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The Legacy of Shinzo Abe

Edited transcript

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Andrew Peaple: Hello and welcome to CSDS-Asia Matters, the podcast where we go behind the headlines to understand the background to the biggest stories in the world's most fascinating region. I'm Andrew Peaple.

The assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has shocked the world, and not just because of the rarity of such gun violence in Japan. Abe, Japan's longest serving Prime Minister until he stepped down in 2020, was arguably one of the country's most consequential leaders, overseeing a program of economic reform at home, which came to be known as Abenomics, and a reorientation of Japan's approach to foreign policy and national security.

In this episode, we're going to discuss the legacy of Shinzo Abe, particularly in international affairs with two experts. Eva Pejsova is the Senior Fellow at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy at the Brussels School of Governance. Hello again to you, Eva.

Eva Pejsova: Hi, Andrew,

Peaple: And Dr. Mike Green. Mike is the chief executive of the US Study Centre at the University of Sydney, and the author of 'Line of Advantage, Japan's grand strategy in the era of Shinzo Abe'. Hello to you, Mike.

Mike Green: Thank you, Andrew, good to see you.

Peaple: Thanks to both of you for joining us so soon after this awful news. Mike, I wanted to turn to you first. Abe had two periods as Prime Minister, as we know, but I wanted to focus really on his second more significant period in office which began back in 2012. Can you start by outlining the position Japan was in when he took over, in terms of its global reputation and power, and why the country was ready for a new strategy both at home and abroad.

Green: You're right to focus on his second term, which began in 2012. Because when he came to power in 2006, as Prime Minister he wasn't ready and he fell from power. Suddenly, with a physical breakdown, really a mental breakdown, in 2007 he gave his cabinet almost no warning and resigned on national TV, and most people thought he'd never come back.

But he did. He studied in the wilderness. I saw him several times for meals as he was looking at what was happening to Japan, and thinking really about how he could come back and lead the country again, which seemed unlikely. But what happened was that the period from 2009 to 2012 was very tough for Japan. The financial crisis, of course, hit Japan's economy like others; the ruling Democratic Party of Japan really struggled to find its footing and there were new Prime Ministers every year for six years, three LDP, three DPJ. President Obama and other world leaders couldn't even keep track and dismissed one of the leaders, the first DPJ Prime Minister, as loopy because he had such bizarre foreign policy pronouncements.

Meanwhile, China was expanding its military and paramilitary presence in the East China Sea and South China Sea; Russia, Korea were all landing on islands that Japan claimed. It was a period of humiliation and the arrival of Xi Jinping really sent a warning signal.

So in that context, Abe was brought back within the LDP, and then won a landslide victory in 2012. And he was the man for the moment, as Japan tried to restore its standing and its national security. As he said at a speech in Washington I hosted at CSIS in February 2013, I am back and so is Japan, Japan is not now, and will never be a tier two country. And that's what he tried to achieve over his long role as prime minister.

Peaple: In your book, you write that his transformation of Japan's grand strategy was as profound as anything undertaken by any of Japan's postwar leaders, and marked a new era of Japanese statecraft. This is obviously a broad question, but can you describe the main facets of his approach and where he placed that line of advantage that you refer to in the book's title?

Green: So the line of advantage, in Japanese the reiki sen, was used by the Meiji leader Yamagata Aritomo to describe the need for Japan, as it emerged in the 19th century, to have not just coastal defence, but to shape the strategic environment around Japan. And that history ended up being tragic for Korea, China, Asia, and Japan, of course, but the basic concept that Japan had to shape its environment is what Abe was trying to bring back, but with a very different context: not the militarism of the pre-war Japan, but an alignment of maritime democracies. So that's the core of the strategy.

Abe was an ideologue, as many have noted. But I've spent time with him, and others who have studied him and who knew him, say that first and foremost, he was a strategist, a grand strategist in the tradition of Winston Churchill or Theodore Roosevelt, or Henry Kissinger. And he sought to restore Japan’s standing at a time of relative declining power by strengthening alignment with other maritime democracies, first and foremost, the US. The Yoshida doctrine — the foreign policy framework of Japan's towering Prime Minister until Abe, Yoshida Shigeru, the post-war Prime Minister — the Yoshida doctrine basically used Article Nine of Japan's peace constitution as an alibi to avoid risk in international affairs, and to focus on the economy. But Abe basically argued successfully to the Japanese people, that we need to accept risk, we need to stand up.

Key elements of his strategy were the Quad, which he proposed with the US, Japan, Australia and India; a free and open Indo Pacific strategy to invest in Asia to counter Chinese coercion; and revising the defence relationship with the US and Japan's interpretation of the constitution to allow Japan to engage in joint operations, collective self defence, and to take on risk with allies and partners for the first time — big, big moves, which now are the mainstream of Japanese foreign policy, backed by the reorganisation of Japan's government to create a National Security Council and more of an American presidential style of leadership and strategic direction for the country. So big, big changes, which now mark a new era.

Peaple: And to what extent, Mike, do you see this grand strategy and these features of Abe's approach as being something that was already taking shape in Japan? Was he really there being shaped by events, or do you see him more as really shaping events? To what extent he was a shaper and to what extent he was shaped by the circumstances he found himself in?

Green: Well, this is the old historian/social scientist's question about structure versus agency.

In an earlier book I wrote 20 years ago, called *Japan's Reluctant Realism*, I chronicled how in the decade after the post war, this Yoshida doctrine of passive involvement in international affairs was eroding, and how Japanese governments and prime ministers were starting to pursue more of a balance of power logic. So this has been building since the 90s, because of the collapse of Japan's economic miracle, the rise of China, uncertainty about the US. And even the last DPJ [Democratic Party of Japan] Prime Minister Noda was trying to implement many of the changes I just described, but his party was too divided. And he didn't have the political standing.

So in a way, Abe rode this wave, the structural change in international relations in the Japanese public's attitude towards China and the world, but they had been thinking in these terms for decades. And so he was the man for the moment. And he did shape this, I don't know that Japan would have had such a strong consolidation of its grand strategy or would have been so successful in shaping the strategic thinking of the US and Australia and others, if Abe hadn't been there. And if he hadn't had the leadership to stay in power for, you know, eight years, basically. So yes, he shaped events, but events made his comeback. And so it's a chicken and egg problem, which social scientists can argue about for decades, but had there been no Abe, we would have a different Japan today. That's for sure.

Peaple: Eva, I was wondering, is this how you broadly see the situation that Japan was in back in 2012, when Abe came to office? And do you share this view of him as being a transformational leader?

Pejsova: Well, absolutely, I would 100% second what Mike said. Of course, it's very difficult to add something to that, to be honest, but the personality facet is definitely there. And we can also see it by the scale of the reaction now after his assassination, he was an extremely popular and skillful diplomat. And he really managed to gather support for the policy that served Japanese national security interests so well, be it the Quad, be it the FOIP, he managed to sell the ideas

really well, from a sort of ideational point of view: Freedom, openness, prosperity, who can disagree with that.

And perhaps just to compliment on what Mike said on the engagement with maritime democracies, it was also with non-maritime non-democracies: I'm just thinking about his efforts to also engage Russia during his period. So it was really a global, in the French way of saying global, all-encompassing effort to create a friendly environment to Japan in which I think he very much succeeded. And that is something that is there to stay.

And I couldn't agree more on the fact that he was the right man in the right place at the right time. Because it is really both the external circumstances and factors, and the combination of domestic demand and the personality of Abe that facilitated this transformation. From a European point of view, we owe Abe most of the EU-Japan rapprochement that we have seen in the past couple of years, especially since 2016, 2017. As much as Abe was reaching out to all those different regional and global actors, he also put a great emphasis on building stronger ties with Europe, which resulted in a way with the Economic Partnership Agreement, the Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2018, and made the bilateral relationship as prosperous and onward going as it is now. So we owe him a lot.

Peaple: Mike, it's interesting, just going back to those early years, that when Abe came back to the premiership, there was some concern about him among policymakers under then-President Obama in the US. What were those concerns about, and what then developed as Abe's aims with regard to relations with the US?

Green: Well, Abe viewed the US-Japan alliance as absolutely critical to the restoration of Japan's security and standing. But unlike Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, for whom he worked, I wouldn't describe him as very sentimental about the alliance. He was very practical and utilitarian. And he needed the alliance to work. And so he rushed to meet Hillary Clinton in 2016 when she was a candidate, which is unheard of; world leaders don't rush to see one candidate in an election. But he went to see her in New York to start laying the groundwork for a stronger alliance. When she lost and he called President-elect Trump, he was on a trip to Latin America. He said, Hey, I'm gonna be in your neighbourhood. Why don't we get together for lunch? You know, I guess hemispherically, it's the same neighbourhood; and I'm not sure how much Donald Trump understood the geography, but he said, Sure. So he rushed to be one of the first leaders to meet Donald Trump.

Peaple: He was the first leader, wasn't he, to meet Trump?

Green: He was the first leader to meet with Donald Trump. A European leader, even a British prime minister, could never have gotten away with that in domestic politics, it would have looked too obsequious to Trump, even a Canadian prime minister couldn't have done it. But the Japanese public wanted their Prime Minister to have a strong relationship with the US to deal with China, and Abe had room to do that. And he shored up Donald Trump, he was the Trump whisperer.

To your question, when he came back to power in 2012, the Obama administration was very divided about China at that time. One group wanted to solidify US-China relations, they were beginning to look at Xi Jinping 's proposal for a new model of great power relations, that kind of grand bargain. I would describe them more as the sort of liberal, idealist wing of the Democratic Party.

The more conservative, realist, balance of power wing of the party welcomed Abe; that would be people like Hillary Clinton, or Secretary of Defence Ash Carter, or Kurt Campbell, who's now in the White House. And so those on the left saw Abe as a dangerous revisionist, and behind closed doors were scathing about him. And frankly, the Chinese saw an opening and they attacked Abe around the world. Ambassadors wrote op-eds, attacking Abe in The Washington Post, in The Telegraph: I think the best op-ed was the Telegraph ,where the Chinese ambassador in London compared Abe to Lord Voldemort from Harry Potter. The Chinese really tried to isolate him, his ideas for the Quad, and so forth were pooh-pooed by foreign policy establishments. But now those ideas — the Quad balance of power, a Free and Open Indo Pacific — are broadly accepted on a bipartisan basis in the US, Australia. I'll defer to Eva but I think in much of Europe now, that vision has prevailed. But it is worth remembering that 10 years ago, people thought he was a little too ideological, a little too spicy for a time when we were trying to build stable relations with China.

Peaple: It's amazing, really, that actually, during his period in office, Japan became a sort of thought leader, as you say, in that region. Eva, can you talk a little bit more about that? I mean, the way that Japan had had this sort of very passive foreign policy for so long, has suddenly become the country that others look to, for their philosophy on Southeast Asia and the Indo Pacific more broadly?

Pejsova: Well, absolutely. It was the same line, it was the same context in Europe, which Mike just said: the language about the free and open Indo Pacific is really the language that was adopted by the European Union’s Indo-Pacific strategy. And that was the language used by Abe, and adopted not just by Australia and the US, but also ASEAN to certain extent, or India. It's a language that has become mainstream.

But on the European side, it was push and pull factors, really. It was around the same time, we're talking 2016, when the US withdrew a little bit, and there was this great disappointment or era of uncertainty with regards to the transatlantic relations. It was a push from Japan, but also Korea to a certain extent, Australia and some of the like minded Indo-Pacific partners, for Europe to be more involved in the region. And on the other hand, it was, of course, Europe's own disappointment with China. It is since 2016, that we see a much more cautious attitude to China being a major challenge, with the 5G scandals, with the Huawei scandals. So it is, again, a combination of factors, but Japan has played an absolutely major role in that.

And it is not just in the Europe-Japan relationship, but it is really regionally and globally. And I find it's especially interesting in the attitude towards China, when we were all looking for how to

approach China, especially in the Trump era. The whole idea of cooperating with China on trade, on issues of common interest, and not leaving China alone or sidelined, was pretty much promoted by Japan, and today that is what most big democracies are doing, including Australia, Europe and the United States to a certain extent. So here again, we see Japan's kind of ideational leadership in action.

Peaple: Mike, can you talk us through a very important stage in Abe's premiership in terms of foreign policy, at least, with the commitment to collective self defence with the US? First of all, can you explain what that debate was all about, why it was controversial within Japan, and what it has meant for Japanese foreign policy, why it's been such a big change?

Green: It's a great question, Andrew, because although it's rather arcane and technical, this change in how Japan interprets its peace constitution is really the most important piece of this transformation. It legally makes it difficult for future Prime Ministers of Japan to go back to the old way of foreign policy. The Japanese Constitution in Article Nine, the famous peace clause which was written by Americans during the occupation — New Deal idealists people who had worked on the Treaty of Paris, based on pre war interwar idealism — is legally mushy, but basically says Japan renounces the right of war to resolve international disputes, and will not maintain military forces for that purpose. So they've always had military forces, but not for that purpose. They've called them self-defence forces. And the Japanese government has interpreted that Article Nine as meaning that Japan will not exercise its right of collective defence, will not exercise, its right under the UN charter to come to the aid of other countries under attack, it will only defend itself if directly attacked — which of course significantly limits what Japan can do in any crisis. And throughout the post war period the mainstream Japanese political leaders found that very convenient, because during the Vietnam War, during the Gulf War, when NATO allies, when Australia, Korea were standing up and sending forces, the Japanese government said sorry, we'd love to help but our Constitution, which you Americans wrote, won't allow it, as we interpret it. And the Japanese public, above all, wanted to avoid what they called make komare, being entrapped in conflicts, again.

What Ave did in 2015, was introduced a major package of sweeping national security reforms, which were premised in part on a reinterpretation of that constitutional provision, to say that Japan does have the right to come to the help of close allies and partners — the United States, Australia, India, where mentioned, Korea sometimes mentioned — if they're under attack, and it is vital — this was the sort of reassuring part for the public — if it was vital for Japan's national survival, whatever that means. But it basically takes away the alibi, it means Japanese Prime Ministers going forward, if there's an international crisis, do not have an excuse, they have to make a political decision whether or not they will share the risk. And although Japan's not sending troops in the Ukraine crisis, you can see in the very robust response from Prime Minister Kishida, that the Japanese people now expect their leaders to lead, to stand alongside the US, Britain, Australia, France and others in resolving international crises. It may not mean they send troops, but it creates a very different framework, which will outlast Abe for generations, I think.

Peaple: It's a really significant aspect of his legacy. But having made that commitment in 2015, Mike, then you have Trump coming into office in 2016. Was there concern within Japan at all that actually Abe had made this big bet, this big move, which essentially meant the alliance with the US would get closer and closer — and then there comes into office, a US president who is bent on a more isolationist policy?

Green: Well, the Japanese public did not like Donald Trump, they did not revile him as much as European publics, but they didn't like him, they didn't trust him. But the Japanese government really liked the Trump administration, the hawks who came into the White House and the State Department and the Pentagon completely agreed with Abe's assessment of the China challenge. There was no debate as there had been in the Obama administration. So it was a strange sort of contradiction. Donald Trump was unpredictable, dangerous, but the Trump administration had a hawkish element that the Japanese government, that Abe's government could work with.

I think the reason Abe was so successful was not because Japan invented a completely new foreign policy. If you look at what Abe did, it was fundamentally about shoring up the liberal order the United States helped to build, at a time when the US was going through all kinds of internal distractions. And that's why it resonated with Western Europe, with Australia and others, because he wasn't inventing a Japanese world order. He was reinventing the American world order, and he was shoring up relations with the US to do it. It was deeply disturbing to Abe that there was a transatlantic split in the Trump years, and in the G7 and other forums he worked really hard to repair that, because he was about leading, but leading to reinvent and shore up the American led post-War liberal order to face this new challenge from China. So he was all in, in a way I think European leaders, except perhaps Theresa May were not, he was willing to embrace Donald Trump. Because it wasn't that he loved Donald Trump. He needed Donald Trump to step up and do what America has to do for Japan in the world.

Peaple: Quite a brave move in that sense, because the other major factor shaping Japanese foreign policy, at least externally, over this period is the rise of China, which continued pretty much unabated through Abe's period in office. You both referred to this already. But I wanted to ask how well do you think Abe's government responded to these conflicting pressures it faces which is on the one hand, Japan has pretty close economic ties with China, in terms of tourism, in terms of exports, manufacturing, and so on, alongside its desire to counter China's growing influence in the Asian region. How well did he thread that needle do you think?

Pejsova: Well, that's obviously very central to Japan's interest. As you said, we already mentioned it, it was really trying to balance, basically a very, very strong stance on territorial issues, on sovereignty, on China, and efforts to kind of unilaterally bend the rules based order in the region. It was through supporting, through capacity building, or the claimant stance of the states of South China Sea, for instance, working closely with Southeast Asia, working closely with other allies, etc, etc. It's a combination of a very strong stance on sovereignty, and these kinds of basic values, and an engagement on trade or climate or energy or connectivity for that matter with China, which as I said, is a model that is perpetuated by many now.

But if I just could come back a little bit on Prime Minister Abe's relations with former President Trump, I found from the European perspective, again, it was surprising and kind of admirable in a way, because at a time where all the European leaders were extremely, of course, critical, also pushed by their own domestic constituencies towards the Trump policies and wary and extremely cynical, sceptical — to see Abe's very close personal relationship with President Trump was puzzling to many. And we remember the many golfing pictures and phone calls. And again, I would emphasise the very strong personal charisma or diplomatic skills that Abe had in that sense, which were really clarifying, because not only did he need US to support for all the reasons that Mike already mentioned, but also to keep a very close eye and a kind of constant personal connection with Trump, to prevent any sort of bad surprises, which has been deemed to be very smart in the end, and managed to influence him somehow from behind. So I find that another very good example, if not the most telling one, of Abe's leadership and influence.

Peaple: And I guess arguably, there was no European leader during Trump's period in office that managed to form that kind of relationship with Trump.

Pejsova: Wellno, Macron tried, let's not forget, he invited President Trump for the 14th of July national parade with one of the biggest parades we've seen and he made the impression. French-American ties at the beginning were actually going quite well. So Macron would really stand out there with Theresa May, but for different reasons.

Green: And to be fair, Andrew, to be fair to European leaders, the America First movement that had its roots in American isolationism, that was reborn a bit with Trump, was also very much an Asia First movement. The right wing of the Republican Party, and frankly, going back to the 1860s and 70s, was always deeply, deeply sceptical about the European experiment. It had its roots in the American West and Midwest, largely from Czech and Hungarian and German and Irish immigrants who had left the old world, and believed that America should not corrupt itself by having deep relations with Europe. So that Trumpian, America First reaction against the EU and European experiment runs very, very deep.

And it made it very, very difficult for Macron or May or anyone, whereas the right wing's fascination with Japan and with countering China, that also goes back 100 or more years. You can see it in Steve Bannon, you can see it in the people who surrounded Trump on the national security side. So Abe did have an easier environment in the US to work with than European leaders.

But it was not cost free and it was painful, and he was exhausted by Donald Trump. He played golf, it looked fun: hee was exhausted. I once told one of his advisers, you know, you had 18 summits with Donald Trump already. And the advisor said, 'No, Prime Minister Abe had the same summit 18 times,' because every time Donald Trump would threaten to pull troops out of Korea and Japan, and every time they had to talk him out of it. I think it was exhausting. But he did it as a matter of patriotic duty, and I think Europe benefited.

Peaple: Yeah, I can imagine playing golf with Donald Trump is pretty hard work actually. Mike, towards the end of your book you have a very interesting line about how the Japanese almost became like the Greeks to the US's Romans, a similar position that Britain one saw itself having in terms of being the sort of wise counsellors to the dominant force of the day. Can you just expand on that a little bit, I thought it was a really interesting idea.

Green: I was quoting the famous Harold Macmillan line in World War Two, when he told the British General Staff that now that America is so powerful, they were like the Romans and Britain would be the Greeks who would be their advisors. And then someone pointed out to him, yes, but the Greeks were slaves, even the advisors. And so it's a difficult position.

And in many ways, the UK managed the US, except for the Suez Crisis, generally, very skillfully, and managed and shaped American power pretty skillfully. And this is also the era of Abe Shinzo. I think that the special relationship that US had with the UK, it's not being eclipsed by Japan, but it's being matched by Japan. We don't have Five Eyes, we don't have the deep history of over a century of fighting side by side and intelligence sharing, and even nuclear sharing. But in terms of thought leadership, Abe was the most influential leader in the world among US allies on American strategy. And that influence is enormous.

But the US is big and powerful and does not always listen. And I think one thing Abe did that is not always appreciated, was build strong ties with other allies. Now that I'm based in Sydney, Australia, I can see how deep and frequent the Japanese and Australian consultations are about how to shape the US. And I think Europe is increasingly — Eva would know better — but my impression is European capitals are increasingly working with Japan to shape the US. Everyone needs this US led order. But the US is big and powerful and doesn't always listen, and that's what Abe's successors now have to contend with. The good news is Japan is very popular in the US, Japanese ideas are respected. But you know, we're not the most agile power in the world these days.

Pejsova: Plus, we don't know what will happen in the next elections, right.

Peaple: So if we get Trump back, or we get a figure like Trump…

Pejsova: Yes, there is a lingering uncertainty: these connections were being formed slightly before Trump,but of course accentuated during Trump. So when we say America is back, but it's not really back in the same world, with the dynamic already created bilaterally, trilaterally among their own allies, that served somehow as a backup plan, if you want, I suppose, in the minds of many of those leaders, in the case that the US shifts, again, into less predictable foreign policy.

Green: I think Japanese foreign policy thinkers, while they worry about that, feel more confident they can manage the next presidency, because of the way they managed Trump. I personally don't think Donald Trump will be president again, but it is possible. And if we have that scenario, I think the Japanese people, and many in the US national security establishment will look to Japan, and also Australia, to start doing what Abe did in the Trump years. And it'll be interesting

to see if Europe, while it recoils and another Trump administration — which I think is unlikely now after these January 6 hearings — but if we have one, it'll be interesting to see if Europe now recognises in Japan a partner to try to shape and sort of work its way through what would be a difficult four years. Although as I said, I don't think that's where we're heading. But you know, it could happen.

Peaple: Absolutely. You have both painted a pretty positive picture of Abe's influence so far. But where did he fall short? Eva, you referred to one area already, which is Russia, where potentially you could say the Abe legacy won't have survived. But perhaps more importantly, relations with Korea were pretty bad all through Abe's premiership; even though on paper — and I know, there's all sorts of historical issues between Japan and Korea — but on paper, the two countries would seem to have quite a lot of interests in common. So Eva, let me start with you. Where did you think that Abby fell short? Or where did his revolution not quite develop as he would have liked it to?

Pejsova: Well, the Korean case is one example. But I think it would be quite unfair to blame it solely on Abe, because of course, the Japan-Korea relationship is a complicated one. We've talked about it before on this podcast. And it's not just with Korea, it's with China. And it all boils down to the historical revisionism which really is regional poison, and it will get better and worse again, probably, in the years to come. So this is not something that we would blame Abe for.

But of course, the fact that Abe is famous for his conservative views, his own family history, plays in his disfavour here; and some of the more nationalistic moves, including the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, and of course, the efforts to revise the Constitution, were often pointed to as underscoring the more nationalistic and dangerous turn in Japanese politics. And that's inside, and especially outside Japan.

But when we talk about shortcomings, I feel that there's a clear gap between the widely applauded achievements on the international scene, and the much less pleasant balance that we see domestically. And sometimes we hear about the domestic scandals, but it's often brushed off. But it's true that the domestic concerns were much graver, it seems, than the international ones. So it's not just, you know, scandals over the non-transparent financing of various projects, of preferential treatments to his friends, of media censorship, but also on the economic side. Abenomics worked to a certain limit only; womenomics did not succeed — again, whether that is a deeper structural problem of Japan, which I believe it is. It's more that problem than necessarily Abe. But overall, there were much more shortcomings at home than abroad. And that's something that needs to be remembered.

Peaple: Mike, what's your perspective there? Do you agree with that, that Abe was, broadly speaking, successful in foreign policy and a mixed record at home?

Green: I think you're both right that the relationship with South Korea, that was probably the biggest shortcoming in foreign policy. And as Eva points out, it's incredibly complicated, and plenty of blame to go around. But it is striking that Abe took big risks to try to strengthen

relations with Russia to counter Chinese influence, but didn't take big risks with Korea, which historically and geographically and in the US alliance system, is a much more important card in the deck. And so although it takes two to tango, you know, Seoul has to do its part, Korea would be a sort of a B-minus grade, or a not completely successful grade in the foreign policy.

His Abenomics economic programme was, on balance, successful. But this was not a broad structural reform to grow the economy, like Conservatives saw with Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan; or Australia, New Zealand, opening their economies in the 80s to grow. He did not undertake big structural reforms to have competition and growth. It was a more targeted, smart, but targeted series of reforms; improving the performance of the Tokyo Stock Exchange, reforming immigration and tourism, essentially tripling tourism in Japan. Even Womenomics, I'd give it a glass half full, more positive rating. Through a variety of reforms, he brought the number of women in the workforce up to the OECD average, it increased by about 3 million people, the number of women in the workforce: that was a pretty remarkable public policy achievement in a very short period of time. However, to Eva's point, the infrastructure, and the norms needed to really allow full participation by women in the economy, were insufficient. And so now they're starting to slide back again.

So yeah, he was not a massive economic reformer, he did targeted economic reforms. I had lunch with him in 2013. He said he was spending 70 percent of his time on the economy. But he framed it in terms of squeezing out growth where he could, keeping popular support up. I think his big focus was always on the reform of Japan's grand strategy externally that we've been describing.

Peaple: I guess when historians look back at this recent period, they'll see these leaders that have grown up in some of the major countries around the world, that are associated with being pretty authoritarian, pretty nationalistic: whether it's, you know, they're all on a sliding scale here. But whether it's Trump in the US, Modi in India, Xi in China, Putin in Russia, of course, and others that we could mention. Sometimes Abe gets lumped in with that crowd, partly, I guess, because he was quite a nationalist. Certainly, before he came to office. Do you think that's fair at all, to lump him in in that sort of group of strong men leaders? Where do you place him on that kind of scale? Mike, can I turn to you first on that?

Green: Well, he got along very well, with Erdogan and Modi and Trump, despite the frustrations with Tony Abbott in Australia, with Netanyahu. You know, this is an era where the foreign policy challenges, but also the limits of the social welfare state, mean that the kind of technocrats and bureaucrats don't fare well as leaders and these strong willed prime ministers and presidents stand out, it's kind of their era. And he got on with them.

Abe was a nationalist, in both the good and bad sense, I suppose. He did view the Tokyo war crimes tribunal and the judgement of Japan, as not fair. That said, in 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, he issued the longest statement of apology and remorse ever issued by a Japanese Prime Minister, actually longer than any ever issued by a German Chancellor. But, he said it was the last apology. That's what he wanted, was to get Japan out of

the penalty box. And I think he succeeded. But it did create some controversy with Korea and with some in Japan as well. That's the era we live in. I don't think, in terms of civil rights and domestic governance, he definitely is not in the same category as Modi or Erdogan, or Viktor Orban, definitely not. But he has a little bit of that to him. And people will comment on that, and you can see it in all the remembrances that well, it's overwhelmingly positive, there is commentary about how he does, at least on the better end of the spectrum, fall in with that group of leaders you mentioned.

Peaple: And of course, I suppose, putting democratic values at the core of Japan's foreign policy was important, particularly in concepts like the free and open Indo Pacific. I mean, how convincing do you think Abe was with that? How convincing do you think Japan is as a proponent of democratic values, especially, given its longer term history going back to the war, and so on?

Green: If that's for me, I'd answer by saying pretty convincing. In consistent public opinion polls in South and Southeast Asia, Japan is rated the most trusted country in the world. The Lowy Institute in Australia does a very interesting annual assessment of Asian power called Asia Power Index. And in 2019, ranking different power attributes of countries, they gave Japan top marks for thought leadership and leading the international liberal order. You see similar things in polls in Singapore, in Southeast Asia,. The Japanese political leadership has warmed to the idea that they should stand by universal values, democratic values. The current Prime Minister Kishida particularly believes in that.

But the Japanese take is different from the US take; it's more accommodating to the incomplete democratic processes in Southeast Asia. And it's softer than the US approach, but I think pretty effective. Japan's influence and respect, when you look at these polls, are not enough without US power. All these polls rate Japan highly except in terms of power. And so it's the alliance with the US, and the ability to align with Europe and the Quad, that gives Japan material power to back up its thought leadership. And that's why this is not a sort of Japanese leadership of Asia, like people talked about in the 80s, or the Greater East Asian prosperity sphere in the 1930s. It's thought leadership for a liberal order, aligning countries around a vision, that was not invented in Japan, is being refined by Japan. And I think for that reason, it has credibility, maybe in some ways more credibility than American arguments in parts of Asia.

Peaple: And Eva, it was noted at the start of the conversation that Abe came to office after one of these periods that Japan seems to have where Prime Ministers are going through a revolving door. And it often happens, it seems, that you have somebody who is in power for a long time — you think of Koizumi in the early 2000s — in office for a long period, followed by one of these periods of there being a new prime minister, seemingly, every every few months. Is there a danger now, do you think, that Japan slips back into that kind of period, and some of the momentum of the Abe inheritance is lost? I know Kishida has just won a significant victory in recent elections as we record this, but do you see this legacy lasting even if we go through one of those periods of revolving leaders?

Pejsova: Well, I think the chances are very solid this time, because as you said, the LDP has secured its majority now and we are sailing through, at least for the next three years, extremely stable waters, where the Kishida Government can basically implement all the policies that he wanted to, including the defence budget rise that we are likely to see, including pushing for the proposition to revise the Constitution. I think that there are solid chances now that the public opinion seems more mainstreamly aligned behind Abe's vision, that we will see definitely a continuation.

But if I can just quickly come back on the comparison with some of the autocratic leaders, I find that there's two main major differences between Abe and this group. And first is the fact that Abe was really not inward looking, as opposed to most of these: quite the opposite, he was outward looking. So you know, when you say he's a nationalist, some would argue he's actually an internationalist, but because it serves the Japanese domestic and national interest. And the second that I see is that Abe is not a populist, and perhaps with the slight exception of Korea here, in fact, many of the reforms that he tried to push were not very popular at home, you know, be it on the Constitution or revision, or much of the legislation that he passed to make that happen.

Green: Those are really good points from Eva. And if I can add to them, unlike these other leaders, we're talking about, Abe is not anti immigration. Japan's never had a very open immigration society, but in incremental ways, it is opening up at a time when these other countries are closing down. And the same is true for trade, to Eva's point about engaging the world not closing down. Japan is moving in an international and opening direction on trade, when many of these other countries are becoming more protectionist, including the US. When it came to power. About 16 percent of Japan's trade was covered by free trade agreements, economic partnership agreements and so forth, about 16 percent. When he left it was about 82 percent. So Japan is opening in a way these other leaders aren't, and I'm glad you've raised that because it's a really important distinction.

Peaple: And the last question for you Mike, then just to sum up, and Eva referred to it in her last comments. Has Abe taken the Japanese people with him, in terms of this overall approach to foreign policy. Because this is a country that had profound pacifist leanings, in a way unlike any other country, any other major country, at least, that we've seen in the past. It was a remarkable position for a major country to have. But do you think Abe has ultimately changed that in a lasting and stable way?

Green: He definitely has changed it. How far it goes, we'll have to see. So for example, Prime Minister Kishida's government is looking at increasing defence spending to 2 percent of GDP. It's officially about 1 percent, by NATO standards is probably closer to 1.2 percent. The public supports that, pacifist Japan, the public supports essentially doubling defence spending. In principle, the question is a fiscal question, will they issue more debt? Will they be willing to sacrifice social welfare spending to get defence spending? So I think Abe has won, broadly speaking, the ideological arguments; the Japanese people still hate war, that aspect of pacifism is still strong, but the idea they have to take risks, they have to be more proactive, they have to

do more to defend themselves, that has taken root. The real debates now I think, are going to be less about ideology and more about things like fiscal cost. And that's where you'll see the tension in Japanese politics going forward. In that sense, Abe's era is here to stay, at least three years, as Eva said, because of the electoral results, I'd say it's generational.

Pejsova: My final thoughts were pretty much the same. It's exactly that, Abe's era is here to stay and the legacy lives on.

Peaple: Well, thank you both so much for that fascinating discussion. They're really truly informative. We actually published an episode recently, which Eva also took part in, where we look at Japan's approach towards Southeast Asia. So there's more detail and more discussion of Japan's foreign policy in that episode as well. So do check that out. But for now, thank you to both of you. Thank you, Mike and Eva; as I say, tragic circumstances but a really fascinating discussion there.