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JAPANESE-RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN GEOPOLITICAL TRIANGLE: MUTUAL INFLUENCES OF THE PARTIES

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Abstract: *The study revealed mutual influences within the conditional triangle "Japan-Russia-Ukraine" that have consequences for the security situation on a global scale. It clarifies how security and territorial integrity (of Ukraine and Japan) affected the content and nature of Japanese-Ukrainian, Japanese-Russian, and Ukrainian-Russian relations. The study aimed to determine how the positions of any two states from the modeled conditional triangle concerning a third state influence the content and nature of their relations. The research methodology is based on institutional analysis, with the help of which the decisions and positions of the state institutions of Japan, Russia, and Ukraine, as well as their consequences for security at the regional and global levels, are studied. It is proved that the Ukrainian issue affects the content and nature of Japanese-Russian relations with upward dynamics throughout the entire period of the Russian aggression against Ukraine (2014-2023). The analysis of the processes in the triangle "Japan-Russia-Ukraine" demonstrated that the security of Europe and Asia might no longer be separated as autonomous processes.*

Keywords: *Japan; Ukraine; Russia; Conflict Escalation; War; Global Security; Sanctions*

INTRODUCTION

One of the topical issues of international relations, which is currently given a new interpretation, is the content and nature of Japanese-Russian bilateral relations and the factors that affect them. This is conditioned by their rapid change under the influence of new global security challenges, the situation in third countries, the strengthening of the authoritarian component in international politics, etc.

Japanese-Russian relations did not exhibit significant dynamics for a long time; they slowly evolved out of mutual interest: Japan sought to sign a peace treaty and return to the Northern Territories, while Russia sought economic cooperation and required Japanese investments and technologies. However, Russia's change in foreign policy and security strategies in the direction of open aggression and the increased security threats in the Indo-Pacific region due to the actions of China and North Korea led to a change in Japanese foreign and security policy. As a result of the mentioned processes, Japanese-Russian relations significantly deteriorated. Many problems became actualized due to the different positions of Russia and Japan concerning third countries, along with the appearance of problems that go beyond narrowly bilateral relations but affect them due to the global interdependence of modern states.

Among the problems that have had the greatest impact on the rapid deterioration of Japanese-Russian relations are the issues of territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. Even after the annexation of Crimea, when Japan joined the anti-Russian sanctions (April 2014),

Japanese-Russian relations worsened. One indication of this was the Japanese government's decision to cancel Vladimir Putin's official visit to Japan in October 2014, scheduled before the annexation. Although interstate cooperation was not stopped, Japan's solidarity with the collective West in assessing Russia's aggressive policy inconsistent with international law affected Japanese-Russian relations. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 quickly brought Japanese-Russian relations into a phase of upward escalation of the conflict.

According to our research hypothesis, the mentioned processes allow us to discuss the conditional triangle "Japan-Russia-Ukraine". The relationships between any two-state parties have certain consequences for a third party. First, the Ukrainian factor caused a significant deterioration in Japanese-Russian relations. The analysis of mutual influences with the participation of the mentioned states needs to be studied, given the novelty of the manifestation of mutual influences in such a configuration of actors in international politics. Therefore, the research aims to confirm/refute the author's working hypothesis about the presence of mutual influences within the conditional triangle "Japan-Russia-Ukraine" and to find out how such mutual influences affect the security situation on a regional and global scale.

The difficulty of researching the topic of mutual influences between Japan, Russia, and Ukraine is that the problem, although it started in 2014, gained momentum in 2022. Therefore, it has practically not received scientific understanding. The three states mentioned above were not studied precisely in the context of identifying mutual influences. The few existing studies analyzed Japan's reaction to the events in Ukraine since 2014 and clarified the influence of the "Ukrainian factor" on Japanese-Russian relations (Lysak and Ivanets 2015; Nelidov 2022; Panov et al. 2019; Udovik 2015). Thus, the source base of this research is primarily official statements and documents of state institutions of Japan, Ukraine, and Russia. They made it possible to reveal the mutual influences of states occurring in the conditional triangle "Japan-Russia-Ukraine" that we modeled.

The research methodology is based on institutional analysis. The study is done on the complex actions, decisions, and positions of the political institutions in Japan, Russia, and Ukraine. This enables us to illustrate how the third state party in the conditional triangle, "Japan-Russia-Ukraine", is impacted by issues with bilateral relations (Japanese-Russian, Japanese-Ukrainian, and Russian-Ukrainian).

FORMATION OF A JAPANESE-RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN TRIANGLE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

The common enemy unites Japan and Ukraine. Formally, Japan is also at war with Russia because a peace treaty was never concluded after the end of the Second World War. In 2022, Japan in the Diplomatic Bluebook 2022 called its Northern Territories (Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofuislands) "illegally occupied by Russia" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022). The common enemy brought two geographically distant states very close.

The value of Japan's support for Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea is very important because the government of S. Abe at that time aimed to achieve a "historic breakthrough in relations with Russia" (Udovik 2016, 150). This is evidenced by the fact that S. Abe met with V. Putin much more often than with any other foreign leader (27 times). The reason for this was the

hope that the issue of signing a peace treaty and returning the disputed territories would move forward. Obviously, under such circumstances, Japan was faced with a choice: 1) to continue to cooperate with Russia in order to realize its national interest; 2) to openly oppose the aggressor state and condemn its actions in Ukraine. When choosing a model of behavior, Japan placed the values (democratic) above all and not the illusory prospect of returning territories from Russia.

After the USA and the EU introduced the first sanctions against Russia in response to the annexation of the Ukrainian Crimea, Japan joined this process almost immediately. Therefore, in 2014, Japan: suspended consultations on simplifying the visa regime for citizens of Russia, postponed the beginning of negotiations on a new investment agreement, an agreement on cooperation in the field of peaceful space exploration, an agreement on dangerous military activities (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014b); introduced personal sanctions against Russian citizens who contributed to the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014c); froze the assets in Japan of those individuals and companies that were involved in the annexation of Crimea and destabilization of the situation in the eastern territories of Ukraine (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014a); introduced sanctions regarding the export of weapons and securities of several Russian banks, etc. Generally, the list of Japan's sanctions was very extensive. At the same time, in the Russian scientific discourse, the sanctions of 2014 are called "symbolic" (Nelidov 2022, 110; Panov et al. 2019, 5), which supposedly allowed Russia not to be in international isolation.

In addition to the sanction, Japan's position on supporting Ukraine was confirmed by the cancellation of V. Putin's official visit to Japan scheduled for the end of 2014, the official visit of Japanese Prime Minister S. Abe to Ukraine (June 2015), and the official visit of Ukrainian President P. Poroshenko to Japan (April 2016).

We consider that the events of 2014, related to Russia's criminal actions in the territory of Ukraine, became a turning point that united Japan and Ukraine in opposing Russia as an aggressor state. Under the conditions of the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine, Japan began to assert itself more and more active on the international stage. However, given the possibility of signing a peace treaty with Russia and receiving the Northern Territories back, this was detrimental to its interests.

JAPAN'S POLICY TOWARDS RUSSIA IN RESPONSE TO THE FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

Immediately after Russia recognized the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on 21 February 2022, even before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Japan reacted with anti-Russian sanctions. Since 22 February 2022, the circulation of Russian government bonds has been banned, and a plan to freeze the assets of several influential Russian citizens has been announced. Japan characterized Russia's actions as violating Ukraine's sovereignty and international law. The introduction of sanctions was a response to Russia's recognition of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.

Japan reacted sharply to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. On 24 February 2022, F. Kishida stated that this invasion undermined the foundations of the international order, which is based

on the non-recognition of a unilateral change of the status quo by force. The subsequently published Diplomatic Bluebook (2022) stated:

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is an outright challenge to the existing international order and imposed a great impact across the world. This aggression is a unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force and is an outrageous act that shakes the very foundation of the international order. It is a clear violation of international law and totally unacceptable. Japan strongly condemns these actions (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022).

Japan believes the war in Ukraine is changing the international order, and Russia is the subject of international politics destroying the liberal-democratic order and values. Official Tokyo has clearly announced the rejection of the status of a passive observer in these processes, which are of a global nature.

After the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine, Japanese businesses, despite financial losses, began to withdraw from the market of the aggressor state and put Russian assets up for sale. Due to their strong dependence on Russian consumers, the companies that found it difficult to exit the Russian market quickly stopped investments and advertising. Japan implemented a wide range of economic measures concerning Russia, for example:

1. Russia's "most favored nation" trade status was canceled;
2. the import of equipment, certain types of wood, vodka, gold, etc., from Russia was prohibited;
3. the export of luxury items to Russia was prohibited;
4. sanctions were introduced on the export to Russian military organizations of controlled goods from the internationally agreed list, other dual-purpose goods;
5. gradual cessation and subsequent complete refusal of imports of Russian coal and oil (Government of Japan 2022).

Japan banned business contacts with more than 50 military organizations and enterprises of Russia (and Belarus), including aircraft and ship manufacturers. Efforts were made to prevent Russia from circumventing financial sanctions using digital assets (crypto-assets) through cryptocurrency exchanges.

In a speech before the Japanese Parliament, the President of Ukraine, V. Zelenskyy, asked for a full trade embargo against Russia (President of Ukraine 2022b). Japan did not introduce that embargo, but the number of various sectoral sanctions is significant. It is noteworthy that the mentioned speech by V. Zelenskyy was the first speech by a foreign leader before the Parliament in the history of Japan. This speech emphasized the primacy of Japan in Asia in the issue of pressure on Russia to restore peace. Among the Asian states, Ukraine receives support from a few subjects. Noticeably, many Asian states are still motivated to maintain contact with Russia, which causes them to adopt a neutral rather than anti-Ukrainian position. This further strengthens Ukraine's high assessment of Japan's position on ensuring peace on a global scale.

Following its G7 partners, Japan stopped using Russian oil in 2022, and its imports will eventually stop altogether. This is not an easy decision for Japan due to its strong dependence

on energy imports from Russia. In 2021, Russia supplied about 4% of oil and 9% of gas. However, alternative sources of supply from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait) have been found. As of 5 December 2022, Japan introduced an upper price limit for Russian crude oil, except for oil imported from the Sakhalin-2 plant (given Japan's energy security issues). The Japanese authorities made this decision after the agreement between the G7 countries and Australia to limit the price of Russian crude oil to 60 US dollars per barrel as part of the latest sanctions against Russia caused by the aggression against Ukraine.

Japan also banned the import of Russian coal. In 2021, 13% of these imports came from Russia. Japan was the world's third-largest importer of Russian coal after India and China. However, as with oil, this situation is solved by alternative suppliers (Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam).

If we group the sanctions applied by Japan against Russia, these will include: 1) Japan's support for measures aimed at preventing the financing of Russia by leading multilateral financial institutions (IMF, World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, etc.); 2) responding to Russia's evasion of sanctions, including with the help of digital assets; 3) restrictions on operations with the Central Bank of the Russian Federation; 4) freezing the assets of a number of large Russian banks and their subsidiaries in Japan due to their close relationship with the Russian government; 5) Japan's joining the measures aimed at isolating Russia from the international financial system and world economy by disconnecting certain Russian banks from the SWIFT system; 6) a ban on the issuance and transactions with new Russian government debt bonds on the primary and secondary markets of Japan; 7) prohibition of new investments in Russia; 8) prohibition of providing certain types of services to Russia, in particular, trust and accounting services, etc.

Also, as of 1 March 2022, Japan strengthened personal sanctions against high-ranking Russian officials, the military, oligarchs, members of their families and close circles, etc. Japan's personal sanctions concern, for example, V. Putin, D. Medvedev, S. Lavrov, S. Shoigu, V. Gerasimov, N. Patrushev, D. Peskov, R. Kadyrov, S. Kiriyyenko, deputies of the State Duma of Russia, and others. The assets of the mentioned and many other Russians in the territory of Japan are frozen; conducting any financial transactions with them is prohibited. Japan joined the Multilateral Russian Oligarch Task Force to search for and seize the assets of Russian elites and oligarchs and fictitious persons they used (US Department of Treasury 2022). Also, by the decision of the Japanese government, eight middle-ranking diplomats of the Russian embassy in Tokyo and representatives of the trade mission were expelled from the country on suspicion of espionage (April 2022).

In the wake of nuclear blackmail in September 2022, the Japanese government expressed concern over President V. Putin's nuclear rhetoric due to the possibility of using nuclear weapons during the invasion of Ukraine. As the only country in the world that suffered nuclear attacks, Japan demanded that Russia not use nuclear weapons.

In 2022, at the beginning of 2023, Japan was not part of Ukraine's main group of allies, including states with significant military potential and those ready to make political and legal commitments. At the same time, Japan was in a wider group of international partners that supported a set of non-military guarantees based on sanctions and provided humanitarian, financial, and other assistance. Simultaneously, we assume that Japan's security and defense

strategies change at the end of 2022 could be the first step towards a potential change, like support for Ukraine in the fight against Russian aggression.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine accelerated systemic changes in Japan. We consider Russia's aggression against Ukraine the driving factor for changes in foreign security, etc. Japanese politics. The government of F. Kishida observed how the NATO alliance supported Ukraine, which demonstrated a strong will to fight. The conclusion was drawn from this: if Japan increases its attention to security and defense issues, the United States and other partner states will be more willing to help when needed. The fact that Japan will be ready to defend itself is an important factor in maintaining the steadfast confidence of the allies.

RUSSIA'S POLICY TOWARDS JAPAN IN RESPONSE TO THE PRO-UKRAINIAN POSITION

Russia carefully monitors all of Japan's steps to support Ukraine, and they increase the tension in relations more and more. On 21 March 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia stated that given the "obvious unfriendly nature of the unilateral restrictions imposed by Japan on Russia, a number of measures are being taken in connection with the situation in Ukraine" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022d). This relates to Russia's withdrawal from negotiations on a peace treaty with Japan, the suspension of Japanese citizens' ability to travel without a visa based on previously acknowledged agreements on visa-free exchanges, Russia's withdrawal from talks with Japan for cooperative commercial ventures in the southern Kurils; Russia is preventing Japan from maintaining its partnership with the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation for sectoral discussion.

Due to Tokyo's firm position against Russian military actions in Ukraine, Moscow withdrew from negotiations to establish an official peace treaty on 22 March 2022, bringing harsh criticism from Tokyo. In addition to failing to deter Japan, Russia's decision to leave the negotiations further increased the anti-Russian sentiment and the determination to carry out the sanctions program.

Since April 2022, the Russian government has been drawing up a list of "unfriendly" states, which includes more than 50 states and territories (Government of the Russian Federation 2022). Japan was one of the first to be classified as "unfriendly". Therefore, counter-sanctions and restrictions were introduced by Russia. In particular, in May 2022, a decision was made to indefinitely ban 63 Japanese citizens from entering Russia, including the Prime Minister, the heads of both houses of the Japanese Parliament, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, most of the ministers, representatives of institutions dealing with issues of the return of the Northern Territories and national security, heads and leading columnists of popular Japanese media, etc. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022d). In July 2022, sanctions were extended to 384 members of the lower house of the Japanese Parliament. In the corresponding statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, it is emphasized that the sanctions concern Japanese parliamentarians who "having taken an unfriendly anti-Russian position, make, in particular, baseless accusations against our country in the context of the special military operation in Ukraine" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022c).

In response to the expulsion of its diplomats from Japan in April 2022, Russia announced similar procedures against eight Japanese diplomats. This received the following reasoning:

With the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine (...) official Tokyo has taken an openly hostile anti-Russian course. Actively involved in a fierce campaign to spread slander against our country, directed by the West, the government of F. Kishida has resorted to steps unprecedented for modern Russian-Japanese relations, destroying the positives of mutually beneficial cooperation accumulated over many years. Despite common sense, Japan has openly taken the position of the full support of neo-Nazi formations operating in the territory of Ukraine, providing political, economic, and military assistance to the regime in Kyiv. This is accompanied by the incitement of Russophobic hysteria in Japanese society, creating serious obstacles for the normal functioning of Russian foreign institutions, which violates the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961. The apotheosis of this line was the expulsion of eight Russian diplomats from Japan. In connection with the above, guided by the principle of reciprocity, the Russian side demanded that eight Japanese diplomatic staff members leave our country by May 10, 2022. The full responsibility for this development lies solely with the Japanese government, which has decided to abandon friendly, constructive relations with Russia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022a).

Contrary to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Russia applied illegal pressure on Japanese diplomats. Specifically, in September 2022, the consul of the Consulate General of Japan in Vladivostok, M. Tatsunori, experienced such pressure. He was questioned roughly and did not have a lawyer. He was accused of receiving information with limited access, particularly about the impact of Western sanctions on Russia's Primorsky Krai. The consul was declared *persona non grata* and was required to leave the territory of Russia within 48 hours (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022b). Russia accused the Japanese diplomat of espionage. We see this as Russia's mirror response to accusing its diplomats of espionage with subsequent expulsion from the country. Russia exerted undue pressure on the Japanese consul because he took a critical position towards the Asian countries that did not condemn Russia for the war in Ukraine. Russia purposefully chose the annexed islands and the waters of the Sea of Japan in 2022 to conduct various independent and joint air, ground, and naval exercises with China. In 2022, Russia increased its military presence near the borders of Japan, for instance, groups in the Japanese Northern Territories.

We were interested to learn how Russian science deals with the problem of the triangle "Japan-Russia-Ukraine". According to the scientists' estimates of the Center for Japanese Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, "the Ukrainian crisis, which entered an active phase in February 2022", resulted in the collapse of Russia's relations with Japan (Nelidov 2022, 108). In Russian diplomatic and scientific discourses, Japan's position in the international arena is usually highly dependent on the US. The most important factor

determining Japan's position in Ukraine is Japanese fears that China may take advantage of the precedent established by Russia (regarding Taiwan).

POSITION OF UKRAINE CONCERNING THE PROBLEMS OF JAPANESE-RUSSIAN RELATIONSHIPS

The Ukrainian Parliament appealed to the international community regarding Japan's Northern Territories to enable contractual and legal formalization of their status (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2022). The goal was to attract the international community's attention to the demarcation of sovereign states' borders and respect for territorial integrity. The appeal of the Ukrainian Parliament is aimed at preventing the tolerance of issues related to the occupation of any territories, as well as drawing the attention of the world community to the need to support the sovereign territories of Japan (the Northern Territories). A decree of the President of Ukraine was also signed, by which the Northern Territories of Japan were recognized as occupied by Russia (President of Ukraine 2022a). In addition, Ukraine confirmed its respect for Japan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including its Northern Territories, and called on other states to make similar decisions.

It should be noted that the appeals mentioned above of the Ukrainian Parliament to the world community and the decree of the President of Ukraine were positively assessed by both the Japanese authorities and the public. We are unaware of any state's chief of state or Parliament articulating the difficulty of restoring Japan's Northern Territories in such a clear manner. This is another example of how a common enemy, with whom there is already a long history of hatred and enmity, albeit at times dressed up as cooperation, may bring countries together.

CONCLUSION

The analysis confirmed the authors' hypothesis about the configuration of relations in the format of the conditional triangle "Japan-Russia-Ukraine", where the relationships of any two-state parties have certain consequences and determine the actions of a third state party in response. The indirect influence of Ukraine on the content and nature of Japanese-Russian relations has been on the rise since 2014. Despite the national interest of Japan to cooperate with Russia for the sake of signing a peace treaty and returning the Northern Territories, the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine was the reason for Japan's change of priorities in the direction of supporting democratic values, struggling for peace and global security.

One of the consequences of Russian policy regarding the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and the subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine was the rapid escalation of tension in relations between Japan and Russia. Since the end of the Second World War, no other issue has brought such tension into Japanese-Russian relations as the Ukrainian issue. This broad issue goes beyond Ukraine and concerns any encroachments on sovereignty and territorial integrity (such as the Northern Territories of Japan).

The Russian aggression against Ukraine had many consequences for Japan: rapid activation in the international arena; revision of the security and defense policy; escalation of tension in relations with Russia (refusal to conduct a dialogue regarding the peace treaty and disputed territories); deterioration of Japan's security environment due to Russia's active military exercises near the Japanese borders, on disputed islands.

Japan's support for Ukraine had the following consequences for Russia: the introduction of sanctions that affected all areas of Russian life; socio-economic losses due to the exit of Japanese business from the Russian market; loss of Japan as a market for the sale of energy sources; curtailment of various projects, mainly in the Far East region; Japan's humanitarian, technical and other support for Ukraine to fight against Russia, etc.

Ukraine's support for Japan became a tool to activate the international community concerning the return to Japan of the islands annexed by Russia. The situation in Ukraine gave Japan an impetus to become more active in the international arena to review its security and defense strategies. Due to the Russian-Ukrainian war, Japan is overcoming the stereotype that its foreign policy is allegedly not independent and is completely aligned with the US.

The main methods of pressure by the state parties of the triangle were:

- The methods of Japan's pressure on Russia to support Ukraine were primarily: actions aimed at isolating Russia from the international financial system and the world economy; sectoral and personal sanctions; expulsion from the country of diplomats suspected of espionage; curtailment of cooperation in most spheres, especially economic, etc.
- Russia's methods of pressuring Japan for its pro-Ukrainian position are: withdrawing from peace treaty negotiations; assigning Japan to unfriendly states; personal sanctions; expulsion of diplomats and undue pressure on them; requirement to pay for energy resources exclusively in Russian roubles; conducting various military exercises near the borders of Japan, etc.
- The method of Ukraine's pressure on Russia to support Japan is determined to be the activation of the international community for the return of the Northern Territories to Japan.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine is perceived by Japan not only as a threat to security in Europe. Japan believes that the same aggression from Russia (or China, North Korea) may be repeated in East Asia in the medium term. Japan, therefore, believes that Europe's and Asia's security cannot be maintained as separate, independent processes. This strengthens the connections and dependencies among the three countries - Japan, Russia, and Ukraine.

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