The Abe Assassination and the Ukraine War

What does the "History Issue in East Asia" tell us about them …?

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The Abe Assassination

- A clear crime that must be condemned unequivocally.
- A controversial figure such as Abe undoubtedly had enemies. But, democracies have a duty to protect politicians of any type from violent attack. There appear to be clear security failings.
- The more important issues to discuss today are "response" and "implications".

Abe speaking in Nara just before he was shot.

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Response

- There are two very worrying trends in the media.
  A. Mainstream media revisionism: As everyone goes into "tribute" mode, his policies, impacts and political record gets revised.
  B. Social media conspiracy theories: People start spreading rumours for their own politicial ends.
- The appropriate response is as follows:
  1. Condemn a crime.
  2. Do not let Abe's death or the manner of his death alter our assessment of his political actions during his life.
  3. Wait for reliable information on motives before commenting in public.

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Political Implications

- What possible effects were there on the result of the Upper House elections? Sympathy vote …?
- How will his death affect the power balance within the LDP and/or government?
- Will this have implications for domestic security and/or freedoms?
- Will constitutional revision now rise up the political agenda as a way of "honouring Abe's memory"?

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Implications for the History Issue

- Three scenarios:
  1. Little to none: His death is the passing of a powerful nationalist - but there are many more who will continue in his role.
  2. A boost for revisionism: His death makes him a "martyr" or "saint" in conservative/nationalist circles, and increases public sympathy for his revisionism.
  3. A boost for progressivism: Over time, the murky circumstances of his death discredit his reputation and therefore his stance.
- Ultimately, the history issue is much bigger than one person. The effect of his death on the continued status of the 2015 Abe statement as Japan's official position will be most significant.

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The Ukraine War

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Historical Comparisons

- There are many comparisons being made with past imperialism and past wars.
- Putin has likened himself to Peter the Great. His ambitions are unambiguously imperial.
- Putin's "special operation" calls for the "de-Nazification" of Ukraine. This clearly borrows the framework of World War II (but is total nonsense).
- Or perhaps the analogy is World War I: largely static trench warfare fought across a long front with victory ultimately determined by economics and domestic politics rather than on the battlefield.
- The British Army Chief General Sir Patrick Sanders has called the Ukraine War "our 1937 moment". He was talking about Europe … but is the comparison with 1937 in Asia most appropriate?

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Comparisons with the 1937 China War

- It is an "undeclared war". The Ukraine invasion, like the 1937 invasion of China, is not called a "war" by the invader.
- The war is clearly imperial: disdain for the other's history and territory; a war of occupation in a vast neighboring land mass.
- Does the annexation of Crimea in 2014 mirror the annexation of Manchuria in 1931? I.e. It's a long-term imperial war with escalation in various stages.
- The invasion invites widespread Western condemnation, but they do not intervene directly. However, they supply arms to China/Ukraine.
- Isolated Japan walks out of the League of Nations. Isolated Russia walks out of the G20 Summit.
- Poor logistics and supply problems lead to widespread looting and atrocity.

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Discussion 1: What do we make of the following two statements?

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Comparing the Japanese Government's Positions

- In the light of the discussion thus far, let's compare two statements passed by the House of Representatives.
- Statement on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the War End.
- Statement on the Ukraine War.

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Discussion 2: Think of reasons why the Ukraine War should not be compared to the 1937 invasion of China.

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What if …? (WWII Scenario)

- In 1939, the invasion of Poland triggered WWII. Further aggression by Russia against Poland or another NATO nation would trigger WWIII.
- Would China side with Russia creating another "democracies vs authoritarian states" global war?
- This global war could also trigger major conflict in Asia, and bring Japan and China into direct conflict.
- Such a war could easily end in nuclear devastation …

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What if …? (WWI Scenario)

- The war gets bogged down in trench warfare for years.
- A decisive victory is not possible on the battlefield.
- The aggressor realizes that "not being able to win" is effectively the same as "losing". Collapse of morale and the economy at home lead to the end of the fighting.
- The end of the war will be marked by revolution and regime change within Russia.
- But, this humiliation might create the seeds of further conflict (as the Treaty of Versailles did in 1919).

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What if …? (South Ossetia Scenario)

- Russia realizes that its bigger aims cannot be achieved at this juncture. It settles for a limited victory and limited gains.
- The Donbas is annexed by Russia and there is a ceasefire. Ukraine is pressured to accept its losses for the sake of global peace and food supplies etc.
- But this will not be "peace". We will simply be waiting for Russia to try the same thing again at a later stage …
- And maybe it will inspire China to "retake" Taiwan.

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What if …? (New Scenario)

- Perhaps the wars of the past offer no reliable way of making predictions about the future.
- All war scenarios in Ukraine have included nuclear devastation, global hunger, and climate disaster from the outset.
- Perhaps the greatest lesson from history is this …

Wars are like wildfires. They are uncontrollable. You never know which direction they will go. The safest thing to do is never to start them. But, it's too late to say that now …

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Discussion 3: How do we achieve global peace?

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Anti-imperialism

- None of the Ukraine War scenarios are attractive. The only solution is for Russia and all countries to abandon their imperialist power-lust over countries/territories that do not want to be dominated by others.
- The Russian people must reject imperialism (alas, there seems little hope of this) … but so must the USA, China and others.
- Unfortunately, we are in a period of growing "techno-authoritarianism".
- We must be aware of how technology can strangle our freedoms, and raise our voices for the inherent dignity and rights of all people in our species.

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Anti-nationalism

- It relies on "I am Japanese/Russian/American therefore I am right/superior".
- Nationalism has been considered almost like a "religion" by critics. Because there is the higher authority of the nation or a god, it facilitates self-sacrifice (= warmongering).
- Nationalism/religion also facilitates the oppression of and atrocity against the "inferior" other.
- Any form of identity politics based on race, nationality, religion, ideology etc. is inherently dangerous.
- We must aim for a rules-based order in which all humans have the same rights, responsibilities and inherent value as individuals in the eyes of the law.

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Anti-“Meglomaniac Men”

- We often hear of the “great men of history”.
- Instead, we should talk about the “meglomaniac men” of history.
- As long as we talk of invaders, imperialists, and mass murderers in heroic terms, meglomaniac men today will want to “join the club”.
- The greatest challenge for our political systems today is how to prevent violent, narcissistic, sociopathic men who crave power from becoming political leaders … especially in countries with large militaries.
- And it starts by stopping these men in small organizations like companies, schools, neighborhood associations, and clubs.

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Environmentalism

- How many of the world’s conflicts now are rooted in natural resources: oil, gas, minerals, agricultural land …? And remember, Japan’s aggression in the 1930s and 1940s was essentially about raw materials.
- Every conflict creates both conflict among humans and environmental destruction.
- Reducing reliance on fossil fuels and natural resources has the double effect of promoting peace and tackling the climate crisis.
- If you want to promote peace and sustainability, **actively cut out fossil fuels, minerals, and unnecessary consumption from your daily lives.**

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My Biggest Fear

- It is possible that Russia is tacitly pursuing the single most destructive and murderous policy ever seen by humanity: intentional climate change.
- Russia has the “most to gain” from global warming. Vast areas of Sibera might become inhabitable as they shift from tundra to temperate. Plus, Russia would gain control over much of the mineral wealth in the Arctic.
- However, such a policy would be insane …
- Russia could never protect its southern borders against the tsunami of climate refugees.
- Would the world even be worth living on in those circumstances …?

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Russia’s Contested War Memories

- Ultimately the biggest similarity between Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Japan’s invasion of China will be “contested war memories”.
- The divisions in Russian memories are already clear.
- In the future, the spread over the nationalist (war-supporting) to progressive (war-critical) spectrum will emerge even more within Russian society.
- When Russia is released from total media control, the debate will start in earnest.
- And as in Japan it will last generations … In this sense, Putin has already lost and condemned his country to a divided future.

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Have a peaceful summer holiday …!

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