



Line of Advantage: Japan's Grand Strategy in the Era of Abe Shinzō, by Michael J. Green. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. 328 pp.

In this comprehensive historical examination of Japan's grand strategy under the late, former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe from 2012 to 2020, Michael Green draws on several years of intimate access to Mr. Abe and his advisors. Green paints a detailed and timely portrait of Abe as a masterful leader of Japan who is perhaps not yet fully recognized for his political acumen, vision for the future, and lasting success. Green's analysis could not come at a better time as Japan's role in the Indo-Pacific region influences America's and other allies' approaches to compete with China as the primary pacing challenge.

Line of Advantage is both a meditation on the twenty-first century evolution of Japanese security policy (and its undeniable impact on American security policy) and a shrine to Abe's lasting legacy on Japanese grand strategy and peace in the Indo-Pacific region. Chapter one begins with the titular quotation from Aritomo Yamagata: "There are two ways to secure national independence and defense. The first is to protect the line of sovereignty. The second is to protect the line of advantage (*riekisen*). The line of sovereignty means the nation's border and the line of advantage includes the area closely related to the safety of the line of sovereignty. There is no country that does not try to defend both lines" (1). Abe's "line of advantage" was decidedly maritime in nature and provided a blueprint for both

American policymakers and his political successors (5). With Japan's security options today defined equally by geography and wartime experience, Abe chose to emphasize his country's maritime strength, projecting a line of advantage well beyond Japan's national borders and allowing Japan to play a greater strategic role as part of America's defense policy in Asia (43).

Green's main argument is that Abe—confronted with a rising China—engaged in external and internal balancing to offset a Sinocentric worldview in which Japan would be sidelined by its larger neighbor across the East China Sea. As for external balancing, Abe announced new joint planning and military operations with the United States and other allies beyond the traditional self-defense of Japan (4). Additionally, Abe is largely responsible for the creation of “the Quad,” a strategic group comprised of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. He also trumpeted his new “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” strategy—a phrase now often heard in national defense circles—intended to counter Chinese offensives through diplomatic, military, and financial initiatives. As for internal balancing, Abe advocated for a greater Japanese defense budget and implemented the first fully functioning national security proposal established in Japan's postwar history (4). The arsenal of Abe's external and internal balancing advanced new notions of freedom of movement and prosperity that were eventually adopted by American policymakers and now find resonance around the world.

More broadly, Green argues persuasively that of all America's allies, Japan has emerged as the most important thought leader on China strategy (225). Japan's maritime strategy of balancing offered strong competition to Chinese aggression by molding the environment around China, thereby reinforcing the ability of the rest of the Indo-Pacific to resist expansionism by Beijing (47). Those in the American defense sector should not be surprised to know that the United States' strategic framework in the Indo-Pacific is effectively based on the Japanese foreign ministry's early FOIP vision (225). Japan's strategic thinking under Abe was focused on maximizing the nation's influence while Japan paradoxically suffered declining relative power.

Green does an excellent job of putting Abe's years in historical perspective. After the Second World War, Shigeru Yoshida, the Japanese prime minister in the immediate post-occupation years, cast a long shadow on future generations of Japanese politicians and diplomats. Most successive prime ministers pledged loyalty to Yoshida's doctrine of minimizing geopolitical risk and focusing on economic growth under the steadfast security relationship with the United States (218). But this approach was not a grand strategy per se. According to Green, Japan languished without a concrete grand strategy until Abe created one. Abe's

taking the nation's helm in 2012 ostensibly marked a turning point for Japan and the region (222).

Green colorfully likens the United States and China to the two most important chess pieces on the board that is the Indo-Pacific region (105). With Abe's return to power in late 2012, Abe formed a new expert panel tasked with preparing the outlines of legislation to establish a National Security Council system (196). Shortly thereafter, the prime minister's office published Japan's first National Security Strategy document, which would supersede prior policy documents from the defense and foreign affairs ministries. Henceforth, all international security policy planning and pronouncements would come from a single-voiced bureaucracy. The prime minister's 2013 strategy document served most notably as the resilient and enduring architecture for all Abe's next seven years in office. This remarkable accomplishment is perhaps Abe's most lasting success.

Abe's National Security Council system shaped the United States' strategy toward Asia in later years. It also advocated for jointness and consolidated the three Japanese military services, civilian offices, and uniformed authorities (203). Green is rarely critical of Abe's time in office, but he does not withhold criticism of Mr. Abe's economic initiatives. He states that Abe's strategy for unleashing greater economic growth—the cleverly named “Abenomics”—cannot be compared with the successes of Margaret Thatcher in the 1970s or Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Thus, while Abenomics were impactful, the average annual growth rate in Japan failed to meet what economists thought possible (214).

Line of Advantage is worth reading for anyone with even a passing interest in Japan and the Indo-Pacific region. Green leaves little room for improvement, though his writing is at times overly flattering and deferential to Abe's tenure, sapping his appearance of objectivity. No mention is made of potential shortcomings of Abe, such as claims of nationalism or historical revisionism. Nevertheless, the book benefits greatly from Green's captivating writing style, broad knowledge base, and deep devotion to Japanese politics and foreign policy.

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