

# **Historical Observations on the U.S.-Russia-China Nuclear Cold War: In Search of a Domestic Foundation for Japan's Security**

**Kaoru Iokibe**

## **Abstract**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to a growing historical awareness that we may now be in an interwar period like that between the two world wars, and that this period may be coming to an end. At the same time, the presence of nuclear arms as the ultimate weapon has reemerged. This paper is inspired by these repetitions of the past.

First of all, I confirm the present phase of international confrontation, taking George Kennan as my guide.

Secondly, I survey the history of the "ultimate weapon." Viewing the nation-state as the first ultimate weapon, I consider what suggestions the efforts to prevent the outbursts of its destructive power may provide in order to prevent the use of today's ultimate weapon of nuclear arms.

Thirdly, focusing on nuclear deterrence, I consider how the tripolar deterrence among the U.S., China and Russia differs from the U.S.-Soviet bipolar deterrence that was the keynote of the Cold War.

Fourthly, based on the above arguments, I discuss the domestic foundation needed for Japan's policy towards China.

## **1. 75th Anniversary of George Kennan's X Article**

### **Guidance for Historical Observations**

**T**here have been numerous discussions on how the U.S., Japan, Europe, and other Western countries should deal with the threat from Russia and China. I am a historian specializing in Japanese political and diplomatic history, so I hope to contribute my two cents' worth using past experience as guidance.

It is probably safe to say that the Western countries have entered a cold war with China and Russia. In light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they have imposed harsh economic sanctions on Russia to support Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin has even talked about the use of nuclear weapons in his attempt to intimidate the Western countries. On the other hand, China is perceived as posing an even greater challenge to the international order than Russia.

While China and Russia have a cooperative relationship, they are not allies. This cooperative relationship requires the West to pursue a balance with the combined military power of the two countries. The absence of an alliance also compels the West to adopt a two-pronged conceptual strategy on the assumption that these two countries will take independent actions.

Historical observations are precisely necessary for a complex and difficult situation like this. Focusing solely on the current situation may result in short-sighted or inflexible responses.

---

This essay is a translation of an article published online on December 9th, 2022. It can be accessed at: <https://www.jiia.or.jp/jic/20221209.html>. The information in this essay is current as of December 2022.

I will attempt to make historical observations based on the concepts of “ultimate weapon” and “ultimate war.” From there, I would like to undertake a preliminary discourse on what is the domestic foundation needed for the implementation of policy toward China.

However, first, I would like to refer to the experience of the previous Cold War for guidance on the historical view to be adopted in order to arrive at policy conclusions.

The year 2022 happens to be the 75th anniversary of George Kennan's article published under the pseudonym “X” which laid out the basic strategy for the Cold War. I would like to start my discussion using the 75th anniversary of the X Article as my vantage point.

### **The Life History of George Kennan**

Kennan was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in February 1904, the month the Russo-Japanese War started. He stated in his memoirs that he hailed from a “family of settlers.” When he entered Princeton University, he recalls being very self-conscious, but he studied very hard. He joined the Department of State in 1925.

While he was an introvert academic type, he participated in the practice of diplomacy. These two aspects meant that he achieved limited career advancement but was able to make unique intellectual contributions to U.S. diplomacy.

Kennan published his article “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947. (In George Kennan, *American Diplomacy, Expanded Edition* [Amerika Gaiko Goju-nen], Iwanami Gendai Bunko, 2000) In consideration of his position as a State Department official, he used the penname “X.” This X Article was highly acclaimed.

This was two years after the end of World War II. It was a time when optimism was waning and doubts were rising inside the U.S. government on whether it would be possible to work with the Soviet Union, which had fought with the U.S. against the Axis powers, after the war.

Kennan studied Russia intensively. He became so knowledgeable of Russian literature that he wanted to become an expert on Anton Chekhov. He knew about the Russian government's history of suspicion, aggression, and expansionism against the outside world. The Soviet Union's belief in Marxism, which was antagonistic toward capitalism, aggravated such tendencies. This knowledge was also based on Kennan's own experience working at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. The X Article argued that the U.S. should do away with its optimistic illusion about the USSR's intent.

On the other hand, the USSR's overall national power was inferior to the Western camp, so war was not imminent. He advised “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” The identity of X soon became known, and Kennan came to be remembered as the “father of the containment policy.”

It was important to rehabilitate West Europe and Japan to enable them to resist the infiltration of Soviet communism (mostly the nonmilitary aspects). Kennan was deeply involved with the formulation of and messaging on the Marshall Plan for the economic recovery of Europe. He also contributed to the shift in the occupation policy for Japan.

However, Kennan was in the mainstream of policymaking for only more than two years. He was critical of the founding of NATO and West Germany, as well as the development of the hydrogen bomb. He believed that such confrontational military posture was neither patient nor vigilant. Perhaps translating “containment” as advocated by Kennan as *fujikome* [confinement] in Japanese has a slightly stronger aggressive nuance than what he intended.

Kennan returned to Princeton University in 1950 to work as a scholar. While he did serve as ambassador to the USSR and Yugoslavia subsequently, he failed to establish good relations with the host country governments and his home office, so his tenure was short-lived. He died in 2005. Perhaps being a scholar is the secret to longevity.

### **Difference with the Present (1) —Paradigm of Confrontation**

Kennan's basic strategy underwent many revisions even during the last Cold War, so it was merely a basic doctrine. It goes without saying that this strategy cannot be applied unamended today. First, I would like to examine the difference with the X Article's assumptions to further our understanding of the present.

First, the paradigm of confrontation is different.

The X Article was premised on a bipolar U.S.-Soviet confrontation. While the Cold War in Asia became multipolar subsequently due to the intensifying China-Soviet confrontation, this was a process beneficial to the West. On the contrary, China and Russia today share a strong sense of rivalry against the West, and they are in a cooperative relationship.

### **Difference with the Present (2) —Trust in the Enemy**

Second, the level of trust in the challenger is different.

Kennan's assumption was that the USSR believed that time was on its side. According to communist doctrines, capitalism was bound to collapse. Regarding the Soviet Union's perception, the X Article stated: "The theory of the inevitability of the eventual fall of capitalism has the fortunate connotation that there is no hurry about it." It asserted that the USSR was in no rush, so unless the West engaged in provocation out of impatience, the probability of a Soviet military attack was low.

In this connection, Kennan trusted the USSR of being capable of making rational decisions on the power balance. Since the challenger was a country with inferior national power that reckoned time was on its side, containment would be effective.

Do China and Russia today have time on their side?

No such confidence can be seen from Russia. Its main exports of oil and natural gas were increasingly being avoided amid the drive to decarbonize in response to climate change. Russia appears to be attempting territorial expansion while there is still demand for these exports. However, Europe is striving to reduce its dependence on Russian resources, so China and India are buying them cheap. War and economic sanctions are accelerating Russia's decline.

China is catching up with the U.S. in military and economic power, so it can be said that time is on its side. However, what is the long-term outlook? Population decline is already taking its toll in China. There is an estimate that even if its GDP overtakes the U.S. in 2033, there will be a reversal in 2050, and China will never be able to catch up again. It will not be surprising if China is anxious to take whatever it can while it still has the momentum.

Therefore, rationality must not be overestimated. There will probably be different opinions on China. However, as seen in its obsession with the zero Covid policy, the situation is such that Xi Jinping's words are difficult to reverse, even by himself. It is highly possible that there will be even less room for dissent inside the regime under the third term of the Xi regime which started in October, rendering it more vulnerable. Needless to say, trust in Russia's rationality is even lower.

This might be the beginning of the end of authoritarianism. A regime that suppresses disagreeable opinions will come to suppress even disagreeable information, resulting in its making fatal mistakes eventually. While the advancement of surveillance and information manipulation technology may nip disagreeable opinions and information in the bud, this may actually dig the regime's own grave in the long run. That is to say, the global degeneration of authoritarianism may be happening. However, this process is destabilizing the world for the time being. The road to the end of the end will be long and tortuous, and there is no guarantee that democracy will not end ahead of this end and that mankind will not be wiped out by a nuclear war. Come to think of it, there was still time until victory or destruction in the situation understood by Kennan 75 years ago.

### **Difference with the Present (3) —Trust in Allies**

Third, trust in the Western system is different.

How long would “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment” take? When and how would it bring about changes in Soviet conduct and its regime? This was the theme of another article published in 1951 dubbed the second X Article, “America and the Russian Future.” (In *American Diplomacy, Expanded Edition*) Kennan asked for people’s patience in this article. Since the USSR was not a country that would change under outside pressure, people must wait for the Russian people to change their thinking. However, it would not do to simply wait. Kennan left behind the inspiring words that this was a wait for “time to be gained for the working of more hopeful forces.”

He was saying that if the U.S. made its democracy work properly, this information would gradually penetrate the USSR and lead to changes. Kennan tended to take a pessimistic view of U.S. diplomacy and the domestic political situation behind it. Will he be able to find a “more hopeful forces” in the polarized America today? The pride and hope he had in U.S. democracy 75 years ago was so impressively strong.

### **The Effect of Area and Historical Studies**

However, there is still something to learn from Kennan beyond the contexts cited above. This has to do with Kennan’s being an area studies scholar with a strong historian’s leaning. Why is this good?

Nuclear deterrence used to be the centerpiece of the theories of Cold War strategy. In particular, the Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) theory claimed that there could be no nuclear war because in an all-out nuclear war, attack by one side and retaliation by the other side would result in fatal damages on both sides. This was based on the Game Theory premised on the rationality of both sides.

However, with nuclear proliferation, there are more entities now that might resort to nuclear attacks, rendering this assumption of rationality untenable. There might be countries which would resort to intimidation or use of nuclear arms even at the expense of widespread casualties among its own people. This is even more plausible in the case of non-state terrorists. For this reason, the “tailored deterrence strategy” based on an intrinsic understanding of the challenger’s goals and values – what it hopes to gain and what it does not want to lose – is being advocated in U.S. nuclear strategy since the beginning of the 21st Century. This will require an accumulation of a variety of area studies.

Furthermore, China has increased its nuclear arsenal. While its delivery systems are still inferior to those of the U.S. and Russia, it has become the number three nuclear power. Greater complexity brought to the Game Theory of nuclear deterrence by a tripolar paradigm, compared to a bipolar structure, will be discussed below. Moreover, it appears to be difficult to have trust in China’s and Russia’s rationality at a level comparable to that in the old Soviet Union. While the U.S. is an ally, its mindset and interests may not be identical with those of Japan.

Universally costly bets – that losing may mean the annihilation of a country’s people – are placed on the table of nuclear deterrence, so it would seem that analysis transcending the character of individual actors is possible. Yet, the players at this table represent a diverse variety of mentalities and cultures. There is no guarantee that they share the same view on the value of the bets let alone the rules. In areas other than nuclear deterrence, it is even more necessary to make efforts to pursue security by constantly thinking in consideration of the actors’ character.

### **Kennan’s View of the Russians**

It is particularly important to understand the Russian personality at present. I have engaged in academic exchanges with Russians in the past. The discussions on the Russian side were very

interesting. I came to know about their truly commendable genuine enthusiasm for democracy and international cooperation. On the other hand, there was no lack of advocates of unabashed power politics, and their uninhibited observations without concern for any taboos had the appeal of the forbidden fruit. At the same time, they harbored a sense of rivalry against Western values and opinions and displayed a rebelliousness at times, asserting that Russia was not bound by them. A certain childishness arising from both admiration and inferiority complex could be felt.

Kennan was able to offer an explanation for such confusing impressions. For example, when he was working at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, he submitted a memorandum entitled “Russia – Seven Years Later” to Ambassador W. Averell Harriman in September 1944. He later revealed in his memoirs that he had been confident that this memorandum was even better than the X Article and that he was hurt by the lack of response from his superior. (*George F. Kennan Memoirs, I* [Joji·F·Kenan Kaikoroku I ], Chuokoron Shinsha, 2016)

“To him [the Russian], contradiction is a familiar thing. It is the essence of Russia. West and East, Pacific and Atlantic, arctic and tropics, extreme cold and extreme heat, prolonged sloth and sudden feats of energy, exaggerated cruelty and exaggerated kindness, ostentatious wealth and dismal squalor, violent xenophobia and uncontrollable yearning for contact with the foreign world, vast power and the most abject slavery, simultaneous love and hate for the same objects: these are only some of the contradictions which dominate the life of the Russian people.” (pp. 477–478)

### “Lies” as Seen in Russia

Since the Russians lived in contradictions, there was no permanent truth. Truth was something that changed according to the circumstances from time to time. The sublime pain of the “soul” living with contradictions was the flip side of the coin of human opportunism. Kennan explained the world’s criticism of Russia’s deception in the following terms at the risk of not being understood by his readers.

“What do we mean by this? We mean that right and wrong, reality and unreality, are determined in Russia not by any God, not by any innate nature of things, but simply by men themselves. Here men determine what is true and what is false.

The reader should not smile. This is a serious fact. It is the gateway to the comprehension of much that is mysterious in Russia.” (p. 479)

### How Do Russians Resist?

We are watching with keen interest how the Russian people will respond to Putin’s orders or resist such orders. Since historically, the Russians had consistently received orders from despotic governments, Kennan believed that the following prediction would be valid.

“The Russian people have dissembled for so many centuries that they have dignified the quality into a national virtue. In contrast to Western nations, they can dissemble graciously and good-naturedly – without resentment, without bad manners, without impatience. In this they have challenged, and challenged successfully, the power of the Kremlin.

By this, I do not mean to say that they are politically dissatisfied. But when the influence of the regime comes too close to those mysterious recesses that we may call – at the risk of banality – the Russian “soul,” then the people quietly and politely disengage themselves behind an impeccable series of superficial responses, leaving their masters not quite sure what they

meant by the demure tone in which they murmured, 'Why, yes. Of course.'"  
(pp. 443–444)

### **Half of the Expectation**

I would not put all my bets on such an opinion. The more unequivocal observations on national character are, the more they tend to be arbitrary. I believe that in reality, there is a bigger difference between individuals than between nations. Moreover, each individual with his own character follows impersonal normal calculations of gains and losses in most situations in life. The same is true for all countries, so it should be possible to find rational explanations for China's and Russia's maneuverings in most cases.

However, when it comes to crucial basic policies and decision-making, that is, in cases that entail multiple serious conclusions and require thorough calculation of pros and cons, where the ability to calculate falls short, the character of the decision-makers may become more dominant.

For example, Russia's decision to withdraw from Kherson is reckoned to be a rational one. Yet, its very decision to invade Ukraine was a mistake in terms of its realistic interests. Russia is also making one decision after another and taking one action after another to continue its invasion that will bring serious damages not only to Ukraine, but also to itself.

China's specific maneuverings are even more rational than Russia's. However, I do not believe that its current national policy of carrying out hardline diplomacy, expending enormous resources for military expansion and to extend its international influence, and driving itself into the role of challenger to the international order is in China's interest.

There is a limit to putting trust in rationality. Therefore, we shall put half of our expectation on Kennan's view of the world as an amalgamation of actors with diverse characters.

### **Military Preparedness but Not Militarization**

To think in the opposite way from Kennan will mean ignoring individuality and applying a uniform idea to various situations. It is probably appropriate to call such a way of thinking militarization. All soldiers shoot when the commander gives the order. It will not be possible to shoot in unison if each soldier thinks about whether the order was valid, who the targets are, what sort of life they have lived, and who are their family members. Applying uniform ideas by ignoring individuality is like soldiers who are trained to shoot without thinking.

In his collection of philosophical writings published in 1993, *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy* [Nijisseiki wo Ikite—Aru Kojin to Seiji no Tetugaku], (Chuko Classics, 2015) Kennan stated:

There is, in military thinking, a certain absolutist quality that strongly resists anything that tends to obscure or to impair this purity of motive and action [to annihilate the enemy's forces – Iokibe].

Wariness of militarization was consistently behind Kennan's arguments. While military power is necessary, militarization must not be tolerated. I think his excessive wariness of militarization made him overly averse to military rivalry against the Soviet Union. However, wariness of militarization per se is valid.

Kennan was concerned that U.S. diplomacy after Hitler started the Russo-German War was leaning excessively toward cooperation with the Soviet Union due to its focus on defeating Germany and Japan. He advocated the reconstruction of Japan and Germany in order to stem the expansion of the Soviet sphere of influence. This was accepted in U.S. diplomacy. However, he went on to criticize U.S. preoccupation with military rivalry due to its confrontation with the USSR, resulting in his fall from the mainstream of policymaking.

There were also pitfalls in Kennan's arguments. Since the USSR had become a global challenger, Kennan's understanding of Russia and the solutions drawn therefrom would appear to be applicable to all areas in the world. Such solutions, however, did not exactly fit the specific circumstances that vary by region, with insufficient military focus in certain regions and excessive confrontation in others. There has been criticism that to the extent that the X Article offered clearcut propositions, it was obviously an oversimplification, neglecting the unique context of the East European countries. Even for someone knowledgeable of a national character, there is still a limit to the range of national characters that can be learned in depth, so there is a constant risk of distorting and disregarding other characters based on such limited knowledge. This is a common pitfall for area studies researchers.

The era when Kennan enjoyed influence was only a short period when the U.S. was moving from cooperation to confrontation with the USSR. But precisely for this reason, he had critical viewpoints valid for both the era of cooperation and confrontation.

Kennan also came to criticize longer-term U.S. foreign policy. While he hoped that the U.S. would become an ideal that inspired the world, he was against imposing the American ideal on the world. The reason was this would either lead to ignoring the history and circumstances of other countries and engaging in self-gratifying pontification or costly intervention in the worst case. On the other hand, he criticized isolationism as well. While isolationism meant exercising restraint regarding military intervention in other countries, Kennan might have sensed militarization in its assumption that the outside world is a dangerous place contaminated by imperialism.

Kennan's *American Diplomacy, Expanded Edition* (Iwanami Gendai Bunko, 2000) discussed U.S. diplomacy's unstable vacillation between isolationism and idealism. This work established his reputation as a diplomatic historian.

Above all, Kennan's wariness of militarization shows the West how to fight. Military power is important. When dealing with China or Russia, security cannot be attained merely through dialogue. Dialogue cannot begin without possessing self-defense capability and making the other side understand that it will face devastating retaliation if it attacks. However, to be dragged into militarization by military necessity will mean becoming of the same ilk as China and Russia. The West will lose its moral superiority and lose sight of the meaning of "hope" in the process of time being "gained for the working of more hopeful forces." This will not only be regrettable but will also mean losing the West's advantage.

The Allied forces' air raids on Hamburg toward the end of World War II resulted in 70,000 deaths. When Kennan visited the ravages left behind, he wrote in his diary: "... for moral principles were a part of its [the Western world's] strength. Shorn of this strength, it was no longer itself; its victories were not real victories." (*Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy*, p. 271)

Perception of the present may change if history is understood in light of a certain concept. One may realize that the direction being taken at present tends to have been repeated in the past – albeit in a different context and form – with unsatisfactory results. One may even find some form of indirect guidance on what needs to be done. Reading Kennan, one gets a feeling that this could be possible.

## **2. Historical View Predicated on the Ultimate Weapon**

### **Peace through the Ultimate Weapon**

Until tension heightened with China and Russia, most people had thought that they could live in a postwar period indefinitely. Yet, today, there is a sense that this could be an interwar period and a strong premonition that we are about to enter yet another period of war.

If we are in an interwar period, this has indeed been a long interwar period because with

the advent of nuclear arms as the ultimate weapon, the superpowers have exercised restraint in order not to trigger a war. Ironically, the ultimate weapon made this prolonged peace possible. At present, Russia's behavior has made the prospect of unleashing the ultimate weapon a real possibility. While the probability of Russia actually using nuclear weapons is low in the present situation, one cannot help but be conscious of this threat, and it is now feared that the interwar period may be coming to an end.

If mankind never learns and war occurs repeatedly, history can be understood as a repetition of interwar periods. The benefit or unleashing of the ultimate weapon will probably determine the continuation or end of the interwar period.

### **The Long Interwar Period after the Napoleonic Wars**

The ultimate weapon before nuclear arms was the nation-state. Napoleon, who inherited the fruits of the French Revolution, conquered almost the whole of Europe at one time. With the people regarding their own fate as being tied to the state and accepting conscription, the state came to be able to mobilize enormous human resources. Napoleon's talent in concentrated deployment of massive forces was integrated with the nation-state.

Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and other great European powers had no choice but to accept the concept and structure of the nation-state, albeit at different times. However, they strived to avoid the full mobilization of the destructive power of the nation-state. These countries would suffer intolerable damages if they fought a full-fledged war against each other. They were also imperial powers that ruled over multiple nationalities in their own countries or possessed colonies overseas, so bringing up the ideal of national independence would be rather troublesome. From 1815, following Napoleon's downfall after losing the Battle of Waterloo, the great powers including France had paid attention to the balance of power among themselves, resulting in a prolonged interwar period.

Wars also occurred even during this period. The Crimean War fought in 1853–56 between Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire, and the Kingdom of Sardinia (Italy) on one side and Russia on the other resulted in 640,000 deaths, so it may not be valid to regard this as part of the interwar period. However, this war converged into a limited battle over the naval fort of Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula because under Austrian pressure, Russia was restrained in its incitement of Balkan nationalism. In the end, it can be said that the imperial powers fought for their pride in a running battle that lasted a whole year. This, aggravated by an epidemic, resulted in an appalling number of casualties.

The wars that ended in the unification of Italy in 1861 and the unification of Germany in 1870, as well as the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 demonstrated the difficulty of stopping the forces of the awakening nation-states.

### **How Interwar Periods Come to an End**

How do interwar periods end? Challengers to the international order are either formidable enemies or dangerous enemies.

A formidable enemy is a force that possesses the ultimate weapon as well as other capabilities, such as Germany which succeeded in industrialization, expanded overseas, and was becoming an imperial power.

A dangerous enemy is a force that possesses only the ultimate weapon. The Balkan states that gained independence from the Ottoman Empire were a case in point. They were mid-sized and small nation-states that were unlikely to become imperial powers and their only goal was to become consummated nation-states. For this reason, they waged wars repeatedly over compatriots living outside the country or foreign elements inside the country. This situation was made worse by the lack of agreement on the definition of nation due to the entanglement of



different races and religions. Furthermore, Russia, which claimed to be a champion of the Slavic people, was encouraging the Balkan states to assert themselves internationally.

The strategy for maintaining an interwar period where the ultimate weapon is involved is complicated. The dangerous enemy is more dangerous because it tends to resort to the ultimate weapon. On the other hand, serious long-term confrontation is necessary in dealing with the formidable enemy. However, the formidable enemy has something to lose and it has other capacities to choose than the ultimate weapon. Generally speaking, it is desirable to cooperate with the formidable enemy to restrain the dangerous enemy.

Two Balkan Wars occurred from 1912–1913. In the first Balkan War, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece seized the Balkan territories, the Crete Island, and other parts of Turkey (Ottoman Empire). In the Second Balkan War, Serbia, Greece, Romania, and Turkey took land from Bulgaria, which was thought to have grabbed too much in the First Balkan War. While this weakened Turkey and boosted Russia's prestige, in reality, Russia and the other major powers were beginning to have trouble controlling the Balkan states.

Serbian nationalism, in particular, came to regard the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had a sizable Serbian population, as its main target after it defeated Turkey. On June 28, 1914, a Serbian nationalist assassinated Austria's Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, Bosnia.

This would have been a situation in which the great powers should cooperate to prevent the rampage of the nation-states of the Balkan Peninsula. However, the assassination of its heir to the throne won Austria strong international sympathy for a while, resulting in a major discrepancy in the major powers' policies.

Austria thought this was a golden opportunity to subjugate Serbia. With the consent of its ally Germany, it presented extremely tough demands. Since Serbia rejected some of the demands, war was declared on July 28. By that time, sympathy for Austria was waning.

Russia and its ally France had wanted Serbia to make concessions in order to avert a crisis. Serbia had accepted its responsibility for the assassination incident but was only resisting demands that might infringe on its sovereignty, such as allowing Austrian officials to participate in the investigation of the incident. Therefore, Russia could not abandon Serbia. It ended up issuing a general mobilization order.

Austro-Hungary and Russia and their respective allies Germany and France also went to war. After the German forces violated Belgium's neutrality, Britain also joined the war. Thus, World War I started and lasted until 1918. There were 9.5 million casualties among the military forces alone, and over 7 million noncombatants lost their lives.

### **Short Interwar Period after World War I**

The interwar period after World War I was very short because the power of the ultimate weapon was diminished. Several empires collapsed after the great war, and there was a proliferation of nation-states. This brought about more small independent nations such as the Balkan states, the breaking up of existing nations, and independence movements in other countries. This was also a source of weakness and instability that led to the rise of a new empire, which mobilized the citizens making full use of the structures of the nation-state and aspired to expand beyond the territory of the nation-state.

In Russia, a revolution occurred during World War I, which led to the founding of the Soviet Union. The USSR handed over part of its territory to Germany then dropped out from the fighting. However, Germany was also defeated in the war and lost large tracts of its territory. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved. Multiple independent nations came about amid the resulting power vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe. It can be said that the impetuous adoption of the ideology of nation-state rendered it difficult to maintain the balance of power. Furthermore, a double standard was also applied in the division of German people between

different nations, such as Germany and Austria. This facilitated Nazi Germany's expansionism beyond its national border in the 1930s on the pretext of unification with compatriots in other countries.

Britain and France had adopted an appeasement policy for a period but declared war after Germany invaded Poland. Thus, World War II started in September 1939.

Similar events occurred in East Asia, albeit under different circumstances. After Japan succeeded in establishing a nation-state at an early stage, the national independence movement on the other side of the ocean spurred the military invasion of the continent.

Even at the time of the First Sino-Japanese War, there had already been advocates of taking advantage of ethnic conflict to occupy the whole of China. *Mitogaku* [a school of Japanese historical and Shinto studies] stressed differences by nation. This had a significant influence on *Kokugaku* [National Learning] aimed at differentiation from the Sino-civilization and antiforeign exclusionism that sought to expel Western powers. Naito Chiso, a *kangaku* [premodern study of China] scholar who adhered to this line of thinking, argued that while Toyotomi Hideyoshi was a great hero, he failed in his advance into the continent because he attempted the expedition with Japanese *samurais* alone. He claimed that since the Manchus founded the Qing Dynasty, it would have been possible to recruit forces in China with the "trick" of inciting the Han people's "heroic struggle to restore the ancient regime." (Naito, "Open Up a New Japan in the Orient," *Shin-Nippon*, No. 2, 1894) If the Han people would not be subservient to the Manchurians, it is doubtful if they would be subservient to Japan. Did he mean that this could be done with some sort of "trick"?

The Xinhai Revolution of China occurred in 1911, prior to the start of World War I. The Qing Dynasty collapsed, and the Republic of China was founded. The problem now was how the Han people would control the minority nationalities. From time to time, the Japanese army took the opportunity to machinate cooperation with the independence movements in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. In 1931, the Kwantung Army instigated the Mukden Incident. The last Qing emperor, Puyi, was installed as the emperor of Manchukuo.

The Japan-China relationship deteriorated. Japan advocated Pan-Asianism and anticommunism in its attempt to draw China closer to Japan. Although it had little hope for long-term success as long as it upheld Manchukuo as a *fait accompli*, Japan wanted to stir up Chinese nationalism and channel the animosity toward Britain, the U.S., and the Soviet Union.

The Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937. Japan failed to win a total victory in the all-out war against the Han people. As one strategy to reverse the unfavorable situation, it attempted to cut off the supply route from the south for the Chiang Kai-shek regime supported by the West. At that time, vast areas in Southeast Asia were colonies of Britain, France, and the Netherland. Japan advanced southward using the local independence movements.

While the expansion of Japan's military actions to Manchuria, the Kannai region [all Chinese territory south of the Great Wall], and Southeast Asia appeared to be suicidal, it can also be said that this was in pursuit of people who would conveniently engage in "heroic struggle to restore the ancient regime" and ultimately serve Japan's purpose. However, Japan probably did not see the same potential in Siberia. While the start of Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 presented an excellent opportunity for Japan to advance northward, it did not make this move.

Japan's advance southward was also motivated by the desire to obtain natural resources in Southeast Asia. From the American point of view, Japan was not only challenging the international order in Asia but was also grabbing the resources Britain needed for its resistance to Germany, thus endangering the European battlefront. After Japan occupied the southern part of French Indochina (Vietnam) in July, the U.S. imposed a total oil embargo. The Japanese navy depended on the U.S. for oil so it was apprehensive that the situation would become even more unfavorable

with time. Japan then attacked Pearl Harbor in December, plunging into war against the U.S.

### **How to Prevent the End of This Interwar Period**

Some 55 million lives were lost in World War II, making this the most destructive war in history. Moreover, the majority of casualties were civilians. This was because on top of Germany's holocaust, both sides resorted to extensive air raids. Subsequently, the U.S. dropped the nuclear weapons it developed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The USSR also succeeded in developing nuclear arms, which led to a confrontation between two camps in the Cold War, both possessing large numbers of the ultimate weapon.

Ironically, this prevented another great war. Both camps understood that an all-out nuclear war would be suicidal, so a sort of cooperative relationship to prevent such war was built. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, an international order centered on the Western camp was established.

This international order is facing a serious challenge today. The formidable enemy this time is China. It possesses not only nuclear arms, the ultimate weapon, but also enormous conventional forces and economic power. The typical dangerous enemy is North Korea, which surges ahead in its development of nuclear arms and missiles. And now Russia is about to join the list of dangerous enemies. Its conventional forces are fighting a desperate war of attrition against Ukraine, while the process of breaking away from dependence on Russian energy resources is progressing in Europe. Nuclear weapons are now one of the few advantages Russia has left.

The advent of low-yield nuclear weapons led to assertions that they will prevent a worldwide nuclear war. Yet, I feel uneasy. This is because considering the example of the last ultimate weapon, nation-states, failure to make serious efforts to control small nation-states like the Balkan states, which would not be capable of starting a world war on their own, led to the first step toward a world war.

The lesson learned from World War I is that the proper way to respond to a crisis is to cooperate with the formidable enemy to restrain the dangerous enemy. There are numerous issues, such as climate change and epidemic prevention, that may further aggravate the plight of the West and mankind unless China cooperates. I believe that China is willing to make contributions on these issues.

This is because unlike Russia, China's national character is the product of a long history as the center of the Sino-civilization. While Russia shows strong antipathy and independence born out of the contradiction between admiration of Western civilization and an inferior complex, China wants to be the leader of universal values. If there is no likelihood of success, it may indeed behave like Russia but it will not miss an opportunity to epitomize such values.

However, today's ultimate weapon, nuclear arms, is different from the past ultimate weapon, nation-states. In the sense that nuclear arms can annihilate an entire people or even mankind, it is not only the strongest, but literally the ultimate weapon. It may bring about an ultimate war that will mean the end of mankind or truly extensive irreparable damages. Therefore, it is not only necessary to prevent war based on a historical perspective premised on the ultimate weapon, but also to have a common understanding between allies and enemies on the predictable consequences of an ultimate war and join hands in preventing such a war. That is, a historical view predicated on the ultimate weapon must be supplemented with a historical view predicated on an ultimate war.

## **3. Historical View Predicated on an Ultimate War**

### **Why Is a Historical View Predicated on an Ultimate War?**

Ishihara Kanji, who plotted the Mukden Incident, was a well-known proponent of a historical

view predicated on an ultimate war. He believed that an ultimate world war would be carried out by attacking the enemy population with powerful weapons carried on long-range aircraft. The ultimate weapon Ishihara imagined was very similar to the nuclear arms developed subsequently. He reckoned that eternal peace would come under the victor in an ultimate war. The Mukden Incident was one of his answers when thinking of what needed to be done for Japan to become the victor.

In a sense, Ishihara Kanji did what needs to be done in the nuclear age to a certain extent. The MAD theory that came later followed the logic of Ishihara's historical view predicated on an ultimate war in that the necessary actions under this theory were premised on an ultimate war, although the goal was not to win the ultimate war but to prevent one. For this purpose, what needed to be done was for both the U.S. and the Soviet Union to possess retaliatory capability to inflict fatal damages on the enemy if attacked with nuclear arms. (Defense Secretary Robert McNamara estimated in 1964 that at least 400 nuclear bombs must survive a first attack.) Since there could be no victor in an ultimate war, such a war would be avoided.

The idea of preventing an ultimate war also needs to be developed in the tripolar nuclear cold war between the U.S., Russia, and China.

### **Is the Nuclear Threat Real?**

I might be criticized for overestimating the probability of a nuclear war. There are as yet no signs that Putin will actually make nuclear attacks. While the current situation is said to be the most serious nuclear crisis since the Cuban Crisis, experts have concluded in their explanations that for now, such a probability is low. The West's deterrence is still effective at present. Although Putin may indeed use nuclear arms in a situation that may lead to his downfall, such as Ukraine's retaking the Crimean Peninsula, at this point, the Ukrainian forces have yet to achieve this on the battlefield. It is a common tendency to turn to such optimistic talk, but is this a valid analysis of the present situation?

It is said that even if Putin uses nuclear arms, he will probably use low-yield nuclear devices in Ukraine. In such a case, NATO will use force against Russia, not in Russia itself, but on Russian forces in Ukraine or its Black Sea Fleet will be attacked with conventional weapons. That is, there is unlikely to be an immediate nuclear war between Russia and NATO.

In other words, it is generally believed that only amateurs talk nervously about the nuclear threat. I am a historian specializing in the late 19th century, so I am indeed an amateur. Yet, I do have my concerns as an amateur.

First, I have a feeling that the asymmetry of Russia fighting on the one hand and NATO not fighting on the other may lead to different understanding on the escalation of the confrontation.

For the West, Russia's use of nuclear arms deserves a harsh punishment, so punishing it with conventional weapons is actually being considerate so as not to escalate the situation.

However, from the Russian point of view, it may see this as being attacked by NATO even though it has only attacked Ukraine. If Russia begins to use nuclear arms in reaction to this, it seems that no plan is in place to prevent escalation by Putin, who will become even more irrational.

Ukraine cannot be counted on to cooperate in preventing an escalation because it is the party that is most frustrated by the asymmetry, since it is the one resisting Russia's aggression without NATO's participation. Although Ukraine will be the first one to suffer damages if Russia uses low-yield nuclear arms, NATO's entering the war will tip the power balance in its favor overnight. The explosion on the Crimean Bridge and drone attacks on air bases inside Russian territory have seriously provoked Russia. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's remark three days ago (Dec. 6) that, "We have neither encouraged nor enabled the Ukrainians to strike inside of Russia" appears to indicate that Ukraine is seen as a risky ally.

Too much talk about a nuclear war crisis will lead to insensibility to the tragedy happening on the battlefield. Ukraine and East Europe are already facing serious damages and threat from Russian conventional forces. If Japan and the U.S. talk only of their fear of the use of nuclear arms, they may be accused of being insensitive and unreliable allies. However, there is something to be done from an objective distance. West Europe, the U.S., and Japan that bred the originator of the historical view predicated on an ultimate war (Ishihara Kanji) should be the ones to deepen the thinking on ultimate war even as they support Ukraine.

Second, the optimistic talk has too many caveats, such as “for the time being...” When a missile landed on Poland on Nov. 15, many people must have broken into a cold sweat and questioned themselves as to whether they had not been complacent on account of these caveats.

Even in the past Cold War, the threat of an immediate nuclear war had not been constantly present. Yet people continued to refine the theory of nuclear deterrence. There was a continuous reciprocation of the thinking that the worst scenario could be avoided by preparing for it during peacetime. Although this was dreary and unpleasant business, it was the wisdom needed to survive the Cold War, and it served as a galaxy that shone dimly on postwar history. Are we fully putting our forebears' wisdom into practice in the present Cold War?

### **Tripolar Nuclear Deterrence**

To be fair, practicing such wisdom now is admittedly more difficult than before.

Several studies have already been published on nuclear deterrence under a tripolar structure of the nuclear powers. It has been pointed out that theoretically, this will be much more difficult than in a bipolar paradigm. (Discussed expertly in Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., “The New Nuclear Age,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2022) People tend to become optimistic in two cases: when there is a plan and when there is no plan. I am worried that the latter may be the case at present.

Will thinking in terms of the actual confrontation and not along the line of the Game Theory open up new prospects? Unlikely. If an all-out nuclear war occurs between the U.S. and Russia and both sides come to suffer serious damages, China's hegemony will be established. Since China is not an ally of Russia, it will probably stay clear of the nuclear war.

Although mankind may perish from radioactivity and drastic climate change anyway, until that day China will put pressure on other countries to secure all possible resources for its people and Western countries will have little power left to resist China's self-centered behavior. China too will be desperate, so the threat or use of nuclear arms cannot be ruled out from its possible options. China calls nuclear deterrence “*weishe*,” which means not only to stop the other party but also has the nuance of forcing it to do something. Even greater misery and absurdity may persist after an ultimate war that will even make the expression “ultimate war” seem too naive and exasperating.

Under a bipolar U.S.-Soviet rivalry, theoretically, the U.S. president would at least be able to push the nuclear button to stop the evil empire from dominating the world. His ability to push this nuclear button deterred the USSR from launching nuclear attacks. However, under the tripolar U.S.-Russia-China structure, pushing the nuclear button will hand over hegemony to China, which is the greatest threat. I doubt if the U.S. president will be able to make such a decision.

This is because the U.S. is defined by democracy, and it has a strong aversion to plunging its people into miserable and humiliating conditions. It is also not only a democracy, but its economy also consists of free competition. The combination of these two tends to give rise to disparity and discontent with such disparity. A strong resentment that the elite unjustly neglected the citizens has given rise to the Trump faction in the Republican Party. Can America tolerate a scenario in which the Democratic president and his close aides board Air Force One (U.S. Air Force aircraft used by the president) to survive after pushing the nuclear button and take command over the nuclear war and the catastrophic postwar era while the people die violent deaths or hide in nuclear shelters surviving on canned food?

The world American politicians live in consists of two self-contained societies of the two major parties. The U.S. president will always have to live with his reputation in his own party and criticism from the opposition party throughout his life and even after he dies. Trump is a traveling salesman roaming this self-contained society who has decided to leave his sense of shame at home. That is why he was able to come up with clever, strange, and bad moves beyond the imagination of the members of this society. Discounting such an exception, presidents are sensitive about their posterior reputation. He will have to be prepared to face harsh criticism to start a U.S.-Russia nuclear war under a U.S.-Russia-China tripolar setup. The psychological hurdle to making the decision to launch a nuclear attack on Russia will be much higher than in the case of a bipolar world.

Nuclear deterrence will not be effective against the other party unless preparations are made to use nuclear arms when the necessity arises. I believe the U.S. will launch a nuclear attack if Russia crosses the red line. However, there is no guarantee that Putin realizes that. Authoritarian leaders, while paying attention to and counting on the confusion and absurdity brought about by democracy, tend to underestimate the determination of democratic countries. Prewar Japan also made this mistake. If Russia comes to have lower regard for U.S. nuclear deterrence, this may make it easier for Russia to take provocative action.

It is difficult to stop Russia from escalating the confrontation. If this is to be attempted, the surest solution is to make Ukraine cease hostilities. Yet, it will be difficult to tell Ukraine to stop fighting as long as it still has the will to fight. The next best solution is to reduce aid to Ukraine, thus delaying its advance as a result, in order to avoid a situation where Putin will be tempted to use nuclear arms.

However, as long as a Russia with its current national character exists, even if the present Ukraine war ends or Putin steps down, it will only mean deflecting a crisis for the time being. Even so, this may still be an option since it will save many lives and livelihoods. However, this will be at the expense of losing the West's moral superiority and give the challenger possessing nuclear arms false hopes. Will this not lead to an even greater crisis?

Factors that evoke thoughts about such a scenario can be found in the media reports we receive. They make us worry that the anchors securing the international order, such as nuclear deterrence and aid to Ukraine, are being removed one after the other.

### **Inertial Thinking**

Inability to think of an effective solution for tripolar nuclear deterrence is terrible but falling into inertial thinking out of intellectual weariness is even worse.

The optimistic thinking cited above is an example of inertial thinking.

There may be even more sophisticated forms of inertia. Some may think of reducing the tripolar paradigm into a bipolar one and reverting to the good old MAD theory. This is possible if the U.S. declares that when an all-out nuclear war breaks out with Russia, similar nuclear attacks will be launched on China as well. Since China's not being an ally of Russia and not participating in the U.S.-Russia nuclear war is complicating matters, lumping China and Russia together will result in a bipolar arrangement.

This will be a precipitate and outrageous policy that is not even worth discussing. Yet sadly, the policy of making such a declaration will be effective to some extent. While China will be furious, above all, it will desperately try to stop Putin from escalation. Although Xi Jinping has already expressed opposition to the use of nuclear arms, China should be able to make further contributions. It can offer options that the Western countries are unable to provide, including awesome economic inducements, providing political asylum, and abduction and confinement.

There are precedents of abduction and confinement by China even for a dignitary of Putin's status.

Anti-Japanese riots known as the Imo Incident erupted in Korea in 1882. The Qing Dynasty resolved this by abducting the Daewongun (the king's father) Yi Ha-eung, who was thought to be the mastermind behind the unrest, and taking him to Tianjin. In 1936, Chang Hsueh-liang took Chiang Kai-shek prisoner to make him cooperate with the Communist Party of China to form an anti-Japanese united front. China has not only succeeded in abduction and confinement but has also achieved the goal of such action.

The historical view predicated on an ultimate war can be restructured within certain limits even under the U.S.-Russia-China tripolar paradigm. That is, on the premise of an ultimate war and if China is forced to assume that it will be embroiled in this ultimate war, Russia can be deterred to the extent that China can restrain Russia.

I am opposed to the policy of making such a declaration [of nuclear attack on China if a nuclear war breaks out with Russia]. Either this will become a laughingstock because it will not be taken seriously, or moral superiority will be decisively lost.

Will the Pentagon's experts be able to come up with a reliable prescription if this matter is left in their hands? The "2022 Nuclear Posture Review" released by the Defense Department in late October is cause for some concern.

It not only confirmed the intent to possess the capability to fight a nuclear war with both China and Russia. The policy advocated by President Joe Biden during his presidential campaign that nuclear weapons shall be used for the "sole purpose" of nuclear deterrence has been rejected. It also stated clearly that the principle of "no first use" will not be adopted. This means that it is possible that the U.S. may be the first to use nuclear arms in conventional warfare.

The principle of "no preemptive use" has not been negated, which means that the U.S. will not start a war with nuclear attacks. However, the "Nuclear Posture Review" appears to have eliminated any principle that will forbid a nuclear attack on China if, for example, China wages war against Taiwan while there is a rising crisis of nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia.

That is to say, nuclear deterrence between the U.S. and Russia is not completely reliable. While a policy of U.S.-Russia-China nuclear war is not one that can be adopted, this may be useful as a subject of hypothetical debate. Yet, it appears that safety mechanisms in policy have somehow been removed without such a debate.

## **Security as an Independent Academic Field**

Will Japan be able to contribute to the discourse on nuclear deterrence?

Since the invasion of Ukraine, comments by security experts have gained greater acceptance and they are in greater demand. This is a good thing. However, perhaps because these experts have been given a cold reception so far, Japanese experts, while very capable, are few in number. This small number of experts are working very hard, appearing on TV, giving speeches, and participating in international conferences.

I think despite the manpower shortage and their limited access to the latest military information compared to U.S. and European experts, they are striving to obtain information and conveying what they know to us.

Naturally, they tend to tell us only what the situation looks like for now. While that is indeed the first requirement, since they are somewhat removed from live information in the first place, why not investigate various views of history and include contribution to broadening the West's framework of thinking in their agenda? If they are not good at doing this, it will also be interesting for scholars in other fields to brainstorm and make suggestions.

This is because discussions with a broader range than government policy needs to be conducted by private citizens. This is no longer only a desirable undertaking in a general sense. The Western governments must not adopt the policy of declaring a nuclear attack on China in the event of a U.S.-Russia nuclear war. However, private discussions should include the fact that this

policy, despite its brutality, is a very likely offshoot of the historical view predicated on an ultimate war.

The government must work for the relaxation of tension while enhancing the country's defense capability. Private citizens should argue that the challenge to the international order has become riskier with the start of a tripolar nuclear cold war and urge China to cooperate in averting an ultimate war. With substantial discussions at the private level, the government will be able to minimize its provocative language. The best cooperation can be achieved with the government and private citizens each accepting their different roles. Hence, the need for independent scholarship.

Experts who are only able to quickly detect what is actually happening will not be enough. Scholarship is the creation of knowledge (not the creation of facts). To know what somebody else knows is not scholarship. Scholarship requires knowledge of what is not known to others based on what everyone knows.

For sure, since information accessible to all is limited in the field of security, linkage with the practice of security is important. Certain Japanese experts appear to refrain from imagination that goes beyond actual practice because they are faithful to their mission and not because they make light of independent scholarship. The Japanese government is also not restricting the freedom of scholarship in the field of security. Both parties are preoccupied and seriously short of manpower. Still, I am strongly advocating the independence of scholarship because I know that the experts I respect are also independent scholars and they will not be bothered by my support.

I have forgotten to mention that improving the performance of missiles and strengthening missile defense have also been cited as a solution to the tripolar nuclear cold war. That is true but it will take time and money. In contrast, the independence of scholarship is an urgent requirement for security.

#### **4. Rise of the Silent Majority**

##### **Policy toward China from the Two Historical Views**

While the historical view predicated on the ultimate weapon emphasizes the need to cooperate with China, the historical view predicated on an ultimate war claims that China should be given a strong warning. In order for Japan to survive, it needs a delicate package of carrot and stick policies toward China, as well as a strong domestic consensus in support of these policies. Considering the complexity and difficulty of the situation, this consensus must support extraordinary balance of mind, resourcefulness, and perseverance. To use an analogy from the Doha Soccer World Cup, this is like seizing the chance for victory in the match against Germany, remaining calm in the game with Costa Rica, and not losing hope in the game against Spain – although I failed in all three counts.

Japan's policy toward China so far has been torn between two outspoken minority groups – the pacifists and people with anti-Chinese sentiments – and has navigated a narrow path in order not to offend either group as much as possible. While this might be reasonable domestically, it does not make sense internationally. Executing a delicate policy package is difficult.

##### **The Emperor and Achilles**

How can these vocal minorities be made to reconsider? The Emperor played a role in the prewar period. Exactly 130 years have passed since the clash between the oligarchy government dominated by feudal domain cliques and the opposition parties came to a head at the fourth Imperial Diet (late 1892-early 1893). When such emotional exchanges as Diet Member Yukio Ozaki asking if the budget could not be cut even by a single cent and Finance Minister Kunitake Watanabe retorting “no” reached an impasse, the Emperor issued an edict calling for harmony,



thus settling the situation. In response to the opposition parties' criticism of the cost of naval expansion, the edict indicated that part of the spending would be paid by savings from the imperial household expenses and urged the government to carry out administrative reforms and reduction of expenditures, thus expressing hope for the House of Representatives' cooperation. With this, the opposition parties engaged in consultations with the government, resulting in an agreement on the budget. Japan won in the naval battle in the Sino-Japanese War 18 months after this.

There is no doubt that the edict was using the Emperor for political purposes. In the first place, the presence of active minorities was desirable. Laying the groundwork to suppress them came with serious side effects. Militarization moved ahead in the 20th Century using the Emperor as symbol, resulting in tragic consequences for Japan and its neighbors.

Achilles is known as the strongest warrior in the Trojan War. Yet in Homer's "Iliad," he did not join the battle until the final part of the story. All the other warriors, such as Mycenaean Greek King Agamemnon and Hector, son of Trojan King Priam, fought desperately even knowing that the appearance of Achilles would turn the tide. Achilles also had his weakness, which came to be termed Achilles tendon today. He was prophesied to die if he joined the battle. That is how it should be in a world created by mortals.

### **Silent Majority**

Today, the Emperor cannot and should not play a role similar to that in the prewar years. The only force that can overwhelm the minorities is probably the silent majority.

However, the silent majority will remain silent barring an earthshaking event, so it will be difficult for it to play a political role. During the turmoil over the revision of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1960, Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi stated: "I must listen to the silent voices."

When mass demonstrations protesting Kishi's revision of the treaty surrounded the Diet, it would appear that all the vocal people were opposed to the treaty. Kishi reportedly said: "The demonstrators are a minority. The baseball stadiums and movie theaters are all full and nothing has changed in the streets of Ginza." That was an objectionable remark, more so because he had a point. Even though there is a silent majority, there is no denying that normally, they do not express their political views, and they are all in baseball stadiums, movie theaters, or Ginza.

I also appreciate the good aspects of old Japanese politics. Although the House of Representatives censured the oligarchy government at the fourth Imperial Diet, Japan presented a united front during the Sino-Japanese War. Regardless of their position on the war, the people cooperated in an emergency. The demonstrations subsided after the Security Treaty revision was approved by the Diet, and the new Security Treaty became the foundation of Japan's security and prosperity. On the other hand, Kishi, whose high-handed political methods stood out, was forced to step down. From the long-term point of view, it would seem that a balance was achieved. However, this was in an era when the source of threat was in London or Paris or Moscow. The threat at present is more imminent. Not only the providence of popular sentiment, which has been exerting an influence without our realizing it, but also meticulous discussions by the policy community and the leaders' decisions, as well as the consensus supporting them, will be necessary.

As if in response to this age of crisis, I have a feeling that the silent majority left the baseball stadiums and showed up in public spaces after the fatal shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8. Although many people opposed the state funeral on Sept. 27, when the funeral was actually held, more than 25,000 people queued up to offer flowers at the Kudanzaka Park.

As many as 330,000 demonstrators surrounded the Diet during the protests over the Security Treaty, so it can be said that 25,000 people is a small number. Yet, this was amid the Covid pandemic on a hot weekday, and the silent majority is supposed to be silent. Even just the tip

of the iceberg of this group was already quite impressive. For sure, there were fervent Abe supporters who added to the number. However, it is conceivable that people who were critical of Abe, who resented the procedures leading to the state funeral, and who were not keen about the state funeral were included. Yet the queue of people who came to send off the former prime minister who had worked very hard for national administration and who met an untimely death extended as far as Yotsuya. Their silence overwhelmed the protests against the state funeral.

It is interesting that the rightists also do not appear to be celebrating without reserve. They might have felt that the queue of the silent majority was not the same as their own procession.

They might have also resented the fact that the highlight of the memorial service for Abe was the condolence speeches by Yoshihide Suga and Yoshihiko Noda. While Suga had assisted Abe as the chief cabinet secretary, he is more of a pragmatist who has not inherited Abe's ideology. Noda was prime minister during the Democratic Party administration. He was asked to deliver a condolence speech because he was the political adversary of Abe, who led the opposition Liberal Democratic Party at that time.

### **The Kishida Administration's Mission**

As the rightists look on with displeasure, the Kishida administration is also in confusion from the attacks of the leftists. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is not necessarily good at managing the administration. In the first place, it is regrettable that his aspiration and will in steering the administration to do something remains unclear. Yet, he could be representing the lethargy of the silent majority through a mysterious bond. There is unlikely to be another leader in the political world today who will listen to the voice of the silent majority while maintaining a balance of mind like Kishida. Such is the prime minister we have today.

There will be no lack of forces wanting to use the silent majority for political ends. However, the silent majority has disappeared after forming long queues to offer flowers on that day. They indeed made an appearance but did not stay. They are following Homer's script.

Japan is beginning to walk a critical tightrope with the other Western countries where falling off will be fatal, but it might have made a good start. For now, we would like the Kishida administration to bounce back.

---

Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author. They do not represent the views of the Japan Institute of International Affairs.