The Abe-Trump Relationship

Until the 8th of November in 2016, the eyes of the world had been fixated upon the raging election battle in the United States of America between the Democratic Hillary Clinton and the Republican Donald J. Trump, which was shaping up to be a historic turning point for both the US and the world. The election of the bellicose outsider that is Trump, whose election had been given a very miniscule chance by a now infamous New York Times election poll on October 20, 2016 as being 8 percent, was a massive shock to the world at large. Japan, and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (PM Abe), were not exceptions to this common global trend but the actions of PM Abe in response to the election of Trump – to what it arguably the highest office of power in the world – has been exceptional. PM Abe has sought to develop personal ties with the incoming president, taking great care to engage Trump himself as a close friend and ally, and making sure to highlight their common points and solidarity. Seeing how PM Abe has responded to the foreign policy challenge that is Trump, brings forward a number of questions as to the reasons and the consequences of the initiative taken by him for his own foreign policy.

As such, the main aim of this paper is to study the relationship between PM Abe and President Trump from the perspective of Japanese foreign policy. The guiding question of this paper asks and inquires into the effect of Prime Minister Abe’s push for a closer personal – or bilateral – relationship with President Trump on Japanese foreign policy. In answering this question, I will be making the argument that Prime Minister Abe’s pursuit of a closer relationship – or bilateralism – with President Trump is a strategic push by the prime minister to position Japan and its foreign policy on tandem with the US, where the outcome is the achievement of the proactivity that PM Abe desires for Japanese foreign policy. Integral to

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1 I will be using the Western name order within this paper, which follows the name-family name order.
understanding the driving point of PM Abe’s desire to pursue closer ties with President Trump is the development of their personal relations and the importance of such ties, the diplomatic styles of President Trump and the diplomatic policy outlook of PM Abe, and the interplay of the two. Thus, this paper will begin by briefly discussing the historical context of Japan’s relations with the US in the aftermath of the Second World War (WWII) which is important to understanding the fundamental developments that has guided the relations between the two countries. The discussion will then move onto the policies of PM Abe and the politics of President Trump in foreign policy, highlighting their importance in the making of foreign policy on both sides. Then, I will discuss the development of the relationship between PM Abe and President Trump, looking into how the personal ties between the two leaders have developed and reflect the earlier discussion on individual policies and politics. Finally, I will bring together the discussion in an analysis of how the personal ties between the two men has impacted Japanese foreign policy.

_The Victorious and the Vanquished_

The end of WWII found the Japanese Empire dismembered and Japan proper was brought under the occupation of the US, with General Douglas MacArthur serving as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers with his soldiers and officers manning the Occupation. General MacArthur’s directives were quite clear in what they wanted to him and his Occupation to achieve in Japan, which was both a vanquished foe and with the advent of the Cold War, a rising ally in East Asia. The chief concerns of the occupation that are of particular importance here is demilitarization of Japan, and democratization which came with the introduction of a new constitution.

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2 Used interchangeably, Occupation with a capital “O” refers to both the occupation itself and the military structures and offices under General MacArthur that carried out the tasks of the occupation.
Demilitarization of Japan had been a goal of the Allied powers, which had been officially put on the agenda with the Potsdam Declaration, and had been contained within US policy documents planning the Occupation of Japan and in the military orders and directives given to General MacArthur. Japan’s military was to be stripped of its arms, disbanded fully, and allowed to lead “peaceful” lives once they had fully been repatriated to Japan – which would have made Japan into the Iceland of Asia and destroy one source of Japanese aggression and warmongering. Demilitarization was achieved relatively quickly by the Occupation because it had simply been the task of disarming a defeated enemy, where the bulk of its armies had become stranded abroad and easily manageable, and of disbanding its military structures whilst purging those elements found to be “undesirable”. Furthermore, the rising pacifism of the Japanese people, whom had found that the war had only been a destructive effort on their lives and livelihoods, aided the Occupation in demilitarizing Japan. As such, Japan had become a nation that did not possess the ability to defend itself against foreign aggression because it no longer possessed the means to do so. The actual inability to engage in self-defense and the resistance to remilitarization, due to entrenched pacifism and the unwillingness to remilitarize, became one guiding post for the relations of Japan with the US during the Cold War.

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Whilst demilitarization had removed from Japan the ability to wage war, whether for offense or for defense, and the new constitution – introduced as part of an effort to democratize Japan – compounded upon this situation. Dubbed occasionally as the “Pacifist Clause”, Article 9 of the new Japanese constitution renounced the right of the Japanese state to wage war and made it unconstitutional and illegitimate to have or deploy such a fighting potential. Thus, the post-Occupation Japanese governments were left with a structural impediment that left them unable to and unwilling to push for greater Japanese proactivity in security related issues, where even hinting at remilitarization might have caused a government to fall due to civil unrest. This became another central point around which the Japanese had formed their ties to the US during the Cold War period.

A product of demilitarization, the Article 9, and the rise and entrenchment of pacifism in Japan, which emerged after the Occupation was over, was the Yoshida Doctrine which has set the pace for Japan-US relations during and beyond the Cold War. Formulated by PM Shigeru Yoshida, the doctrine – at its simplest interpretation – proposed that Japan would pursue economic reconstruction and prosperity, and relegate its security concerns to the US which would also come to lead the direction of Japan’s foreign policy as the hegemonic leader (which I shall discuss below). The Yoshida Doctrine allowed the Japanese leaders to channel those social forces that did not want to see the comeback of the military in Japan and also to deflect security costs and concerns onto the global hegemon which it had come to ally, so that it could focus on its own internal development. Furthermore, the doctrine reflected the unwillingness and inability of the Japanese politicians in pursuing a comeback of a stronger security focus in Japan, which made dependence on the US for substantial protection a key concern for Japanese PMs.

5 Togo, 40; Jansen, 671
6 H. D. P Envall, “The ‘Abe Doctrine’: Japan’s new regional realism.” International Relations of the Asia-Pacific (2018), 6; Togo, 53; Hook et. al., 28
Reflecting this security dependence, the roots of the Japan-US alliance were brought into being by the simultaneous signing of a security treaty along with the San Francisco Peace Treaty between the two sides. Revised in 1960, the final form of the US-Japan Security Treaty brought Japan under the security umbrella of the US as the sole treaty ally of Japan, effectively making it dependent on the United States Forces Japan (USFJ) and the Unites States Pacific Command for its security since then. As such, since the finalization of the treaty in 1960, it can be argued that the security of Japan has been more the concern of Pentagon than of Japanese policymakers because the authority to which the bulk of the military power in Japan responded remained in Washington DC than in Tokyo. It is also possible to observe that the Japanese became dependent on the US beyond the security dimension, as the Japanese have taken great pains so as to keep close to the US in their foreign policy activities. Thus, Japan became a nation that attached itself to its hegemon of choice and kept its line of thinking and ideological struggles in its foreign policy, whilst enjoying the benefits of its military might.

An important driver of Japan-US relations during the Cold War emerged as a negative by-product of Japan’s dependence and close identification with the US, during the Cold War: the fear of being passed over or being abandoned. One of the clearest examples in the past has been part of the so-called Nixon Shocks, and especially the opening up of relations with the People’s Republic of China (from here on, China), after a state visit by then President Richard M. Nixon. The Japanese had only been notified of this development at the last minute, despite being the major US ally in the region and having abided by the policy of recognizing Taiwan, and the

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7 Togo, 52-53; Hook et. al., 29; Jansen, 702
9 Hook et. al., 28
reaction of the Japanese was indignant and apprehensive.\textsuperscript{10} On the one hand, Japan was faced with the prospect of being left out of the loop by its main ally within the further development of the global order because it had not been consulted nor informed of what was then a major policy shift on the side of the US. On the other hand, Japan faced the prospect of no longer being the main recipient of US interest in the region, give the overtures being made to China as an important ally against the Soviets. As such, the prospect of being abandoned by the very power which provided for Japan’s security and guided much of its foreign policy owing to its influence became a driver for the Japanese to increase their engagement with the US.

As such, we can find that the Cold War created a situation in which on one side, Japan had structural, ideological, and socio-political impediments in pursuing an independent security policy which made it dependent upon the US for its security. Japan allied itself with the US, as the hegemonic power and bloc leader of the democratic capitalist camp, and in exchange for coming under the US security umbrella, it stood by US foreign policy every step of the way. On the other side, as the US pursued a wide range of policy alternatives against the Soviet threat, Japan found itself faced with the unsavory prospect of being passed over – even abandoned – by the ally it depended upon for so much. As the next section will show, the age of PM Abe and President Trump has introduced a number of significant changes and developments to this Cold War relational structure between Japan and the US via their policies and political outlooks.

\textit{Art of the Deal and Proactive Pacifism}

On the American side, Donald Trump has been described by psychological professionals and expert observers as being a highly self-centered man – low in agreeableness – and as living his life with a soundtrack of life advice from his father and his business mentor, telling him to

\textsuperscript{10} Togo, 126; Hook et. al. 94
win or perish.\textsuperscript{11} As such, he has been seen as a man capable of fixating upon his interests and taking risks in pursuing them to a conclusion he finds favorable. This has also made President Trump an unpredictable element in US foreign policy, because the speed with which he can change his perception of US interests and the speed with which he can switch between different goals to fight for and win in does not give others the time to prepare for and counter his advances. Furthermore, being an outsider to political circles and his noticeable lack of political experience – which is seemingly remedied by his business experience – makes him an actor independent of the knowledge, expertise, and connections that would have otherwise shaped his tenure. Since his election as the President of the United States (POTUS), the same drivers that made President Trump the business magnate that he is are now in charge of making US foreign policy.

Looking closer into Trump’s foreign policy three things appear to be very important for the way in which Trump makes policy and pursues relations with other states. The first of these has been his overarching campaign slogan – which has arguably become his central foreign policy directive – “Make America Great Again”. President Trump has set his sights on “restoring” to the US the greatness it once had – which in itself has been a point of heated discussion – by taking a stronger stand in trade and economics, and by asking allies to carry a greater share of the burden of maintaining the global order. Thus, the direction of US foreign policy has been geared towards taking risks and actively pushing an agenda that would revise the current network of relations that the US has, in order to allow for a rise in the prosperity of Americans and growth in the American economy.

Complementing this foreign policy focus has been the two further developments in the foreign policy scene of the US, which center on President Trump and his style of leadership. On

the one hand, President Trump himself appears as the single most important foreign policy actor and Dealmaker-in-Chief, determining the direction and actions of US on the international arena. President Trump has applauded his own intellect and importance in defining foreign policy and making deals with other countries a number of times and has used Twitter as a tool of diplomacy in a highly personalized manner, directing his tweets at persons and groups both in applause and in criticism. As such, he has clearly shown that power rests with him in the making and implementation of US foreign policy, and that to get on his good side might ensure the good fortune of other foreign leaders and nations.

Faced with a POTUS that not only takes his personal authority over US foreign policy very seriously but also has the means of putting it into action due to his control over key political offices and institutions, is one of the key reasons why PM Abe must keep close personal ties with President Trump. It can be observed, that PM Abe scores points for himself by keeping the solidarity and by making sure to have an intimate relationship with President Trump, which is on good terms. By highlighting both his commitment to the President and his policies, and by making sure to humor him personally – mainly through golf diplomacy – Abe positions himself as the key allied foreign leader (and positions Japan as the key foreign nation) for President Trump and the US to work with. Furthermore, it is possible that such personal ties may also help mitigate future problems by allowing PM Abe to tap into his personal capital with President Trump to influence his decisions.

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On the other hand is “transactionalism”, which is a very business-like approach to foreign relations, when implemented onto foreign affairs becomes a policy approach in which there must be reciprocity in the behavior and actions of the states in return for the goods and services which the US supplies to them.\textsuperscript{13} Per his transactional approach, President Trump has been willing to throw everything available to him against other countries under the bus for US interests and gains.\textsuperscript{14} This has made for uneasiness amongst US allies, as a cost-benefit pragmatic approach has taken over the ideological and principled foreign policy of the earlier US administrations under President Trump. This shift has made for a new international situation in which states and actors have found themselves supported or abandoned by the US, based on their usefulness to the overarching goals and interests of the US in the world. Centerpieces of the global order that the US has formed and championed, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and recent landmark developments such as the Iran nuclear deal that had sought to stabilize the globe and provide security have suffered because they did not fit in with President Trump’s transactionalist foreign policy.

On the side of transactionalism, it can be found that PM Abe is kept constantly on his toes – just as many of his peers are – because not only is President Trump unpredictable, but he could also be willing to jeopardize, even as a threat, longstanding ties and agreements between the two nations. PM Abe has already suffered from the shock of the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which President Trump has found not to be economically reciprocal and beyond the bounds of his transactional thinking. As such – to avoid such further shocks – PM Abe must increasingly turn to Trump managing, showing solidarity, and keeping up

\textsuperscript{13} Beeson, 2

\textsuperscript{14} It might be an interesting point to note that this approach seems to underpin the entire premise of President Trump’s impeachment process. Brian Harding, ”The Trump Administration’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific Approach.” \textit{Southeast Asian Affairs} 2019, no. 1 (2019): 66.; Powaski, 236
contact to ensure that he is not out of the loop in the development of US foreign policy.

Furthermore, PM Abe has to take the necessary measures to show that Japan is still integral to US policy both in Asia and in the world at large, increasing the value and transactional benefits of Japan for US foreign policy as an ally best kept close.

On the Japanese side, Shinzo Abe has been seen as a leader bent on revising Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan, in order to restore Japan to the position of a “normal”, proactive, and sovereign state by allowing the return of a properly formed and legitimate military to Japan. PM Abe is an experienced politician, who can be seen as a pro-status quo proponent of the existing international order. Furthermore, he is – as of the date in which this paper was written – the longest serving Japanese PM, although not the longest continuous serving, which attests to the strength of his powerbase and his power within the political structures of Japan. Although these might make it appear as such that PM Abe is quite close to achieving the “normalization” of Japan by revising the Constitution, the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito coalition is still short of the necessary political power to achieve this, and it is dubious whether the public would support such a move.

PM Abe’s foreign policy has been termed “proactive pacifism”, which can be said to define the boundaries of Japan’s security beyond a reactive protection of its lands and move this boundary to places where Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and allies are deployed. Proactive pacifism has been followed by certain policy initiatives that make it into a substantial foreign policy approach for Japan. First, PM Abe’s government has formulated a new reinterpretation for the Article 9 of the constitution to allow for collective self-defense on part of

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15 Liff, 13-14; Envall, The ‘Abe Doctrine’; 11, 12
the SDF.\textsuperscript{16} As such, the scope of Japan’s security concerns and commitments have been given room to grow, including active defense and support of allied vehicles and personnel at conflict zones and during missions. Within the context of the Japan-US alliance, this has meant that the Japanese have been able to provide greater support the US in its military conflicts and excursions across the globe, bolstering its position as a key partner and the importance of the alliance by increasing the share of the security burden which Japan handles.

Second, PM Abe has been consistent in updating the military equipment and increasing the operational capabilities of the SDF, enlarging the budget of the SDF, and has allowed the opening up of the Japanese arms sector by lifting the ban on arms exports.\textsuperscript{17} PM Abe has again sought to increase the importance of Japan as an ally to the US by increasing the ability of the SDF to successfully support its main ally, aiming to make the SDF an indispensable asset to US strategic planning. Moreover, by taking such action, which would increase the sophistication and clout of the Japanese “military-industrial complex” on a global scale, PM Abe has also sought to secure the position of Japan in the global marketplace as a supplier of arms. As long as Japan can maintain a de facto military – under the banner of the SDF – whose equipment is world class, and its operational range and capabilities is ready to defend not only itself but its allies too, PM Abe can rest assured that Japan will remain a crucial ally for the US and that the alliance will keep strong.

Third, PM Abe has taken steps to increase the importance and standing of the security orientation in foreign policy – and has increased the level of Japanese foreign policy


\textsuperscript{17} Sheila Smith, and Charles McClean, “US-Japan Relations and the Trump Effect.” Comparative Connections 18, no. 3 (2017), 10.; Liff, 18; Envall, The ‘Abe Doctrine’, 12
institutionalization – by establishing a National Security Council (NSC) and by promulgating a comprehensive National Security Strategy (NSS).\(^\text{18}\) By creating the NSC, the PM has moved towards both the centralization of decision and policy making in the security dimension of Japan’s foreign affairs and the rise of executive control over these matters. As such, the ability of Japan to respond to the calls of the international community and to the invitations of the US to participate in its military operations can be handled much quickly and with greater ease. By putting into place, the NSS, PM Abe has introduced both traditional security concerns, alliance bolstering with the US and has included non-traditional concerns such as cyberwarfare into Japanese security and foreign policy thinking.\(^\text{19}\) On the one hand, the nature of the policy highlights the continuing commitment of Japan to its alliance with the US, especially in traditional security concerns that include defensive, offensive, and logistical capabilities. On the other hand – and perhaps more crucially – by aiming to create a comprehensive security strategy, which includes non-traditional concerns, PM Abe is taking steps to increase the importance and weight of Japan as an ally to the US.

Lastly, in line with both PM Abe’s own line of strategic thinking and desire of Japanese proactivity has been his push for greater bilateralism with allies and partners.\(^\text{20}\) PM Abe has sought to bring into being a network of allies and partners, especially in Asia, which would both alleviate the security concerns of Japan by creating a web of connections across the continent and increase the importance of Japan for US foreign policy in Asia by establishing its position at the crossroads of the continent. As the next section will show, PM Abe has engaged President Trump in highly personal terms, reflecting both his desire to keep himself and Japan close to the

\(^{18}\) Liff 15, 19-20; Przystup and Saunders, 21
\(^{19}\) Liff 15
\(^{20}\) H. D. P Envall, "Can Japan’s golden golf diplomacy win over Donald Trump?" In The Trump Administration's First 100 Days: What Should Asia Do?. ANU College of Asia & the Pacific, The Australian National University, 2017, 16; Smith & McClean, Tokyo Transitions to Trump, 13; Liff, 17-18; Envall, The ‘Abe Doctrine’, 15-16
heart of US foreign policy and has simultaneously worked to both further US policy and pick up the pieces where possible.

*Prime Minister Abe, President Trump, and Golf*

Relations between PM Abe and President Trump began in November 2016, when PM Abe visited then President-elect Trump, at the Trump Tower in New York City – becoming the first foreign leader to visit him, albeit unofficially – an action for which President Trump has later expressed his own appreciation as being positively aggressive and strong. This was an impressive foreign policy coup for PM Abe, as he enhanced his standing with the President-elect by becoming the first person to legitimate his election as the POTUS. Furthermore, by aggressively seizing the opportunity to meet him PM Abe demonstrated the greatness of his willingness and desire to work closely with the Trump administration. During this initial visit in November 2016, the two leaders spent 90 minutes together in what PM Abe later called “candid” talks conducted in a “warm atmosphere”.

Based on the language used by the PM himself, it can be understood that the two leaders have started off their relationship on good terms, which can be seen as a positive development for the PM’s policy of getting close to the President in order to keep Japan close to the US.

In his official letter of congratulations to President Trump, PM Abe remarked that he was confident in their synergy and called the Japan-US alliance the “Alliance of Hope” in the 21st century. Through this statement PM Abe achieved two distinct things for the purposes of his

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22 BBC News, 18 Nov 2016; Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (Kantei), “Comment by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Following the Meeting with President-Elect Donald Trump (Speeches and Statements by the Prime Minister) | Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet.” Kantei.go.jp, 2016.

23 Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (Kantei), “Congratulatory Message from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Mr. Donald Trump, President-Elect of the United States of America (Speeches and
President Trump-centric approach to relations with the US. On the one hand, he signaled that not only was his relationship with the President was on solid ground but also that the working styles and broad policy aims of the two men were on the same track. As such, he began to formulate a common ground between himself and the President, which would serve to increase the feelings of camaraderie and friendship between the two men, since they were being presented as being on the same page. Furthermore, PM Abe also managed to demonstrate his willingness and readiness to stand by the Trump administration, by signaling his confidence in the new administration and especially in its leader.

On the other hand, it can be seen that PM Abe has made use of rhetoric in emphasizing the importance of the Japan-US alliance which has served first to signal the importance of the alliance to Japan, by rhetorically defining the value and importance attached to the alliance. Second, such rhetoric played into Trump’s self-centered personality by presenting to him this alliance as a tool for the greater good at his disposal, within which the US and Japan – arguably as great leading nations – are beacons of hope for the world. Third, it can be argued that by elevating the alliance to such a level of importance rhetorically, PM Abe has also sought to elevate the position of Japan for US foreign policy.

During this inaugural visit in November 2016, PM Abe gifted to Trump a solid gold golf club as a sign of friendship, which the President has called “the most beautiful golf club” he has ever seen.24 The use of “golf diplomacy” strategically highlights the commonalities between the two men, which can be seen as going beyond the preference for the same sport given the socio-economic connotations of golf, creating a broad platform for connections. Furthermore, PM Abe

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has stressed at times that the golf diplomacy is a continuation of his grandfather Nobusuke Kishi’s “golf diplomacy” with President Eisenhower, and has built upon President Eisenhower’s anecdotes on golf to imply that the frequency with which he plays golf with President Trump must show how close the two men are.\(^{25}\) The use of such rhetoric has two specific outcomes for PM Abe’s aims in developing personal ties with the President. On one side, PM Abe’s rhetoric most likely plays into President Trump’s feeling of self-importance by giving him an equivalency to a 20th century American hero, thus landing the PM into the good graces of the President by way of flattery. On the other side, this rhetoric reinforces the efforts of the PM to position and portray himself as a good personal friend and an even better political ally of the President by emphasizing the amount of time the two men spend together and in relative privacy.

PM Abe’s official state visit to the US in February 2017 – as the second world leader to do so after the then British Prime Minister Theresa May – repeated the now established pattern of rhetorical flattery and assurance, coupled with golf, that had become the building blocks of the relationship between the two leaders. PM Abe met with President Trump in his private golf resort at Mar-a-Lago talking business and playing golf, where both men lauded the importance of national ties, the strength of the alliance and the US commitment to it, and the “good chemistry” they had.\(^{26}\) The outcome of this visit was a success on the side of the PM because it managed to produce both an indication that the President and the US was committed to its ties with Japan, and it confirmed the validity of his policy of keeping the President engaged personally. The latest leg of such personalized exchanges has been with the May 2019 state visit of President Trump,

\(^{25}\) Abe & Trump, 6 Nov 2017  
where he gave away a “President’s Trophy” at the sumo championship. PM Abe has been yet again able to charm the President by bestowing upon him a personal honor, which – given the demeanor of the President as has been discussed above – has worked to elevate the standing of the PM and Japan in the eyes of the President.

Moving beyond the realm of personal relations and going into the business end of the relations between the two sides, it can be observed that PM Abe has become the top world leader to keep up good and constant ties with the President, who has suffered with his relations with Allies elsewhere, especially in Europe. The amount of official communications that goes on between the PM and the President, on the one hand, highlights the high level of functionality contained within the relationship forged between the two men. On the other hand, this reflects the need and desire of PM Abe to keep himself and Japan relevant and in the loop for the foreign policy of President Trump. At crucial times, both rhetorically and physically, PM Abe has stood by President Trump – as he has during the G7 Summit in June 2018 – seeking to create a united front. In fact, photographs from the June 2018 G7 Summit leave the viewer with the impression that President Trump – seated – is a shogun, flanked by his loyal samurai PM Abe – standing – and they facing and challenging the common enemies. This can be seen as a symbolic realization of PM Abe’s policy regarding the President, as he manages to position himself as the right-hand man of the President, into a position of influence and power. Furthermore, by holding the line and sticking to the political views of President Trump where possible, PM Abe has secured his – and Japan’s – position as the staunchest ally of the President and the US. Moreover, standing

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with President Trump has secured for PM Abe the good fortunes of an unpredictable and self-centered man, where personal gains can matter greatly in the pursuit for national gains in relations with the US.

Demonstrating the capacity of the two men to work together has been the embrace by President Trump and PM Abe of similar diplomatic policies, such as the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” first put forward by Abe in 2012.\footnote{Harding, 62; Brian Woodall, "Japan in 2018: Abe Rule, Trump Shocks, and Mother Nature’s Wrath." \textit{Asian Survey} 59, no. 1 (2019), 71; Liff, 18} This can be seen as a huge victory for PM Abe, having his foreign policy adopted by the administration of the man he wants to keep close to, and it is also an opportunity for him to become closer to the President and his administration acting as an advisor – having originated the policy in the first place. As formulated and expanded upon by members of the Trump administration, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific has become a policy of creating a network of alliances, trade relations, and diplomatic ties on a bilateral basis, aiming to keep the diverse Indo-Pacific region free, open, and prosper – with Japan as the main US partner in the region.\footnote{BBC News, 10 Feb 2017; Dwyer, 10 Feb 2017; White House, “President Donald J. Trump Is Strengthening Ties, Improving Trade, and Deepening Our Global Partnership with Japan.” The White House, April 26, 2019. \url{https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-strengthening-ties-improving-trade-deepening-global-partnership-japan/}; Patrick Cullen, "The Rebalance to Asia Under Trump: What Comes Next?." \textit{The RUSI Journal} 162, no. 2 (2017), 11.; Harding, 63-64, 65; Envall, \textit{The ‘Abe Doctrine’}, 15} On the ground, this new approach to Asia has seen Abe make overtures to India as a key regional partner and the US Navy making port calls to places such as Vietnam in an effort to boost relations and forge connections across the continent. Crucially, as it can be observed, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific policy has seen the elevation of Japan to the level of an ally that is integral to the pursuit of US interests in Asia securing both a rise in the importance and proactivity of Japan internationally, and mitigating the fear of being left behind by the US.

It is important to realize that despite all of PM Abe’s efforts at engaging President Trump to score points for Japan-US relations, the relations between the two sides have not been all easy
sailing. The first question to emerge had been the revival of a trade conflict between Japan and the US, under the drive of the President to revise standing trade conditions to the greater benefit of the US producers and consumers.\textsuperscript{32} Although the Japanese side aimed to focus on smaller developments and concessions with the persistency of President Trump in pushing the Japanese for a trade deal, and his decision not to spare Japan from tariffs have allowed the Japanese to realize that a trade deal could not be avoided or derailed.\textsuperscript{33} However, both the PM and the President have been consistent in stressing the greatness of their relationship and their commitment to improving trade ties.\textsuperscript{34} As such, it can be found that rather than becoming an antagonistic process by which the two allies were brought to heads because they could not sort out their differences, the trade revision process has been rather smooth owing to the personal dynamics of the two leaders. Furthermore, PM Abe has managed to preserve his standing with the President – and perhaps even bolster it by pursuing and finalizing a trade treaty so smoothly, while tensions with especially China on the same issue is rising – demonstrating both his and Japan’s position as a reliable ally that responds to calls for a more reciprocal relationship.

The second question to emerge has been the discrepancies in the military outlook and threat assessment of the two leaders. On military issues – going back into the election period – President Trump’s more radical remarks about South Korea and Japan acquiring nuclear weapons and his relaxed attitude towards the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North...
Korea) has seen some worried responses from Tokyo. While possible nuclearization was a chafing point for PM Abe with the Japanese population that largely abhors nuclear weapons, the stance of the President towards North Korea introduced fears of inaction or abandonment at a time when missiles were being launched over Japan. However, because the President ultimately showed adherence to the alliance with Japan and to the protection of Japan under the US security umbrella, Tokyo has gained room to relax. On the question of North Korea, the initial unrest has yielded to cooperation and PM Abe and President Trump have locked arms in a “maximum pressure” policy, but President Trump’s personal relaxed attitude still causes the allies to have different situational assessments. This fundamental security concern and discrepancy has become one reason for PM Abe to constantly keep in touch with and maintain a high level personalized working relationship with President Trump, so as not to find Japan’s security concerns and interests by-passed in US foreign policy.

The third and final point of crisis that emerged was the future of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which PM Abe had rushed through the Diet and championed as a cause, which was almost killed by the withdrawal of the US under President Trump despite PM Abe’s tries at keeping the US in. This had been an instance in which the domestic commitments of President Trump shined through to his foreign policy. Given that this happened quite early in the Trump administration, when the relationship between the two men had been in its infancy, it is not an indicator that the relationship had been overpowered but it had been a lesson to PM Abe that there would be some fights with the President that no amount of lobbying or personal capital could win. The withdrawal had been a Trump shock for PM Abe and Japan, ultimately it has

36 Woodall, 68, 70
37 The Mainichi, 19 Apr 2018; Envall, *Golden Golf Diplomacy*, 16-17; Smith & Clean, *the Trump Effect*, 10; Hikotani 24; Smith, 16
become an initiative for Japan to assume regional leadership in the form of an expansive economic/trade bloc, without the participation of the US. As such, PM Abe was able to transform a setback for his foreign policy into a sort of opportunity for foreign policy proactivity for Japan in Asia.

As can be seen, PM Abe has worked to engage President Trump personally from very early on into his tenure, and has sought to build up and maintain a bilateral relationship with the President. The PM has employed rhetoric in order to play into the sense of self-importance of the President; to signal his support for and eagerness to work with his administration; and to create the understanding that he shares the worldview of the President and that he is the staunchest friend and ally of the President. He has made use of golf diplomacy and a charm offensive to increase his standing with the President and to enlarge the common ground found between the two men, so as to portray himself as a close and important partner of the President out in the world. He has also taken to physically standing together with the President on a number of Asia specific and global issues, so as to show his solidarity and unwavering commitment to the President as an allied leader. However, the relations between the two men have not always equated into good relations due to President Trump’s certain policy objectives which became overriding concerns. Yet, PM Abe has been able to seize on some of these developments as opportunities in order to further Japanese interests and goals in new contexts, and as the next section will show, the close relations between PM Abe and President Trump has influenced broader Japanese foreign policy.

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38 Smith & McClean, *Tokyo Transitions to Trump*, 14-15
How PM Abe’s efforts at maintaining a good bilateral relationship with President Trump affects Japanese foreign policy can be boiled down to three main points. First, Japan is kept out of Trump’s crosshairs and can pursue its interests with ease, without fearing abandonment or conflict with its main ally. PM Abe’s personal capital with the President, working concurrently with his foreign policy approach and policies, has been effective in securing Japan’s position alongside the US, as a staunch and dependable ally. Although the unpredictable nature of President Trump’s foreign policy cannot be entirely mitigated, as the previous section has shown in brief, PM Abe has made enough headway in his relationship with President Trump that he has achieved a position of relative comfort and influence.

Second, due to PM Abe’s policies, Japan positions itself on the same tangent as the US and pursues greater proactivity in international affairs, especially in Asia, as the key partner of the US. Two things are important here for the purposes of seeing the impact of the Abe-Trump relationship on Japan’s foreign policy, both of which are in line with PM Abe’s own vision and goals for Japan and the alliance with the US. On the one hand, by virtue of pursuing the same policies and goals with the Trump administration, the Abe administration can open up to the world and to its own region in Asia – under the guise of aiding its ally – and bolster Japan’s position as a great power through diplomatic networking and proactivity. On the other hand, PM Abe manages to secure the continuation – and the further strengthening – of the alliance between the two countries, regionally and globally, and turns Japan into the essential ally of the US.

Lastly, Japan moves closer to becoming a “normal” state in its international affairs, with or without revising the Article 9, by moving in closer with the US and acting under the pretext of aiding its allies and contributing to global peace and stability. By taking the relatively easier and
less controversial path of constitutional reinterpretation, especially at times when the world seems to expect Japan to act – such as it did during the Gulf War – PM Abe has brought Japan closer to normalcy than ever before. Under continued Trump leadership in the US and Abe leadership in Japan, the situation between the two countries might evolve such a point that with new reinterpretation and policy developments, that Japan might achieve de facto military great power status with its de facto military – without seeking to legitimate such a development within the constitution or perhaps seeking to do so as a fait accompli.

**Conclusion**

Looking at the history of the post-WWII relations of Japan and the US, the foreign policy goals, approaches, and policies of PM Abe and President Trump, and the relationship between the two men, this paper has aimed understanding and demonstrating the ways in which this close personal relationship influenced Japanese foreign policy at large. The central argument that PM Abe’s pursuit of a close personal working relationship with President Trump is a strategic push to position Japan and its foreign policy on the same tangent as the US, where the outcome is the achievement of the proactivity that PM Abe desires for Japanese foreign policy appears to be supported by the evidence available so far. Working closely with President Trump, PM Abe has been steadily making Japan more proactive in its region, bolstering the status of the nation as a key partner and ally for the US, and moving towards state normalcy. However, with the 2020 US presidential election fast approaching and President Trump’s impeachment being in full swing, special attention must be paid to how the results of the election will change this current situation for PM Abe, whose efforts might come to naught if either of these processes end up removing President Trump from politics.
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