all the incoming warheads. China preserves far stronger missile attack capability so that Beijing should not be intimidated by the increase of BMD in the Asia Pacific. Nevertheless, Beijing’s suspicion continues. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei maintains that China does not view the matter “as simply a technical one”, and “The THAAD system exceeds the normal defensive needs of the Korean peninsula, threatens China’s reasonable national security interests and damages regional strategic stability (Wroughton 2016). This is not surprising

because policymakers usually assess that “the adversary as stronger and the self as weaker, even if the reality suggests otherwise (Sankaran 2020, p. 501). Thus, reassuring Beijing is very difficult, if not impossible.

In the 2000 period, the China factor apparently did not play a significant role in the decision-making (Swaine, Swanger and Kawakami 2001, p.82). Urayama (2004) explains that there are five reasons why China did not play a significant role. One of the biggest factors was that China temporarily changed its strong opposition to U.S.-led TMD because China prioritized stability with the United States. In 2020, however, it is worth pondering the implication of the China factor more closely, now that China is much more powerful than it was two decades ago, and strategic competition between the United States and China is more visible.

The cancellation of any kind of system potentially used by the United States to counter Chinese ballistic missiles might result in the relaxation of security intensity and arms race. If so, cancelation of Aegis Ashore could have been viewed positively in Beijing. However, now that alternative solutions are revealed to be two additional Aegis ships, one might wonder that China might be more concerned with more flexible Aegis ships rather than immobile Aegis Ashore, the range of defense is mostly limited to Japanese archipelago. One of the prime concerns for China is that such a system is used in the contingency over the Taiwan strait crisis (O’Donogue 2000). If true, the above explanation loses its persuasion. So far, however, we did not witness

severe opposition against Aegis Ashore nor Aegis ships buildup from China, such as what we saw in South Korea's THAAD deployment case. In order to fill the gap left by the cancellation, newly established Aegis ships will be only committed to missile defense for the time being, while the other ships are used to operate the conventional mission. Although above statement is true in a manner, it is highly doubtful that Japan will use such national defense system for the defense of Taiwan. Especially, it is assumed that Japanese territory including, but not limited to Sakishima island-chain would be on high alert in Taiwan contingency, it is highly unlikely that Japan will use these two Aegis ships for the defense of Taiwan. So far Tokyo has not received severe criticism for the alternative plan. Nevertheless, unceasing effort to convince Beijing these two Aegis ships will not use against Taiwan, nor the defense for U.S. territory should be necessary to prevent unwelcome arms race.

To summarize, in relations with China, the cancellation in 2020 hints that Tokyo concluded that deployment of Aegis Ashore could antagonize China and intensify the already challenging security environment. In later the same year, however, Tokyo adopted almost similar, perhaps more troublesome, alternative for China. Therefore, the cancellation of Aegis Ashore announced in June 2020 can be interpreted that Tokyo placed emphasis on the relationship with China.

Nevertheless, Tokyo approved two Aegis ships as alternatives afterwards. This implies that Tokyo did not try to appease China with the cancellation of Aegis Ashore. An expert

involved in the decision-making process asserts that the China factor did not play a critical role. Ultimately, it was decided due to the vested-interest structure of the defense industry between the United States and Japan (Interview 1). Indeed, throughout the research, the author did not come across with sophisticated discussion on the China factor regarding the Aegis Ashore cancellation. While this topic was closely considered among the academia in the 2000s when BMD was initially proposed, other Japanese BMD experts expressed “it is important not to overreact to Chinese opposition to BMD; the more you react, the more they will exaggerate their anti-BMD claims (cited in Urayama 2004, p.124). For its geographical location, however, Japan should still weigh the China factor in the context of missile defense. Purely neorealist might not offer solutions beneficial for Japan and could end up reduce overall security vis-à-vis China.

#### 4 Conclusion

This research tried to investigate the cancellation of Aegis Ashore and attempted to find the validity of the intervening variables, which led to the cancellation because the neo-realist theory of the IR simply cannot explain the series of Japanese decisions. Through the empirical analysis, we witnessed the contiguous influence of personal and politico-cultural factors rather than simple systemic factors upon Japanese foreign policy decision-making, especially decisions regarding missile defense.

In the first image on individuals, we found out that it could explain the decision to deploy in 2017 to some extent. Abe and Trump's political ambition speeded up the decision to deploy Aegis Ashore. However, this variable could not definitively identify why it led to the cancellation under the same administration on both ends. Since the situation has not significantly changed in 2020, it still lacks a solid explanation why it ended up in cancellation and subsequently deployed Aegis ships as an alternative. For PM Abe, it does not have to be with Aegis Ashore to achieve his political goal. Now that one of his three pillars, encouraging sophisticated military technology, lost its significance, Abe's ambition could be achieved with alternatives. Abe's political goal had been nevertheless consistent, while it still leaves questions why Trump tolerated it.

In the second image of domestic politics, the change in strategic culture is proven to be a more convincing intervening variable. The Decision-making process has been altered dramatically since the 2000s with the newly established NSC in 2013. Japan's Defense Agency (JDA) ascended to the Ministry of Defense (MOD) to become more powerful in the decision-making. Abe's alternative interpretation of the constitution gave more previously restrictive Japanese Self-Defense Forces to contribute to international peace. These two critical changes in strategic culture, the structure of the decision-making process, and the revised idea of peace can explain both the acquisition on the one hand and cancellation on the other. Acquisition, because this simplified process dodged the opposition from a variety of stakeholders for the

sake of contributing to international peace while strengthening ties with the United States and its TMD. This faced backlash later when reviewed by other institutions afterward and could not persuade them of the initial decision.

The third image of the framework of international politics provides more complicated conditions for Japan, amid the strategic competition between the United States and China heightening. The United States is the superpower that tends to pursue idea-based politics. Their desire to keep being hegemon benefitted Japan in the unipolar and bipolar world between the U.S. and Soviet Union, but apparently not in the bipolar world of China and the U.S. Because China is much closer to Japan and simply the idea of containment in Japan is different from the U.S. Under this principle, any missile defense potentially used against the homeland of the United States would jeopardize the relationship with China. Since the start of the BMD discussion, reducing the threat while increasing BMD capability was a vital component of the Japanese missile defense capability. Building new defense capability might further stimulate China to build more sophisticated attack capability both in quality and quantity, consequently putting further threat to Japan. The third image seems to support the decision of cancellation, and thus this contradicts what the neorealist theory would otherwise dictate. Given such an external environment, a rational choice would be to expand the military capability to counter them. In this way, neoclassical realism could explain better than the simple projection of power and balancing. The current alternative solution to build two Aegis ships might ostensibly

suggest the advantage of neo-realism, but it is essential to remember that the China factor had no minor importance in the BMD decision-making.

This is considered a unique case in that decision was made (mostly) by Kono, an unusual maverick in Japanese politics. If it was not for him, some wonder if the government still upholds the plan. The best way to solve this puzzle would be to simply ask Kono. Surprisingly, in his memoirs published in June 2021, however, not only did he mention anything about the missile defense but even also merely touched the missile defense problem in the context of security issues. Nevertheless, he shares the view that the U.S.-Japan security alliance is the utmost priority for Japan's defense (Kono 2021). This does not contradict an academic suggestion that missile defense should not harm the security tie with the United States (Umemoto 2003). He would not do anything to jeopardize such a vital alliance with the United States. This, nevertheless, does not mean Japanese behavior can simply be explained using neorealism. Both deployment or cancellation will change the security structure in East Asia and potentially complicate the relations with China or harm the security tie with the United States.

Thus, neither of these factors alone can provide a plausible explanation of why Japan cancelled the Aegis Ashore missile defence deployment. Only the combination of individual, domestic and systemic levels, in line with neoclassical realist interpretation, paints a hollistic picture of why and how this has transpired. Through understanding this dynamic, this thesis

has advanced our knowledge of Japanese security and defence policy on two levels. Theoretically, it has criticised the often cited neorealist interpretations of security changes in Asia by questioning its applicability on a current event. Empirically, it has illustrated the nuances of Japanese security policymaking on an issue that has yet to be researched and evaluated in the academic literature.

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