

Forecast on the Political and Military Trends of Japan Based on the Impact of Trump's Geopolitical Decisions

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Abstract

This paper employs the methods of trend extrapolation and primary source interpretation to conduct an in-depth analysis of the impact of the Trump administration's policy changes on Japan's political and military trends. The article first reviews the traditional U. S. national strategy and the Rimland Theory, highlighting how the United States maintains its global hegemony by containing regional powers on the Eurasian continent. It then examines the shift in the Trump administration's international political decisions against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war, analyzing its strategic intentions of easing relations with Russia and containing China. Building on this, the paper provides a detailed analysis of Japan's geopolitical background, arguing that Japan's strategic choices are deeply influenced by Spykman's Rimland Theory. Japan is gradually enhancing its influence in East Asia through measures such as "de facto political normalization," military transformation, and the construction of multilateral alliances. The study finds that Japan, as a typical rimland state, is seeking a balance between China and the United States by combining economic cooperation with military deterrence. Japan is also accelerating military modernization, strengthening its alliance with the United States, and actively expanding its strategic space in the Indo-Pacific region. However, Japan's strategy of "dependent autonomy" faces numerous challenges, including over-reliance on U. S. security commitments and uncertainties in domestic politics. The paper concludes that Japan's strategic choices not only reflect its practice of the Rimland Theory but also demonstrate its long-term vision of reshaping the East Asian order in the era of great power competition. Whether Japan can successfully achieve this goal depends on its ability to balance alliance dependence and strategic autonomy.

Keywords: Trump Administration; International Politics; Global Situation; East Asian Security; Taiwan Issue

1. Introduction

With the profound changes in the international political landscape, especially the impact of the Trump administration's isolationist policies on the global strategic order, geopolitical strategies of nations have been constantly adjusted. Among them, Japan, as a vital ally of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, has drawn significant attention for its political and military strategic orientation. This paper aims to analyze the adjustments in Japan's political and military strategies under the new international situation by examining the policy changes of the Trump administration and to predict its future developmental trends.

The paper begins with a review of the traditional U. S. national strategy and its containment policy based on the Rimland Theory. Leveraging its advantageous geographical location, the United States has long been committed to containing any regional power on the Eurasian continent that might threaten its hegemony by controlling the two major arteries of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The theory of Nicholas Spykman, which underscores the significance of the "rimland," posits that the United States should establish a balance of power in East Asia and Europe to check the land-based powers of the "heartland." This theory has provided a crucial theoretical foundation for U. S. strategic decisions in the 20th century. Subsequently, the paper analyzes the shift in the Trump administration's international political decisions against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war. Russia, as a major power spanning the Eurasian heartland, wields considerable geopolitical influence. The Trump administration sought to ease relations with Russia to alleviate strategic pressure in the Far East while containing the rise of China. This strategic adjustment not only reflects a reassessment of the current international situation by the United States but also has far-reaching implications for Japan's geopolitical strategy. The paper further explores Japan's geopolitical background and its strategic choices. As the first modernized country in East Asia, Japan's strategic options have been profoundly influenced by Spykman's Rimland Theory. Located at the eastern edge of the Eurasian continent, Japan sits at the intersection of maritime and continental powers, a geopolitical configuration that endows it with an important role in international politics. Faced with pressures from China, North Korea, and Russia, Japan urgently needs to adjust its political and military strategies to safeguard its security and interests.

After examining Japan's geopolitical background, this paper delves into Japan's political and military trends in the current international situation. It points out that Japan is gradually achieving "de facto political normalization" through a series of strategic measures, including the decentralization of security mechanisms, functional spillover of alliance networks, and military transformation. Japan has not only strengthened its alliance with the United States but also expanded its influence in the Indo-Pacific region through multilateral mechanisms such as the Quad and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). Meanwhile, Japan is accelerating military modernization to enhance its expeditionary capabilities to counter potential threats from China. The paper also notes that Japan has adopted a complex balancing strategy in East Asia, seeking equilibrium between China and the United States through a combination of economic cooperation and military deterrence. Japan attempts to manage the challenges of Sino-U. S. tech competition by controlling key semiconductor material supplies and participating in U. S. -led

export controls. At the same time, Japan is actively seeking dialogue and cooperation with North Korea and Russia to ease regional tensions. Finally, the paper concludes that Japan's strategic choices reflect not only its practice of the Rimland Theory but also its long-term vision of reshaping the East Asian order in the era of great power competition. However, Japan's strategy of "dependent autonomy" faces numerous challenges, including over-reliance on U. S. security commitments and uncertainties in domestic politics. Whether Japan can strike a balance between alliance dependence and strategic autonomy will determine its position and role in the future international order.

The structure of this paper is as follows: The first section reviews the traditional U. S. national strategy and the Rimland Theory; the second section analyzes the shift in the Trump administration's international political decisions against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war; the third section explores Japan's geopolitical background and strategic choices; the fourth section provides a detailed analysis of Japan's political and military trends in the current international situation; and the fifth section summarizes Japan's strategic choices and the challenges it faces, and predicts future trends. Through this structure, the paper aims to comprehensively and deeply explore Japan's strategic adjustments and future directions under the new international situation.

2. The Traditional National Strategy of the United States Based on the Rimland Theory and the Containment Policy

Nicholas Spykman once said, "Geographical factors have a more lasting impact on foreign policy than factors such as the economy and the personalities of leaders." (Spykman, 1943) The United States enjoys the most advantageous geographical location in the world, with vast oceans to the east and west and weak and friendly neighbors to the north and south. According to the theory of sea power, "Sea power refers to everything that enables a nation to become a great nation by relying on or through the ocean. Whoever controls the ocean rules the world." (Mahan, 1890) The United States has been able to participate unrestrictedly in international political, economic, trade, and military activities through the two major arteries of the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. Before the United States became the absolute hegemon in the world, the center of the world was on the Eurasian continent. The vast majority of political, economic, and military activities in the world were concentrated in Western Europe and East Asia. Therefore, the starting point of the U. S. strategic decisions in the 20th century was to suppress all regional powers emerging on the Eurasian continent that threatened U. S. hegemony. The real maturation point of U. S. foreign policy was the publication of "America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power" by Nicholas Spykman in 1943. He emphasized the importance of the "rimland" and that the United States should establish and maintain a balance of power in the Far East and Europe so that "sea power" could control the land. The United States influences and controls the entire periphery through the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, thus geographically curbing the development of land-power powers in the heartland. At the same time, maritime states can sometimes align with the heart of the heart to counter the rising powers of the periphery.

3. The Russia-Ukraine War and the Shift in the Trump Administration's International Political Decisions

Russia is a powerful country in the heartland and a continental power spanning Eurasia. Russia has dual geopolitical attributes. It is both a European country and the direct heir of the nomadic states on the Eurasian continent. Russia is not only a traditional European country, but also an extremely aggressive, expansionary power. Russia relied on resources and population advantage against the Western European powers, but also relied on western technology against the eastern countries. Russia can expand simultaneously in the directions of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Far East to establish absolute hegemony. However, if Russia does not intend to establish hegemony, it will do its best to maintain the balance of power and peace. The emergence of any powerful state in the rimland is a great threat to Russia. Throughout history, maritime countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have hardly had any large-scale armed conflicts with Russia. Their (Russia and maritime countries') interests were aligned, and they formed alliances many times in wars to eliminate powerful states in the rimland. After Putin took power in Russia, he hoped to use a series of political and economic means to enable Russia to gain an advantage in the rimland and thus re-establish political hegemony on the Eurasian continent. Meanwhile, it should be noted that as Russia is an authoritarian regime, Putin has closely linked this political aspiration (the aspiration to rebuild hegemony) to his own political life and political reputation. The Russian people cannot accept a defeated and incompetent "tsar." Faced with the rise of China and the quagmire of the Ukraine war, Putin hopes to resolve the war as soon as as possible and in a dignified manner so as to adjust his strategy. The previous Biden administration still adopted the strategy of containing and suppressing Russia. This strategy aimed to exhaust Russia through the Ukraine war and thus achieve the goal of destroying the continental power. However, the rise of China has created loopholes in the U. S. national strategy. Excessive suppression of Russia will instead lead to a close alliance between the Far Eastern power and Russia, which will then use Russia's advantageous geographical location to influence Europe and the Middle East. This is a situation that neither Russia nor the United States wants to see.

Similarly, in the Far East region, the United States and its allies are facing enemies from three sides, namely Russia, the DPRK, and China, and are under great strategic pressure. For the United States, any combination of marginal power and heartland will completely shake its global hegemony. New World countries (American countries) rely on the Pacific and Atlantic control margins. But the heart is like the crossroads of the old world, where any marginal power wants to control the heart and radiate, influence and control all the edges.

Therefore, the Trump administration chose to change its geopolitical strategy to avoid a close alliance between Russia and China, form an alliance with Russia, relieve the pressure in the Far East region, and at the same time achieve the encirclement of China.

4. Analysis of Japan's Geopolitical Background

Japan's geopolitical configuration is deeply embedded within the framework of Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory, as articulated in *The Geography of the Peace* (1944). Its strategic

choices fundamentally represent an East Asian instantiation of Spykman's core proposition: "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia commands the destinies of the world." (Spykman, 1944) Situated as a pivotal hub at the "maritime-continental" interface along the eastern margin of Eurasia, the archipelagic geography of Japan endows it with three inherent strategic attributes that define its role in global power dynamics: the frontline of Maritime-Continental military confrontation, the institutional hub of alliance networks and carrier of value orders, the dynamic balancer of power equilibrium (Spykman, 1944).

As a defeated country, Japan's political and military decisions are severely restricted. Japan has completely become an outpost of the United States in the Far East region. Japan has always wanted to use political, economic, and military means to shape a new Asian order and become a regional hegemon in East Asia. Since the beginning of the 21st century, China has been gradually rising. How to suppress China while taking advantage of it has become a concern for Japan. Currently, there are significant conflicts between China and Japan on the Taiwan issue and the Diaoyu Islands issue. Taiwan has become the "Czechoslovakia" of the U. S. camp (Kopper et al. , 2019) . Having learned the lessons from the Munich Conference in history, the United States and Japan are unlikely to make concessions on the Taiwan issue (Glaser, 2021). For Japan, Taiwan is the front line in its confrontation with China. If China successfully liberates Taiwan Province, The East Asian order established by the United States will face the risk of collapse. China will gain the dominance of the new East Asian order. This is something that neither the United States nor Japan wants to see. Japan attempts to do its best to prevent China from liberating Taiwan Province and from becoming the hegemon in East Asia (Mong CHEUNG , 2024). Meanwhile, Japan is facing pressure from three sides, namely China, the DPRK, and Russia. The development of the DPRK's ballistic missiles and nuclear technology has significantly increased the pressure on Japan and South Korea. The territorial conflict between Japan and Russia over the Northern Four Islands also puts pressure on Japan's northern border.

Therefore, Japan urgently needs to ease relations with the DPRK and Russia, and it does not even rule out turning an enemy into a friend with one of these countries due to the shift in Trump's geopolitical decisions.

5. Forecast on Japan's Political and Military Trends under the Changes in the Global Situation

Our generation will experience a drastic change in the international order. In terms of international politics, Japan will take advantage of China's rise and cater to the policies of the United States. It will gradually achieve de facto political normalization within the U. S. camp. It will also strengthen and extend the Japan-U. S. alliance so that its influence extends to the East China Sea region. Japan will gradually lift the restrictions on its military and modernize its Self-Defense Forces, transforming a force for homeland defense into an army that takes into account both homeland defense and external intervention. Japan will gradually strengthen its alliance with Taiwan and enhance political and military cooperation with it. Faced with China's overwhelming power in the East Asian region, Japan will first ease relations with China through economic

policies, accumulate strength, and at the same time actively participate in activities to ease relations with the DPRK and do its best to ease relations with Russia. Currently, the interests of Japan and the United States highly overlap in the short term. In the long run, Japan may attempt to break away from the U. S. order system and re-establish an East Asian order belonging to Japan.

We are now positioned at a historic juncture of international order reconstruction, where Japan's strategic choices unfold along a discernible logical chain within the framework of Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory. As the most geostrategically dynamic state in the eastern Rimland of Eurasia, Japan is enacting a classic paradigm of Rimland Theory in an era of power transition through a threefold strategic rhythm: phased dependence, incremental breakthrough, and long-term reconstruction.

5.1. The Geopolitical Logic of International Order Upheaval: The Ascendancy of the Rimland

In "The Geography of the Peace"(1944), Spykman posited that the core conflict of global power resides in the triangular interplay among the "Heartland, " "Rimland, " and "Sea Powers, " with the strategic value of the Rimland escalating dramatically during periods of old-order disintegration. The ongoing Sino-U. S. strategic competition has engendered an "Indo-Pacific bipolarization", elevating Japan from a "Cold War Far Eastern defense frontier" to a "pivotal node in global power redistribution." Central to its strategy is leveraging the "offshore pressure" exerted by China's rise on the United States, positioning itself as the "most reliable U. S. ally" to absorb strategic empowerment. The "2023 Joint Declaration on a New Era of the U. S. -Japan Alliance" exemplifies this: by integrating "responses to Taiwan Strait contingencies" into joint operational plans and securing U. S. authorization to deploy a Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) system in Okinawa, Japan effectively transforms the East China Sea into a "controllable conflict buffer zone" as conceptualized in Rimland Theory. This logic of "rising through alliance" aligns with Spykman's assertion that Rimland states must employ sea power to balance continental forces, while also embodying his opinion that the Rimland can accumulate strategic capital through institutionalized alliance networks.

The structural transformation of Japan's role is rooted in the geopolitical triad Spykman outlined. As the Heartland (Eurasian continental core) and Sea Power (the United States as the preponderant maritime hegemon) compete for dominance, the Rimland—especially its East Asian segment—emerges as the critical hinge. Japan's archipelagic geography, spanning the "Kuril-Japan-Ryukyu" arc, constitutes a natural maritime barrier separating the Pacific Ocean from the Eurasian continent, endowing it with inherent "gatekeeper" functions over key maritime passages like the Tsushima and Miyako Straits. These geographical attributes, when combined with its post-war alliance with the U. S. , create a unique positional advantage that allows Japan to act as both a transmission belt for U. S. sea power and a buffer against Chinese land power projection.

5.2. The Path to Substantive Political Normalization: Institutionalizing Rimland Theory

Japan's pursuit of "substantive political normalization" is not an isolated domestic project but a practical extension of Rimland Theory at the institutional level. Within the U. S. -Japan

Alliance framework, this process unfolds through three interrelated dimensions, each reflecting Spykman's emphasis on alliance networks as tools of power projection.

5.2.1. Decentralization of Security Mechanisms: From Subordination to Co-Equal Partnership

The "2022 National Security Strategy" marked a pivotal shift, redefining "Taiwan-related contingencies" as an "existential crisis" for Japan and establishing a "U. S. -Japan Joint Command Coordination Center." This institutional innovation transcends the traditional hierarchy of the alliance, transforming the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) from a purely logistical support entity into a full-fledged operational partner. The 2024 "Southwest Islands Defense Enhancement Plan" further operationalizes this shift: high-frequency radar installations on Yonaguni Island, capable of monitoring coastal Fujian province, are integrated with anti-ship missile batteries on Miyako Island to form a "forward deterrence arc"—a textbook application of Spykman's "frontier control" concept, where Rimland states establish defensive perimeters to contain continental power expansion.

This decentralization is not merely operational but symbolic, signaling Japan's ambition to assume a more proactive role in shaping regional security architectures. By aligning its defense planning with U. S. strategic objectives in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, Japan effectively normalizes its military participation in extra-territorial conflicts, a critical step toward shedding its post-war "pacifist" constraints.

5.2.2. Functional Spillover of Alliance Networks: From Bilateralism to Multilateral Institution-Building

Japan has expanded the U. S. -Japan Alliance into a multilateral security framework, leveraging institutions like the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) to extend its influence. The Quad, which formalized annual joint military exercises in 2023—including the "Northern Edge" drills that incorporated Taiwan Strait simulation scenarios—serves as a Rimland-centric security bloc, aligning democratic maritime states to counterbalance China's continental influence. Concurrently, the IPEF's securitization of economic cooperation, particularly in semiconductors and critical minerals, creates a "technical alliance" that links supply chain resilience to shared security interests, echoing Spykman's emphasis on using economic interdependence as a tool of strategic integration.

Japan's "Official Security Assistance" (OSA) mechanism, with a 2025 budget of ¥350 billion, further exemplifies this strategy. By providing coastal surveillance radars to the Philippines and patrol boats to Vietnam, Japan not only enhances regional maritime domain awareness but also embeds itself as a key security provider in Southeast Asia, gradually replacing the U. S. as the Rimland's institutional hub. This "institutional nesting" within U. S. -led frameworks allows Japan to amplify its influence without direct confrontation, a hallmark of Rimland statecraft.

5.2.3. Military Transformation: From "Defensive" to "Expeditionary" Posture

Spykman's theory posits that Rimland states require robust military capabilities to maintain the balance between Heartland and Sea Power. Japan's defense buildup adheres closely to this logic: the 2022 *National Defense Program Guidelines* increased defense spending to 2% of GDP (targeting 2.5% by 2027) and authorized the deployment of 1,000 long-range cruise missiles, capable of striking targets across the East China Sea. The 2025 establishment of the Joint Staff Office, a unified command structure independent of U. S. forces, marks the JSDF's transition from a territorially bound force to an expeditionary military capable of "offensive-defensive" operations.

The aircraft carrier conversion of the Izumo-class destroyers to accommodate F-35B stealth fighters further underscores this shift. These vessels, once purely defensive, now serve as mobile air bases, enabling the JSDF to project power beyond Japan's territorial waters—a direct challenge to the post-war "exclusively defensive" doctrine and a clear manifestation of Rimland Theory's emphasis on proactive military presence as a deterrent against continental hegemony.

5.3. Balancing Acts in East Asia: The Rimland's Dual Strategy

Facing China's regional hegemonic ambitions, Japan employs a nuanced "dual strategy" characteristic of Rimland states: balancing engagement with containment, and leveraging economic interdependence to mitigate security risks.

5.3.1. Economic Interdependence and Political Distancing in the East China Sea

Japan's approach to the East China Sea exemplifies Spykman's warning against full-scale confrontation with the continent. While maintaining economic cooperation through the "China-Japan Joint Development Consultation Mechanism" for offshore gas fields, Japan simultaneously intensifies military signaling. This "separation of politics and economics" creates a pressure mechanism: economic ties prevent China from severing Japan from the regional economy, while military posturing deters Chinese attempts to absorb the Rimland into its sphere of influence.

This strategy reflects a deep understanding of geopolitical economics: by controlling 52% of the global supply of semiconductor materials critical to China's high-tech industry, Japan wields significant leverage, even as it participates in U. S. -led export controls on advanced manufacturing equipment. This dual role as both supplier and regulator allows Japan to navigate the Sino-U. S. tech war without complete alienation from either side, a quintessential Rimland balancing act.

5.3.2. Mitigating Risks with Continental Powers: North Korea and Russia

Japan's policies toward North Korea and Russia further illustrate its Rimland survival wisdom. Confronting the North Korean nuclear threat, Japan combines hard-power measures—joining the U. S. -led sanctions regime—with soft-power channels, maintaining "humanitarian food corridors" via Mongolia and Southeast Asia to prevent the collapse of diplomatic channels. (Shunji, 2021) This avoids the dangerous militarization of Northeast Asia, aligning with Spykman's preference for "functional cooperation" over outright hostility among continental actors.

With Russia, despite the unresolved Northern Territories dispute, Japan pursues a pragmatic energy partnership, participating in the "Sakhalin-2" LNG project to secure 12% of its domestic energy supply. Simultaneously, Japan collaborates with Russia on climate initiatives at the UN, such as advocating for carbon border adjustment mechanisms, demonstrating that even adversarial continental states can be engaged in non-security domains to reduce strategic tensions. This "issue-specific collaboration" prevents the Rimland from becoming a unified front against the Heartland, a key insight from Spykman's analysis of historical power balances.

5.3.3. Taiwan as a Rimland Linchpin: Operationalizing the "Defense Chain"

Japan fearing that its integration with the Chinese mainland would breach the first island chain and grant China unimpeded access to the Pacific. To counter this, Japan has upgraded the "Japan-Taiwan Strategic Dialogue" to the vice-ministerial level, providing Taiwan with Patriot missile simulation training and including explicit references to Taiwan's security in its annual "Defense White Paper". These actions operationalize Spykman's thesis that a fractured Rimland allows continental powers to dominate maritime spaces, transforming Taiwan into a de facto member of Japan's "defense perimeter."

This strategy carries significant risks, as it directly challenges China's territorial integrity and could draw Japan into a conflict. However, from a Rimland perspective, the logic is compelling: securing Taiwan's autonomy is essential to maintaining the maritime-continental balance in East Asia, even if it requires overt military cooperation with a non-state actor (Lionel P. Fatton, 2024).

5.4. Toward a Rimland-Centered Order: Japan's Long-Term Vision

Spymann's theory contains an implicit promise: Rimland states that successfully integrate economic, military, and institutional resources can transcend their intermediary role to become architects of new global orders. Japan's long-term strategy might actively pursue this possibility, which is manifested in three interrelated aspects.

5.4.1. Technological Hegemony in the Digital Rimland

Recognizing that modern geopolitics extends beyond physical space, Japan aims to dominate the "digital Rimland" through initiatives like the "Digital Garden City Nation" plan, which seeks to build a 6G network covering East Asia by 2030. By coupling its 52% global share of semiconductor materials with the "Japanese Starlink" project—launching a constellation of low-orbit satellites for communication and surveillance—Japan seeks to establish technical standards and data governance rules that privilege its allies, effectively creating a "digital buffer zone" against Chinese technological influence. This represents a contemporary adaptation of Spykman's theory, where control over information infrastructure replaces control over maritime chokepoints as the primary means of power projection.

5.4.2. Preparing for a Post-U. S. Hegemonic Order

While deeply embedded in the U. S. alliance system, Japan is simultaneously hedging against potential American retrenchment. The "2023 Diplomatic Bluebook" introduced the concept of a "Liberal Democratic Value Alliance," seeking to align with the EU's "Strategic Compass" and deepen security cooperation with India, including joint development of military facilities in the

Andaman Islands. These moves signal Japan's intention to lead a "trans-Rimland coalition" of democratic maritime states, capable of maintaining regional order even if U. S. power wanes (Nanae et al. , 2024). This strategy mirrors Spykman's historical observation that Rimland coalitions often emerge as balancing forces during periods of hegemonic transition.

5.4.3. Reconstructing East Asian Order: From History to Hegemony

Japan's vision for East Asia carries echoes of its pre-war "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" , reframed through the lens of contemporary liberal internationalism. Initiatives like the "Asian Democracy Summit, " which includes Rimland states such as Mongolia and Palau, and the "ASEAN+8 Security Forum, " aim to construct a security architecture led by "maritime democracies, " excluding China from regional leadership. This ideological framing—casting Japan as the guardian of liberal values in the Indo-Pacific—serves as both a legitimizing narrative for its ambitions and a practical tool to mobilize smaller Rimland states against continental dominance, aligning with Spykman's argument that shared political values enhance alliance cohesion.

5.5. The Paradox of Dependent Autonomy: Challenges for the Rimland Strategy

Although Japan's strategy is theoretically consistent with the Pacific Rim strategy, it is facing increasing pressure: its pursuit of autonomy relies heavily on U. S. security guarantees, creating a "dependent autonomy" that could unravel during periods of U. S. -China rapprochement or American domestic political upheaval. The 2024 U. S. presidential election, for example, poses uncertainties about the continuity of the "Indo-Pacific pivot, " forcing Japan to accelerate its defense modernization and institutional hedging.

Moreover, the domestic debate over constitutional revision—driven by the ruling LDP's ambition to formally remilitarize—risks destabilizing Japan's post-war social contract. While Spykman's theory assumes rational state behavior, the role of domestic populism and historical memory introduces unpredictable variables into Japan's strategic calculus, potentially undermining its ability to maintain the delicate balance between alliance commitments and regional stability (Sandra et al. , 2024).

Japan's actions within the current geopolitical landscape exhibit a degree of congruence with the Rimland Theory, yet they also demonstrate significant deviations. Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory underscores the pivotal role of rimland states in geopolitics, positing that these states, through collaboration with maritime powers, can effectively counterbalance continental powers and thereby maintain a global equilibrium of power. From this theoretical standpoint, Japan, as a rimland state in East Asia, appears to align with the theory's depiction of enhancing its strategic position through alliance networks. This is evident in Japan's close alliance with the United States and its strategic adjustments in the military and economic spheres.

However, a more nuanced analysis of Japan's behavior reveals several limitations of the Rimland Theory in explaining Japan's strategic choices. First and foremost, the theory is predicated on the geopolitical context of the 20th century, which assumes a relatively stable geopolitical order and a binary opposition between maritime and continental powers. In contrast, the contemporary global political and economic landscape is far more complex and dynamic.

Factors such as globalization, technological revolutions, and regional integration, which are not fully accounted for in the Rimland Theory, have a profound impact on national strategic choices. In formulating its geopolitical strategy, Japan must contend with multidimensional challenges, including economic, technological, and environmental issues. For instance, Japan's strategic layout in key areas such as semiconductors and new energy reflects its recognition of the importance of technological factors in geopolitics, an aspect that is not sufficiently emphasized in the Rimland Theory.

Secondly, the Rimland Theory falls short in considering the influence of domestic political factors and historical legacies on strategic choices. Japan's pacifist constitution, domestic anti-war sentiments, and historical memory significantly constrain its military strategy and foreign policy. Despite recent adjustments in military modernization and security policies, Japan's strategic autonomy remains notably influenced by its domestic political environment. For example, the domestic debate over constitutional revision and military expansion reflects the complex balance Japan seeks between pursuing strategic autonomy and maintaining domestic peace and stability, a balance that the Rimland Theory cannot fully explain.

Moreover, Japan's approach to relations with neighboring countries reveals a complex balancing strategy. In response to China's rise, Japan employs a dual strategy of military deterrence and economic cooperation to mitigate tensions. While this dual strategy partially aligns with the Rimland Theory's suggestion of balancing continental and maritime powers, it also highlights the flexibility and complexity of Japan's strategic choices. Japan attempts to navigate a "middle path" between the United States and China, avoiding complete alignment with the United States or outright confrontation with China. Implementing this strategy requires delicate diplomatic maneuvers in the complex web of international relations, which the static balance framework of the Rimland Theory struggles to fully account for.

Furthermore, the Rimland Theory is inadequate in explaining Japan's policies towards North Korea and Russia. On the Korean Peninsula issue, Japan participates in the U. S. -led sanctions regime while also maintaining dialogue channels with North Korea through humanitarian aid. In its relations with Russia, Japan demonstrates flexibility on the Northern Territories issue while engaging in economic cooperation in areas such as energy. This complex relationship of both confrontation and cooperation goes beyond the simple alliance or confrontation model described by the Rimland Theory.

In conclusion, although the Rimland Theory provides a useful framework for analyzing Japan's strategic behavior, it has evident limitations in explaining Japan's actions. Japan's behavior both conforms to and deviates from the theory's assertions. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of Japan's strategic choices, it is necessary to integrate other theoretical perspectives and non-traditional factors to supplement and amend the Rimland Theory.

6. Conclusion

Japan's journey through the current international order upheaval serves as a live experiment in Spykman's geopolitical theory. By leveraging its Rimland position to mediate between Sea Power

and Heartland, Japan exemplifies the theory's core proposition: the fate of the world is decided not by dominance over any single region, but by the ability of the Rimland to maintain equilibrium between competing hegemons.

As globalization retreats and regional blocs emerge, Japan's success in navigating the tension between "alliance dependency" and "strategic autonomy" will determine whether the Rimland becomes a stable fulcrum of global order or a fracture zone of great-power conflict. In this sense, the country's choices offer more than a case study; they test the enduring relevance of Spykman's vision in an age of technological revolution and ideological rivalry, reminding us that geography, while not destiny, provides the canvas on which great powers paint their ambitions. The strategic resilience of the Rimland—embodied in Japan's ability to adapt, balance, and innovate—may yet prove to be the decisive factor in shaping the post-American era, proving that Spykman's theory, far from being a relic of the 20th century, remains a vital framework for understanding the 21st century's geopolitical realignments.

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