

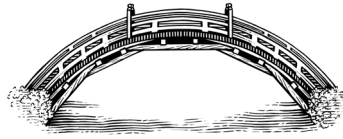
BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Mireya Solís's

Japan's Quiet Leadership: Reshaping the Indo-Pacific

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Adam P. Liff

Tom Le

Kristin Vekasi

Hiroki Takeuchi and Natalya Talih

Mireya Solís

Japan's Leadership Is Needed Now More Than Ever

Adam P. Liff

Mireya Solís's *Japan's Quiet Leadership: Reshaping the Indo-Pacific* packs remarkable topical and analytical breadth into its 260 pages. Building on the argument of her excellent 2020 *Foreign Affairs* article, "The Underappreciated Power: Japan after Abe,"¹ Solís's study offers readers interested in Japanese politics and foreign policy an extremely well-researched, nuanced, comprehensive, and accessible overview of the myriad ways in which recent Japanese leaders have navigated manifold challenges to consolidate their country's status as "a network power in a divided world" (p. 219).

Solís's book sets out to answer the following question: "Why has Japan emerged from the 'lost decades' to become more relevant to the world and more consequential to the new geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region?" (p. xi) She finds the answers in four major factors: (1) Japan's relative "resilience to the populist wave," due to both "social cohesion" and more effective policy adjustments in response to the forces of globalization than some other countries, (2) political reforms that, *inter alia*, have facilitated the exercise of executive leadership, (3) a proactive strategy of "all-out network diplomacy," and (4) "profound geopolitical uncertainty" that has forced a realization among leaders that Japan must do significantly more to "sustain the international liberal system" (p. 221).

Solís frames her study as "moving past the narrative of [Japan's] stagnation," which she dismisses as "pervasive yet inaccurate, for it glosses over the profound currents of change in Japan's economy and politics as well as the marked transformation in the country's international role" (p. ix). Rightly dismissing the facile and contradictory narratives from the past several decades of a nation facing "inexorable...rise or decline," Solís argues that recent Japanese leaders have exercised remarkable—if "quiet"—leadership across a wide array of policy areas (p. xi). For example, over the past decade-plus, Japan's leaders have mainstreamed the concept

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¹ Mireya Solís, "The Underappreciated Power: Japan after Abe," *Foreign Affairs*, October 13, 2020 ~ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2020-10-13/underappreciated-power>.

of a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” carried out ambitious national security reforms that make Japan an “increasingly important ally” for the United States (p. 220), and, perhaps most distinctively, asserted Japan as an unabashed champion of regional and global connectivity. As reflected in former prime minister Shinzo Abe’s remarkable push for Japan to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), this leadership has at times necessitated—and in some cases even been motivated by a desire for—major reforms to Japan’s domestic institutions and policies.

The result has been a quiet but significant evolution in Japan’s domestic politics, policies, and institutions on the one hand, and the country’s regional and global role on the other. In a few policy areas, such as free trade, one consequence has been an unexpected reversal of roles that would likely surprise earlier generations of scholars (and U.S. policymakers). In a particularly compelling case of Japan’s “quiet leadership,” the Abe government effectively rescued the TPP after the United States’ abrupt and unceremonious 2017 withdrawal (p. 127). Coupled in the years since with its successful pursuit of the ambitious Japan–European Union economic partnership agreement and continuance of other initiatives (e.g., the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, RCEP), successive prime ministers’ actions mean that Japan in 2024 is now a far more active supporter of free trade than Washington—to put it gently.

Particularly helpful in its effective but subtle synthesis of her own past scholarship and that of many other Japan experts, Solís’s book boasts remarkable topical breadth. Although primarily focused on foreign policy, it also introduces readers to the domestic political and economic factors that have variably enabled, constrained, or, in some cases, served as key motivators for Japan’s increasingly proactive regional and global role. Indeed, across five themes and fourteen chapters, Solís educates the reader on everything from how Japan’s leaders have responded to the forces of globalization and fast-evolving geoeconomic and geopolitical challenges to recent changes to key fiscal, economic, and immigration policies. With such broad topical coverage, the book’s relatively short chapters, accessible prose, and helpful historical grounding of contemporary policy debates make it particularly well-suited for generalist readers and students interested in Japanese politics and foreign policy.

Although the story Solís tells is largely a positive one about Japan’s remarkable successes in the face of major domestic and international challenges, her analysis is also clear-eyed about where she judges that Japan’s leaders have come up short. As she notes, Japan’s experience

offers both “positive and negative lessons” for other countries (p. x). She acknowledges “the enormous obstacles” Japan continues to face, *inter alia*, as well as its restrictions on the use of military power that, though “eased,” nevertheless “remain the tightest among all U.S. allies” (p. 220). Especially considering that Japan’s own leaders now frequently identify the regional security environment as at its worst since World War II and remark on the exigent need to bolster deterrence against “unilateral changes to the status quo,” it remains to be seen whether even Japan’s remarkably ambitious 2022 national security strategy is sufficient for what Solís refers to as “a world of growing antagonism” (pp. 209–10, 214).

There remain many unanswerable questions about how Japan’s leaders will tackle the diverse challenges of a “fracturing world” in the years ahead. Solís makes a compelling argument that Japanese policymakers in recent years, on the whole, have deftly navigated an unenviable slate of domestic and foreign policy challenges to emerge as a “network power par excellence” (pp. 224–25). Although internal and external challenges abound and Japan’s economic and military power seem likely to continue their relative decline compared to China’s, Solís argues that the needed recalibration of existing networks will make even a Japan with less relative material capability “more, not less, relevant to what is yet to come” (p. 226).

Needless to say, many of the key variables that will reshape the Indo-Pacific in future decades will not be up to Japanese leaders to decide for themselves. Regardless, *Japan’s Quiet Leadership* offers a compelling reminder that relative material power is not all that matters in international politics. Especially in partnership with like-minded actors, be they the United States, the European Union, or others, Japanese leaders have repeatedly exercised meaningful and significant agency. In key instances, they have even charted a course for U.S. leaders to follow. As we all look ahead to the pending U.S. elections this November and to what transpires beyond, it is extremely important not to forget those facts. Though there is much that is difficult to predict about what the future has in store, one thing is certain: Japan’s leadership and active engagement in regional and global affairs will become even more necessary in the years to come. ◆

Japan's Quiet Leadership: Between Vision and Necessity

Tom Le

The limits of the major competing international relations theories in explaining Japanese foreign policy are not so much that they are wrong but rather that they are all correct to some degree. In the last three decades, domestic values, the visions of influential leaders, external security threats, and alliance pressures have all shaped Japan's foreign policy. This messiness is difficult to capture. In *Japan's Quiet Leadership: Reshaping the Indo-Pacific*, Mireya Solís explains—clearly and efficiently—how Japan has responded to domestic and global security pressures with its unique stamp in preserving and directing a rules-based global order that is increasingly under attack.

The book asks, “Why has Japan emerged from the ‘lost decades’ to become more relevant to the world and more consequential to the new geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region?” (p. xi) This question provides the groundwork for understanding Japan's role in creating the Indo-Pacific concept and establishes the high stakes of contemporary politics. Solís argues Japan's resilience against populism, tied to its social cohesion and democratic stability; the emergence of deft executive leadership facilitated by institutional reforms; and a grand strategy tying together economic and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific will make the country relevant for years to come (p. xi). These factors have allowed Japan to respond to a changing international order, a response that has positioned the country as a “more vocal champion of liberal international norms” (p. xi). The book supports this thesis with a bird's-eye view of Japan's responses to globalization, economics, politics, geoeconomics, and geopolitics, paying particular attention to the last 30 years.

The first empirical section of the book, comprising two chapters, establishes that Japan has committed to globalization, primarily through negotiating mega trade agreements and internationalizing its manufacturing. Despite global shocks—such as financial crises, pandemics, and wars—the Japanese public has not turned to populism, nor have the government and private sector turned to isolationism. Japan's commitment to the global order is reinforced in chapter 8, where Solís

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explains how Prime Minister Shinzo Abe salvaged the failed Trans-Pacific Partnership and expanded Japan's infrastructure investments. Chapter 3 is a breakneck, eight-page discussion of Japan's three "lost decades" that identifies some reforms and key players that impact contemporary politics. Chapter 4's analysis of Abenomics and chapter 11's clear breakdown of Japanese security reforms and pursuit of bilateral and multilateral security partnerships (usefully illustrated in Table 11.1, pp. 189–90) provide a sense of successful Japanese leadership at home and abroad. Chapter 5 summarizes Japanese economic revitalization but is a more speculative analysis of green, digital, and human capital initiatives. Chapter 6 argues that "electoral and administrative reforms gave the prime minister the power to initiate policy proposals, create advisory councils to advance landmark policies, and overcome bureaucratic sectionalism" (p. 91), which allowed prime ministers to take on more significant leadership roles in international policies. The final three chapters provide a history of Japan's growing pains in dealing with an increasingly dangerous security environment, culminating with the establishment of the National Security Council, deepening of the U.S.-Japan alliance, strengthening of security partnerships, and adoption of more flexible security policies and capabilities to directly deal with China. Scattered throughout the book are timely discussions of data governance, demographic challenges, supply chain resilience, and other hot button issues.

It is refreshing to read a book with a clear narrative that is not bogged down with a citation for every other sentence. Solís is truly an expert on Japan. The book could have a broader appeal beyond an informed policy audience with further analysis of the underlying mechanisms explaining the lack of populism in Japan and why Japan chooses one policy over another. *Japan's Quiet Leadership* does not explicitly engage with counter-hypotheses or draw on the substantial peer-reviewed literature across disciplines (or many Japanese texts) to reinforce its major claims. Relatedly, although this book cites polls, news articles, and policy notes, some original data drawn from Japan would provide additional insight into the underlying mechanisms shaping Japan's foreign policies.

For example, chapter 2 is mainly a descriptive summary of immigration in Japan, showing examples of where immigration policy has failed more than explaining why populism has not taken hold. The chapter ends with policy prescriptions and a normative critique of Japan's handling of the Covid-19 crisis, but more could be done to explain how demographics tie into Japan's long-term goals. Similarly, chapters 6

and 7's discussion of political reforms and the lack of populism in Japan—the book's most original conclusion—provides some polling data and summarizes the failure of opposition parties but does not provide an obvious theory about the absence of populism. Comparative analysis of populism is limited to a paragraph on page 111, mostly arguing that Japan is distinct from five Western examples because of its dynastic politics. Solís observes that “there are troubling signs of declining democratic dynamism: a deflated opposition camp, disengaged voters, and weakened channels of accountability” (p. 109)—but all this was true as well in the post-World War II era. Plausible competing hypotheses explaining the lack of populism are the public's sensitivity to mass movements due to Japan's monumental defeat in World War II, the strict constitution limiting the government's power over the public, limited religiosity in the postwar era, or simply different race and class politics in Japan compared to higher immigrant-receiving countries. The book touches on some of these issues but not in substantial detail.

Moreover, the book's premises could use additional framing to help non-experts understand the significance of Japan's many policy changes over the last 75 years. Without temporal and cross-state case comparisons, it is unclear how much “more relevant” or “more consequential” Japan is in international politics. While chapter 11 provides coherence to Japan's strategy of signing onto a myriad of international institutions, it would be helpful to more clearly delineate which initiatives are responses to a new international environment and which are a continuation of Japanese globalization that dates back to the Fukuda era.

The book identifies many areas where Japan shows more leadership, especially in pushing for domestic economic reform and bolstering international multilateralism. However, demographic headwinds remain strong, economic conditions severely hinder ambitious security agendas, the government is beleaguered with scandals, the United States is locked in the Middle East and Europe, NATO (especially France) is cautious about bilateral commitments, and the global environment has become more, not less, threatening. Japan is demonstrating leadership by filling in a role the United States has seemingly abandoned, but the degree to which it has reshaped the Indo-Pacific remains to be seen.

If this summation of this book jumps around, it is because Solís provides a multilayered analysis of distinct economic, political, and security issues that demands several readings of this book. Despite connective threads that tie across diverse topics, the text of *Japan's Quiet Leadership*

is an easy-to-follow, brisk 226 pages, and I would have gladly read another 100. Solís successfully debunks the myth that Japan is a non-player in international relations and has rather positioned itself at the forefront of economic, security, environmental, and technological battlegrounds. She is careful not to fall into the growing sentiment among some in the policy world that Japan's leadership is a sign of eroding pacifism and a return to "normalization," concluding that "hardened pragmatism seems a more adept descriptor of Japan's national mood as it reckons with a world of growing antagonism" (p. 214). There are enough hints in the book that this pragmatism will be a difficult journey, and possibly a lonely one, if Japan remains alone in staving off populism and committing to a rules-based liberal order. This valuable lesson should be internalized by policymakers interested in the future of East Asia and, more importantly, all readers concerned about the future of democracy. ◆


Japan as a Quiet Harbinger of Economic Security

Kristin Vekasi

Mireya Solís's outline of Japan's "quiet leadership" is an important corrective to any lingering assumptions of Japanese social, political, or economic stagnation that have followed the country since the low-economic growth era began in the 1990s. *Japan's Quiet Leadership: Reshaping the Indo-Pacific* is an important contribution both to how the scholarly community should treat Japan as a case study and how other highly industrialized democracies can learn from Japan's experience in facing contemporary geoeconomic challenges. In a 2023 article, scholar Phillip Lipsky defined a harbinger state as one that "engages in the politics of a particular issue" earlier than other states and then can serve as either an instructive failure or a successful case to emulate. He argued that Japan can be seen as a harbinger state in several issue areas, including how it has transformed its international posture and engagement.¹ Solís's book provides a deeper dive into how Japan's external economic policies, quiet though they may be, are at the leading edge of attempting to manage the geoeconomic risks of the contemporary era.

Japan's harbinger status is evident in its responses to the downsides of economic globalization, including the industrial hollowing-out that occurred in the 1990s, growing inequality, and the challenges of incorporating a massive nonmarket economy led by a one-party state into global institutions. As we have witnessed in the United States and Europe, these factors raise the potential for populist backlash, which has not yet reared its head in Japan. Instead, Japan has shown leadership in quietly addressing regional economic issues and balancing its domestic and international priorities with respect to its relationships with the United States and China. Not all these efforts have succeeded—leadership does not mean that Japan has successfully navigated the tough regional dilemmas—but they do show some pathways forward.

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¹ Phillip Y. Lipsky, "Japan: The Harbinger State," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 1 (2023): 80–97.  <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109922000329>.

In the realm of external economic cooperation, I agree with Solís's argument that Japan has been a regional if not global leader, and not just over the past decades. Japan's economic security policies, including the recent Japanese Economic Security Promotion Act, are often explained as responses to the increasing skepticism toward globalization within the United States and Japan's difficult position amid U.S.-China trade frictions. However, Japan is arguably a harbinger of the approach to economic security that is now being variably adopted in the United States, European Union, South Korea, and elsewhere. Although current U.S.-China frictions have certainly influenced the shape and focus of the policy approach, particularly with respect to promoting diversified supply chains, they should not be seen simply as reactive to the demands of Japan's ally but instead also as proactive and, of course, in service to Japan's own national interests.

It is instructive to look at some of the history of how Japan has been walking the geoeconomic tightwire for decades. Solís cites a 1980 effort empowered by Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira on "comprehensive security," started in response to the OPEC oil crises, the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system, and the reformation of global politics (p. 151). This effort led to Japan's then Ministry of International Trade and Industry formalizing the economic security concept in 1982.² In language that should sound familiar to observers of current Japanese politics, the comprehensive security research group established at Ohira's behest wrote of the challenge of the decline of Pax America "without any alternative order."³ The report continued,

This reality has turned security issues from being isolated to becoming comprehensive and urgent. Whereas in the past we could rely on the sound functioning of the system, we now must make efforts to somehow maintain the system while also helping ourselves.⁴

Japan is continuing its "self-help" policy by attempting to bolster a rules-based international order through institutional efforts that include regional trade agreements as well as bilateral and minilateral cooperation with other Indo-Pacific countries.

² Masako Suginothara, "Economic Security: The Case of Japan" (presentation at the Japan Association of International Relations Annual Conference, Sendai, Japan, 2022).

³ Akihiko Tanaka et al., "Sogo anzen hosho kenkyu gurupu hokokusho" [Report of the Comprehensive Security Research Group], Comprehensive Security Research Group, July 2, 1980
 ~> <https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPSC/19800702.01J.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

Solís discusses Japan's role as a provider of infrastructure and investment in Southeast Asia (pp. 134–36 and 186–88). Although the countries in Southeast Asia are at the front lines of the competition between the United States and China, Solís rightly points out it is Japanese public and private investments in businesses and infrastructure that are truly balancing those from China, and typically not in an explicitly competitive way (p. 134). In fact, setting aside the highly publicized case of high-speed rail in Indonesia, Japanese infrastructure projects are often complementary to Chinese ones. At the same time, Japanese private and public investments in the region also have roots back to the crises of the 1970s as Japan attempted to balance its security and economic ties. The same 1980 comprehensive security research group report cited above discusses Japan's need to make political contributions with its economic power around the region to develop comprehensive security and not be an “economic giant” and “political dwarf.”⁵ In recent years, Japan has been a leader in regional institution building, particularly in new regional economic agreements. Although to be clear, these have not cured Japanese anxiety about overdependence on the Chinese economy or the security challenges that the rise of China poses, they have contributed to a more robust regional rules-based architecture.

Solís also addresses how Japan's experience with supply chain vulnerability and building supply chain resilience, sparked by the 2010 rare earth imbroglio with China amid a maritime territorial dispute, preceded recent similar efforts by the United States. The 1980s-era policies also focused on access to commodities and highlighted the issue that politicized commodity markets were a “crisis that money cannot solve” as politics rather than supply and demand began to drive markets. One of the policy responses was to start to stockpile critical minerals, of which Japan first developed a systematic list in 1984 (the United States' first formal list was published in 2018), as well as to build support for overseas private-sector diversification and investment. The 1980s approach to comprehensive security declined in the 1990s, but some of the tools remained in the state's toolbox. The successful rare earth diversification efforts that began in 2009 and accelerated after the 2010 crisis were new initiatives that also borrowed from previous experience on aspects like institutional support, funding structure, and recruitment of firms.

As we examine and assess the challenges and successes of current “de-risking” efforts amid U.S.-China frictions, one important lesson is

⁵ Tanaka et al., “Sogo anzen hoshō kenkyū gurupu hokokusho.”

that Japan's regional and economic security efforts have succeeded in the areas where Japan has deep institutional roots and capacity. As the United States attempts to diversify and build its own resilient supply chains, find its way on trade policy, and counter China's overseas economic diplomacy, superficial imitation of industrial policy or regional investments will likely be ineffective. However, the careful study in this book of Japan's path of quiet leadership yields important lessons for U.S. policymakers, ones I hope will be widely heeded. ◆

No Longer Underrated: A New Tale of Japan's Domestic and International Political Economy

Hiroki Takeuchi and Natalya Talih

In her latest book, *Japan's Quiet Leadership: Reshaping the Indo-Pacific*, Mireya Solís argues that Japan's roles in geoeconomics and geopolitics have changed over the last few decades as the country has gone from being a passive follower of the United States to being a proactive leader in the Indo-Pacific region. Japan has long maintained the status of underperformer and been plagued with periods of economic stagnation. In recent years, however, Japan has been able to not only transform its domestic politics but also reemerge as an influential actor in international relations, especially in the Indo-Pacific. As Solís highlights in the introduction, "the image of Japanese stagnation is pervasive yet inaccurate, for it glosses over the profound currents of change in Japan's economy and politics as well as the marked transformation in the country's international role" (p. ix).

Solís separates her book into five different yet related sections: globalization, economics, politics, geoeconomics, and geopolitics. She highlights how Japan's proactive attempts to interconnect the domestic political economy to geoeconomics and geopolitics have enabled Japan to play a leadership role in shaping the international order in the Indo-Pacific and, more broadly, the globalized world. The book makes at least three major contributions to the fields of international relations and Japanese political economy, filling important gaps to contribute to a greater understanding of Japan's strategic interactions with the world.

First, the book offers an excellent explanation on how Japan has responded to what Richard Baldwin calls the "New Globalization" in which manufacturers procure parts produced abroad and different stages of manufacturing production are located in different countries.¹ It emphasizes that the New Globalization has been essential in the development of Japan's political economy since its bubble economy burst in the early 1990s.

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¹ Richard Baldwin, *The Great Convergence: Information Technology and the New Globalization* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).

Although the Japanese economy stagnated in the 1990s, Japanese companies took advantage of the New Globalization as a business opportunity and expanded their international production networks, called global value chains, in the Asia-Pacific region. Also evident in the 1990s was China's economic rise. Solís has previously shown how China's rise gave Japan a strong incentive to play a proactive role in international trade negotiations to avoid being overshadowed by a rising China.²

Solís starts the first chapter with the puzzling observation that “Japan has not experienced the anti-globalization backlash that has consumed other industrialized nations” (p. 3). Why has Japan been immune to the populist backlash to globalization taking place all over the world, especially in developed countries, as a response to the new globalization and China's rise? Although “Japanese companies [have] diverted...their manufacturing activities to other parts of East Asia” (p. 9), Japan has successfully alleviated the negative impact of trade with China (in contrast to the United States), and instead made it beneficial: “Japanese prefectures that import more intensively from China experienced *growth* in industrial employment, especially if those imports were intermediate products” (p. 12, italics in the original). In other words, Japan has implemented domestic policies so that the firms and sectors that benefit from the new globalization can concentrate on higher-value-added stages of global value chains—making Japan more competitive—while outsourcing lower-value-added stages to other countries in the region.

Solís also discusses Japan's policies toward foreign workers, commonly referred to as the country's “immigration” policies. Japan traditionally has been notoriously restrictive in this issue area but has recently strived to reform. In the 2010s Japan began a series of reforms establishing “unofficial side channels for unskilled immigration” in an attempt to integrate foreign workers, although these were “problematic due to a lack of support measures for adjustment to life in Japan and subpar labor protections” (p. 29). Finally, in 2019 Japan enacted more comprehensive immigration reforms. In general, these changes reflect increasing labor shortages in the manual labor market as the country's economy had shifted focus to higher-value-added, high-skilled jobs.

Second, *Japan's Quiet Leadership* ties together Japanese domestic economic and political reforms of the last three decades. In the second and

² Mireya Solís, *Dilemmas of a Trading Nation: Japan and the United States in the Evolving Asia-Pacific Order* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

third sections of the book, Solís shows how a series of domestic reforms undertaken since the 1990s, while incremental, have had a significant impact on Japanese domestic politics and international relations.

The second section opens with the so-called lost decade that followed the 1990s onset of economic stagnation; since then, “Japan has been saddled with low growth and stubborn deflation...[in addition to] a rapidly ageing and contracting population” (p. 41). However, in the 21st century, Japan has been able to slowly shift the global perceptions of the country’s reality and overcome these economic struggles. This process began with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2001 undertaking wholesale liberalization efforts to break with “the grip of iron triangles on policymaking by empowering prime-minister-appointed councils to take the lead on priority policies” (p. 46). While Koizumi’s tenure did not greatly influence Japanese politics, later economic reforms are rooted in these reforms and politics that were extremely popular. In 2012 Shinzo Abe campaigned for his second term on a promise to revitalize the economy, calling his reform plan “Abenomics,” which intended to promote growth by weakening the yen and increasing outbound FDI. Although some of Abe’s strategic approaches to the economy were successful (e.g., agricultural reform), “they missed their target of avoiding an unequal recovery” (p. 64). Despite continued demographic decline and increasing inequality, however, “deepening socioeconomic cleavages have not led to political polarization” (p. 69).


While Japanese politics has so far escaped a populist backlash, the country has suffered from the lack of alternatives to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in its democratic electoral system. During the Abe administration’s second term from 2012 to 2021, Solís shows how the LDP managed to keep winning the national elections *because of*—not *despite*—a growing decline in voter turnout (p. 100, Figure 6.1). During that period, the LDP won the elections even though fewer people voted for the LDP, as even fewer voters voted for opposition parties. In other words, many voters were disappointed and disillusioned with the LDP but were not dissatisfied enough to want to vote for opposition parties—rather, they stayed home on election day. After Abe, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga built his reform plans on “two areas where Abenomics had underdelivered or was missing in action: digital transformation and climate change” (p. 103). Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, on the other hand, has focused his reforms through the “New Capitalism” strategy. Overall, Solís argues that the political and administrative reforms conducted during the 1990s transformed Japanese

politics by laying the foundation for a stable governmental structure in which reform policies can be implemented.

Third, Solís successfully demonstrates how domestic reforms undertaken since the 1990s have formed Japan's new geoeconomic and geopolitical strategies. Regarding geoeconomics, Japan has repositioned itself to play a leadership role in support of the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. When President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017, "Prime Minister Abe decided to put the full weight of Japan as the largest remaining economy behind the trade pact to rescue it" (p. 127). Moreover, Abe proposed the "free and open Indo-Pacific," a grand vision in which Japan plays a vital economic and security role in the region. Solís notes that "Japan is *the* peer competitor to China in the field of infrastructure finance" and that in providing this infrastructure to developing states in the region, "Japan was pursuing larger national interests: preventing China from dominating the regional order and directing it instead toward Japan's own vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (pp. 132, 134, italics in the original). In sum, Japan has taken a proactive stance in the Indo-Pacific region "to develop an economy and society resilient to risks by...protecting critical infrastructure, energy sufficiency, and digital and technological developments...and [by] crafting economic security rules for the financing of commodities among countries with shared values" (p. 152).

In the final section, Solís discusses how Japan has transformed its security policies in response to the new geopolitical threats emanating from neighboring countries North Korea, Russia, and most significantly China. A series of security reforms conducted by the Abe administration, culminating with the 2015 security legislation, "deepened the U.S.-Japan security bond in new ways by enabling greater joint planning for contingencies, eliminating the geographical boundaries to allied security cooperation, and achieving greater interoperability in the revised 2015 U.S.-Japan defense guidelines" (p. 184). Then, the Russian invasion of Ukraine motivated Japan and the Indo-Pacific region to give a new look to the growing tensions between China and Taiwan: "Prime Minister Kishida drew a direct connection to safeguarding peace in the Indo-Pacific...[and] urged a resolute stand against the use of force to unilaterally change the status quo, in order to maintain stability in the Taiwan Strait" (p. 206). According to Solís, to make deterrence work, Suga and Kishida "have gone further in explicitly calling out China's disruptive behavior to the regional order and asserting

the importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait in joint statements with the American president” (pp. 206–7).

In sum, in this fascinating book, Solís has demonstrated how a series of domestic reforms since the 1990s has enabled Japan to play a leadership role in “taming a Hobbesian world” (p. 203). Japan’s emergence as a leader in the Indo-Pacific region suggests that there is a commitment to domestic reforms required to implement a rules-based grand strategy in international relations. Perhaps the biggest challenge that Japan may have to confront is the task of spreading its liberal norms, such as free trade and multilateral cooperation, without the assurance of U.S. involvement, given that U.S. president Joe Biden has failed to gain domestic support for a commitment to international leadership. The United States continues to fall short of its role as international rulemaker as it increasingly retreats from internationalism and reformism due to its domestic politics. Furthermore, the uncertainty of the outcome of the 2024 U.S. presidential election will significantly affect Japan and its potential to rise to the challenge of leading the liberal international order in the Indo-Pacific. *Japan’s Quiet Leadership* opens up new lines of inquiry in the study of Japan’s imprint on the world and will serve as a reference for years to come. 

Author's Response:
Japan's International Leadership—Does It Have Staying Power?

Mireya Solís

Not long ago, a robust and spirited discussion of Japanese leadership—one that would place Japan at the center of Indo-Pacific geopolitics and geoeconomics—would have been hard to fathom. The prospect of Japan's brand of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" becoming the term of reference for other regional and extraregional actors, of Tokyo and Washington swapping places as the bulwark of free trade, or of Japanese social resilience providing a buffer to the inward populist wave afflicting the West would have appeared implausible. Not anymore. The very thoughtful contributions of all the reviewers that have engaged and probed the arguments advanced in *Japan's Quiet Leadership* attest to that.

Each of the four reviews is nuanced and offers a unique vantage point. The collection of essays will enable the reader to grasp the manifold dimensions of Japan's internal evolution and external role. As an author, I feel particularly gratified that this group of experts sees value in what I believe is a distinct contribution of the book: the interweaving of multiple substantive domains that can help us appreciate underrated synergies and take us beyond traditional domestic/international and economics/security divides in the study of Japan. Moreover, the reviewers support the book's core analytical arguments: (1) Japan has come out of the three "lost decades" with heightened international influence, (2) Japan has done so through an all-out network strategy centered on a broad economic connectivity agenda and active security diplomacy that deepened the alliance bond with the United States and at the same time diversified Japan's security partnerships, and (3) domestic change—economic, societal, and political—is essential to understand the emergence of Japan's energized foreign policy.

The most probing questions arising from the reviews are about the future of Japanese international leadership. Can it be sustained? Will it adapt to the harsher realities of the security environment in the Indo-Pacific and beyond? Some of the reviewers offer their own insights on Japan's track record on traditional security, economic security, and trade policies, amping up the discussion of if, when, and how Japan is reshaping the Indo-Pacific. One of

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the reviewers also takes me to task in my analysis of Japanese populism. I will respond to each of these discussion streams in reverse order.

Tom Le finds insufficient my assessment of stunted populism in Japan. His critique comes in several parts: that I have not developed a theory for the absence of populism, do not draw extensive cross-national comparisons, fail to connect my discussion of immigration policies to weak populism in Japan, and have not fully considered hypotheses such as “the public’s sensitivity to mass movements due to Japan’s monumental defeat in World War II, the strict constitution limiting the government’s power over the public, limited religiosity in the postwar era, or simply different race and class politics in Japan compared to higher immigrant-receiving countries.” I disagree with Le on some fronts but also find common ground on others.

I believe the book makes a greater contribution to explaining Japan’s resilience to populism than Le gives it credit for. My goal has not been to develop a theory of populism or its lack thereof, but rather to bring the analytical rigor of general theories of populism¹ to the study of Japan because often populism is loosely equated with unconventional leadership styles or policies that pander to public sentiment. Instead, as theorists of populism point out, what distinguishes populism is its Manichean ideology—separating the “good people” from the “corrupt elite”—with both strains of anti-establishmentarianism and strains of anti-pluralism.² Populist leaders and movements erode the foundations of representative democracy by denying minority rights and weakening institutional checks and balances. Armed with these heuristics, a careful parsing of the evidence shows that while Japan has had a crop of anti-establishment politicians (e.g., Junichiro Koizumi, Toru Hashimoto, Yuriko Koike), they have not followed the anti-pluralism playbook of populist leaders, and populist parties (e.g., Sanseito) remain too small to disrupt national politics.

The book also explores why common drivers of populism elsewhere—a backlash against globalization blaming trade liberalization or immigration for national woes, social cleavages produced by increased income inequality, or political polarization—have not produced a populist turn in Japan. It notes that Japan has experienced extensive economic globalization but built its trading relationship with China through a greater reliance on supply chains, thereby mitigating labor adjustment costs. The chapter

¹ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

² Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

on immigration policies shows that the penchant of policymakers for social stability by delaying as much as possible formal entry of nonskilled workers came at a high price for Japan's growth and its inability to stave off the consequences of demographic decline. It points out that immigration politics have played a more prominent role at the local than national level, with no major party using anti-immigration rhetoric for mass social mobilization. In fact, Hiroki Takeuchi and Natalya Talih single out the book's explanation of why globalization (trade and immigration) has not led to an inward turn in Japan as one of its most significant contributions.

Across different chapters, the book provides evidence for muted social and political polarization despite decades of low growth, stagnant wages, and dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). It underscores some buffers to social divisiveness in Japan's low unemployment rates even during steep recessions and the egalitarian bent of its welfare system. But my analysis also underscores that the low-growth economy has placed disproportionate costs on part-time and female employees. While the phenomenon of zero-sum politics creating a penchant for extraconstitutional tactics³ has not come to Japan, the lack of meaningful political competition undercuts democratic dynamism through voter disengagement and complacency in the ruling party. I do concur with Le that further research of Japan's resiliency to populism is warranted, research that would not only explore the above mechanisms in greater depth but would look at other variables and introduce more comparative analysis. That would yield new research questions such as why countries that experienced mass mobilization and war defeat (Germany and Italy) have nevertheless been more fertile ground for far-right populism than Japan.

The keen insights from the reviewers on Japan's security and foreign economic policies help further the discussion of the reach and limits of Japanese leadership. Adam Liff notes that the book "offers a compelling reminder that relative material power is not all that matters in international politics. Especially in partnership with like-minded actors, be they the United States, the European Union, or others, Japanese leaders have repeatedly exercised meaningful and significant agency. In key instances, they have even charted a course for U.S. leaders to follow." Kristin Vekasi observes that "Japan's external economic policies, quiet though they may be, are at the leading edge of attempting to manage the geoeconomic risks of the contemporary era." She skillfully tracks Japan's current efforts at reducing

³ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018).

overdependencies and using economic engagement for political purposes to the comprehensive security policies of the 1980s, drawing an important lesson for U.S. policymakers: “Japan’s regional and economic security efforts have succeeded in the areas where Japan has deep institutional roots and capacity.” Hence “superficial imitation of industrial policy or regional investments will likely be ineffective.”

Apropos of the historical roots of Japan’s statecraft, Le suggests the book would have benefited from providing a broader look at policy changes over the last 75 years and more clearly distinguishing which initiatives are a continuation of the past and which are a response to the new international environment. I submit that the book does provide such contextualization. It discusses Japan’s renunciation of great-power politics following its defeat in World War II; the undeveloped operationalization of the U.S.-Japan alliance during the Cold War era; and Tokyo’s reluctance to take on an overt regional political role, aware of the trust deficit in Southeast Asia that the 1977 Fukuda Doctrine sought to repair. The nature of security reforms from the second Abe administration onward has been markedly different: articulating a vision for regional order in the “free and open Indo-Pacific,” endorsing the right of collective self-defense under certain conditions, cultivating security partnerships with multiple nations, and abandoning the self-imposed 1% ceiling on defense expenditures, to name a few. Early in the postwar era, Tokyo relied on economic assistance to repair ties with Asian nations and broke with aid orthodoxy by emphasizing loans for infrastructure. Japanese companies further knitted the region together when they invested in droves to overcome the added costs of a high yen in the 1980s. But Japan did not play a proactive role in World Trade Organization trade rounds nor did it embrace early free trade agreements due to its own domestic political constraints. Here too, there is a marked contrast with current foreign economic strategy. The infrastructure finance push continues but is now part of the broader regional blueprint and with a Japanese brand (focused on quality and debt sustainability) to distinguish it from China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Japan has also championed several mega trade agreements and has added economic security tools not only to procure key raw materials but also to mitigate risks of technology chokepoints.

A most pressing question raised by the reviewers of the book is on the staying power of Japan’s leadership. Will the country’s domestic transformation to date and the government’s proactive foreign policies position Japan well for the ever-expanding rifts in world politics?

“Considering that Japan’s own leaders now frequently identify the regional security environment as at its worst since World War II and remark on the exigent need to bolster deterrence against ‘unilateral changes to the status quo,’” Liff remarks, “it remains to be seen whether even Japan’s remarkably ambitious 2022 national security strategy is sufficient for what Solís refers to as ‘a world of growing antagonism.’” Le notes that Japan’s hardened pragmatism “will likely be a difficult journey, and possibly a lonely one, if Japan remains alone in staving off populism and committing to a rules-based order.” Along similar lines, Takeuchi and Talih observe, “Perhaps the biggest challenge that Japan may have to confront is the task of spreading its liberal norms, such as free trade and multilateral cooperation, without the assurance of U.S. involvement, given that U.S. president Joe Biden has failed to gain domestic support for the commitment to international leadership.”

This is, unquestionably, a moment of exigency for Japan and the liberal world order. Domestic developments show that politics do rhyme. Prime Minister Kishida faces a difficult reelection bid as LDP president with weak public support and recent LDP losses in parliamentary by-elections. Like before, the Japanese public is unconvinced that the ruling party can deliver on political reform. U.S. voters face a most consequential rematch this fall that could see the return of a populist leader who is skeptical of alliances and relishes tariffs as a tool of national power. Global stability is increasingly compromised by the Hamas-Israel war and the more volatile situation in the South China Sea with China’s growing use of force against Philippine resupply missions in the Second Thomas Shoal. While not constituting formal alliances, and at times working at cross-purposes, growing security cooperation among authoritarian powers—such as China, Russia, and North Korea—also degrades the security environment.

Huge political tests at home and abroad are on the horizon for both Japan and the United States. While the future cannot be foretold, key assets for Japan’s continued leadership are the national consensus in favor of international liberal norms and strengthened institutional capacity to formulate national strategies. Japan’s network diplomacy has proven prescient. Tokyo continues to be the partner of choice for the issue-based coalitions with which Washington is responding to the new geopolitics, not only the revived Quad during the Trump administration but also trilaterals that include South Korea and, more recently, the Philippines under Biden’s tenure. All told, Japan is likely to loom large in the map of the critical Indo-Pacific region. ◆