

# The World and Japan After the Ukraine War

## What are Japan's Values as One Power in a Multipolar Era?

Yoshiaki Yano (73)

Chairman of the Japan Forum of Security (JAFOS)



It seems increasingly likely that the Ukraine war will end with a Russian victory. In the resulting world order, we can expect a relative decline in Western power, leading to a multipolar era.

This essay analyzes the major factors for multipolarization and gives a perspective of future global trends to explore how Japan can survive as one of these poles, and what values it should share with the world.

### Geopolitical advantages of continental nations in a multipolar world

A Russian military victory would signify the defeat of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that supported Ukraine. Above all, it would be a loss for the Joe Biden administration in the United States, bringing an end to America's unipolar domination. This would likely mean the downfall of Europe, which is suffering social and economic chaos caused by increased immigration, as well as political instability.

A Russian win could bring continental nations into greater prominence. This includes Russia itself, which would leverage this victory to increase its power and global influence; China, which benefitted while staying out of the conflict; and India, which has close ties with Russia and is leader of the "Global South."

Even Middle Eastern and African nations that are friendly with the U.S. would distance themselves from the West. Regional powers, such as Brazil, would establish a greater presence.

Behind this shifting balance of global power, we can name several major factors as described below.

The first factor is geopolitics.

The dominance of modern Western civilization was founded on its military strength that allowed it to cross oceans, symbolized by large, artillery-equipped naval vessels. It came into power starting during the Age of Discovery led by Spain and Portugal.

Hegemony shifted to other Western European countries at times, such as the Netherlands and France. Fierce fighting took place between these continental powers in Europe.

Britain, an island nation, maintained equilibrium between European powers while making them fight each other, which diminished the strength they could have drawn on to advance into the ocean. Britain devoted its power to expanding maritime hegemony and successfully built a global colonial empire.

All these hegemonies were empires with overseas colonies. They sent armadas across the seas to regions with abundant resources, subjugated those areas with military power, and turned them into colonies. Their fleets guarded the wealth that was shipped back to the colonizers, who made huge sums of money through trade. They built colonial empires by further investing this wealth in their navies, then sending them to colonize new areas.

The U.S. dominated the globe after World War II in the wake of these colonial empires. The Cold War ended when the Soviet Union collapsed. Some predicted the "end of history" in the 1990s, a new world order in which the entire globe became a free democratic society with a market economy of the American type.

This forecast has not come true. Rather, a new, multipolar era has arrived, as I mentioned previously.

## **Innovative military technology has brought back advantages for continental nations**

This situation is backed by innovations in military technology, such as long-range, precision-guided munitions and global networks for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).

ISR networks span from the surface of the Earth to space and the deep seafloor (although there are some limitations). They can be used to monitor, assess, and pursue objects in real time, as long as they are larger than dozens of centimeters.

ISR information is sent via global command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) networks and swiftly processed using artificial intelligence (AI). Launch orders are issued to long-range, precision-guided munition systems.

Accordingly, these missiles and other weapons can precisely strike any target in a time span of a few minutes to a few dozen minutes.

These features are even more remarkable when used for strikes on the ocean and in the air, where there is nowhere to take shelter. This is why missiles and other weapons can be used to precisely attack targets in the air or on the ocean within several thousand kilometers of a continental nation's coast. This is referred to as "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD).

It is believed the Russian military links its ISR network with missiles, artillery, and guns (it has roughly seven to 10 times more ammunition than the Ukrainian military). Russia has killed and wounded approximately 800,000 to 900,000 Ukrainian soldiers during this war.

There is a growing risk of concentrated missile and torpedo attacks against large vessels on the ocean, such as American aircraft carriers. This is why continental nations are making it more challenging for others to approach, even thousands of kilometers from their coasts.

The threat of missiles and other weapons extends to all the world's oceans. According to international law, "international waters" are zones that do not belong to any specific nation, and where any country can navigate freely. This concept no longer applies in a military sense.

Similar changes can be seen in space and the South Pole, which do not belong to any nation under international treaties. Even in times of peace, countries are engaging in fiercer competition to control these regions.

The same is true of the electromagnetic spectrum and cyberspace, where there are constant threats posed by hostile state and non-state actors, including governments, militaries, and civilians.

It is easy to respond to these threats in one's own territory, where ground shelters provide concealment from reconnaissance and monitoring. Underground facilities can be built simply and affordably to protect against guided missiles equipped with weapons of mass destruction (like nuclear, biological, and chemical arms), and against damage caused by radiation, biological agents, chemical agents, and the like.

Considering this, continental nations with extensive territories can ensure their safety and guard against threats more cheaply and easily than maritime nations.

When it comes to control of space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum, continental nations are at an advantage because they have room to build many facilities across a wide area, even underground. These include launch sites, command posts, headquarters, transmission and tracking facilities, and radars. Maritime nations still have superiority in utilizing the ocean, but in other ways it seems they are at a disadvantage.

## **Economic advantages of continental nations, including resources, energy, and food**

It is predicted that global population expansion and economic growth will make resources, energy, and food more precious, causing their prices to soar. Continental nations possess many mines where resources are extracted, as well as crude oil and natural gas fields, agricultural land, and water sources.

However, resources are frequently found in inland and remote areas, and there are numerous cases of them remaining undeveloped due to high costs for surveying, mining, and transport.

Resource development requires ample funds and technological power. Ownership rights belong to continental nations where resources are found. Maritime nations must either depend on imports from resource-rich countries or must provide funds and technologies to obtain the right to use these resources, including cooperation to mine them.

However, maritime nations have latent potential for accessing vast amounts of marine resources. They would require technologies for mining undersea oil fields, gas fields, manganese nodules, and hydrothermal deposits, and for extracting gold and uranium from seawater.

Most of the world's population resides in continental nations, which have the economic potential to grow into gigantic production centers and consumer markets. It is reasonable to say there is future potential in areas like South Asia and Africa, which are undergoing remarkable population growth.

It is likely that economic vitality will suffer a relative decline in the West, due to trends such as falling birthrates, changing populations, and more widespread education. To resolve this, an overdependence on immigration would lead to worsening public order, social division, and political confrontation.

We can say that continental nations have good future prospects when comparing different types of potential, including military strength, resources, energy, food, population, and economic vitality. In the coming era, it is estimated that continental nations will have a superior position while maritime nations will lose their geopolitical advantages, which were part of the driving force by which European powers gained global control in the modern era.

### **The West declines in strength as old civilizations are revived**

The second major factor is the rise and fall of civilizations.

Western civilization is founded on Hebraism (the Jewish and Christian faiths) and Hellenism (Greek culture). Since the Renaissance, this civilization's core has been its sciences and technologies. Via the Islamic world and mainly in the military field, it gained control and became the preeminent region of global civilization by overpowering and colonizing ancient civilizations, such as Islamic countries, India, and China.

However, new waves of multipolarization may revive these older civilizations.

There are visible signs that Western superiority is waning, even in the sciences and technologies that provided its main advantages. For instance, many major semiconductor production centers are located in East Asia.

More and more non-Western immigrants are moving to Europe and the U.S. The ratio of people of color is growing as white birth rates are falling.

In the long term, this may transform the overall Western identity and its cultural homogeneity based on Christianity, Greek civilization, and Roman civilization.

There is also instability in the West's military superiority. After more than 20 years, the War on Terror ended with the unilateral American withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. Ukraine is supported by NATO; a Ukrainian loss in the current war would clearly demonstrate the inferior military position of the West.

We can also regard this phenomenon as one that reveals the limits of military predominance by the West when entering into a foreign civilization.

There are also economic instabilities in the U.S. dollar-based currency structure. For instance, news reports say there are many discussions underway about using the Chinese yuan rather than the U.S. dollar to set prices and pay for some crude oil transactions between Saudi Arabia and China.

More non-Western nations of the Global South will likely move away from dollar-denominated financial assets, which can be subjected to American sanctions as seen during the Ukraine war.

### **The limits of Western universal values**

The third primary factor is the issue of values. Western nations have built a political and ethical value system they refer to as "universal values" – human rights, freedom, equality, and democracy – which are ideals that have existed since the French Revolution. The question is, should these values be accepted and adopted by non-Western nations?

No, these Western values are not uncritically accepted by many non-Western countries that were previously colonized by European powers.

For example, some members of the Islamic world believe in political systems based on the concept of divine right to rule. This ideology explains why Iran is an "Islamic republic."

The Ukraine war can be understood as a conflict of values between the governments of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a pro-Western president who wants Ukraine to join NATO, and President Vladimir Putin, who extolls nationalism.

Putin regained Russia's resource rights by expelling Western-funded oligarchs who controlled them directly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Putin is a Russian nationalist. His thoughts and beliefs align with those of writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who opposed Soviet communism with a value system founded on Russia's history, traditions, and Eastern Orthodox Church.

The Zelenskyy administration is backed by globalism-supporting neoconservatives in the U.S. Department of State. Robert Kagan and others hold to an ideology that is rooted in Trotskyism.

Globalists repudiate the inherent national characters of individual countries, as well as their existing family structures, religions, morals, and cultures. They strive to build a worldwide empire ruled by a few elite figures, with a stateless, homogenous global population that has no individual identities. One can say that communism is a type of globalism.

Just like the communists, the Biden administration is manipulated by powers that want a global revolution. When viewing the Ukraine war as an ideological conflict, the Putin administration is actually attempting to defend Russia's traditional character and civilization.

A Russian victory would halt the spread of globalism that began during the French Revolution. This would likely set off an international trend in which nationalism is revived and civilizations recognize their inherent values anew.

## The significance of Japan's civilization, and its role going forward

Arnold J. Toynbee and Samuel P. Huntington both regard Japan as a unique civilization. Considering the geopolitical advantages of continental countries, our maritime nation must make efforts to utilize its remaining safe spaces on land and in the ocean.

For example, Japan should develop and use areas of the deep underground. It should also develop marine resources, particularly seabed resources in our exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This includes aquaculture, fishing, and technological development to extract uranium and gold from the ocean.

Japan must also improve the survival capabilities of its defense platform to ensure safe ocean and air navigation.

To accomplish this, Japan should deploy weapons throughout the archipelago, in important regions and at a sufficient density enabling mutual support. These include long-range precision-guided munitions – both anti-aircraft and anti-ship types – and unmanned weapons that are used under water, on the ocean's surface, and in the air.

Japan must also deploy high-energy laser weapons using nuclear power generation and electromagnetic pulse weapons, due to the possibility of saturation attacks with drones and unmanned ships.

The most important thing for weapons bases is their ability to withstand attacks. Accordingly, we must locate key portions underground or install them on submarines.

China will likely be the most direct threat to Japan in the future. China's goal is to have a world-class military in 2049, and it is sacrificing its citizens to rapidly boost military spending. I doubt that anything will change as long as the Communist Party dictatorship remains in power.

The Japanese islands bar China's entry into the Pacific Ocean. Japan is also located next to Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula.

China already has various types of nuclear and conventional missiles with sufficient ranges and densities to block and prevent the U.S. Armed Forces from entering the western Pacific. China will probably increase missile density and improve performance going forward. It will likely develop and deploy hypersonic glide vehicles (which are said to be difficult to obstruct) and other weapons in its missile defense system.

Therefore, if a crisis occurred in Taiwan or on the Korean Peninsula, Japan would need to expect decreased support from the American military, located far across the Pacific Ocean.

Japan should also put less faith in the "nuclear umbrella." It seems America will be at a disadvantage going forward when we look at the relative balance of nuclear force between the U.S. and China.

The main reason is that Russia has come over to the Chinese side during the Ukraine war. If China and Russia waged a nuclear strike aimed at the U.S. alone and spanning all levels (strategic, theater, and tactical nuclear weapons), American specialists recognize that the U.S. would not be able to withstand these attacks.

Moreover, it seems unlikely that the U.S. could quickly regain balance for its nuclear force. America has developed and produced no new nuclear warheads since its last nuclear test in 1992.

American nuclear infrastructure has deteriorated and will require extensive amounts of money to restart. The federal government's gross national debt is approximately 32.8 trillion dollars, resulting in a lack of funds that delays plans to build nuclear infrastructure.

The U.S. has no choice but to utilize existing nuclear infrastructure until 2036, when it plans to begin updating this infrastructure. Over the next decade or so, there will be no way to avoid a declining level of trust in nuclear deterrence, including these tangible considerations.

A crisis could break out in Taiwan, the Senkaku Islands, or the Korean Peninsula during that time period. Japan must have its own nuclear deterrence – such as hypersonic glide vehicles equipped with nuclear warheads – to help stave off these crises and withstand probable military intimidation by China, including nuclear weapons.

John J. Mearsheimer said that major powers in the nuclear era must have sufficient deterrence to survive a preemptive nuclear strike. Japan should obtain its own nuclear arms if it is to survive as one of multiple poles in this era. Otherwise, the foundation of our national security would be continuously entrusted to the will of another country – Japan would not be able to do anything if it was excluded from the nuclear umbrella, and would have to yield to nuclear intimidation. Japan would not be a pole in that case, but rather a client state.

To achieve nuclear deterrence, Japan would ideally leverage its geopolitical advantages by employing nuclear submarines that can launch ballistic missiles, as well as vehicle-borne ballistic missiles in the deep underground. Japan has technologies to accomplish this and could probably build nuclear submarines in five years and vehicle-borne missiles in just a few months.

The Japanese civilization, which developed in a specific region, is truly unique. Our people speak a single language in this country with an uncommon national character, the longest history and traditions in the world, an unbroken Imperial line, and a consistent faith.

Japanese citizens still hold to proper ethics as principles for daily life: consideration and thoughtfulness, rather than human rights; self-restraint and contentment, rather than freedom; mutual respect and doing one's part, rather than equality.

This Japanese morality stems back to the Jomon civilization that lasted roughly 13,000 years. It was a long era of peace and

stability; no conspicuous traces have been discovered of fighting during that time.

Japanese society, in the rich natural world of the Japanese archipelago, has been harmonious and stable for hundreds of generations. It is a nation of co-existence with no history of despotism or slavery.

Japan has traditionally taken in and adopted positive aspects of the Chinese and Indian cultures since ancient times. It successfully built a modern state on par with Western nations and has defended its independence since the Meiji period. Considering its geopolitical position on the eastern tip of Eurasia, Japan has the potential to become a bridge between the civilizations of the past and today, and between the worlds of East and West.

I believe the Japanese spirit of harmony and co-existence will provide helpful hints about the values and ways of living that should be shared throughout human society in the future.

Now is the time for Japan to help build a human society where numerous civilizations respect each other's values. We must re-affirm our history, traditions, and inherent values, and share them with the world.