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Responding to the crisis: Japan's changing foreign policy and ODA to Ukraine (2014–2023)

Kamila Szczepanska^a, Olga Barbasiewicz^b and Viktoriya Voytsekhovska^c

^aCentre for East Asian Studies, University of Turku, Turku, Finland; ^bInstitute of Social Sciences, SWPS University, Warsaw, Poland; ^cDepartment of Economics and Management, Lviv Polytechnic National University, Lviv, Ukraine



ABSTRACT

The Russian aggression on Ukraine (2022) has marked a significant critical juncture for Japan's foreign and security policies, and Japanese government has deployed a multitude of political, economic/financial, and limited military measures to support Ukraine. The article investigates a less-explored aspect of Japan's foreign policy change in the post-2022 crisis setting, namely the development assistance provided to Ukraine. The manuscript discusses this subject from a long-term perspective, exploring the trends in—and directionality of—Japanese development assistance to Ukraine in the context of Japan's evolving role in the international community between 2014 and 2023. It utilises a role theoretical approach to explore the frictions between the ambitious *proactive contributor to peace* national role conception promoted by PM Abe Shinzō (2012–2020) and the issue-specific role conceptions guiding Japan's foreign policy behaviour towards Russia that shaped Japan's response to the Ukraine–Russia tensions. The article elucidates how the fluctuations in Japanese ODA flows to Ukraine may contribute to our understanding of role conflict and how it was managed, as well as the rebalancing of and changes in Japanese foreign policy that have been occurring since 2022 under PM Kishida Fumio's leadership.

KEYWORDS Foreign aid; foreign policy; Japan; 2022 Russian aggression; the 2014 Ukraine crisis; Ukraine

Introduction

In response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine in February 2022, Japan has deployed a multitude of political, economic/financial, and—though

CONTACT Kamila Szczepanska  kamila.szczepanska@utu.fi  Centre for East Asian Studies, University of Turku, Assistentinkatu 7, 20500 Turku, Finland.

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limited in their scope—military measures to respond to the variety of Ukrainian needs under the conditions of active conflict. Representatives of the Japanese government and Japanese business circles have visited Kiev on various occasions (Asahi Shimbun, 2023b; Reuters, 2023), and new support packages have been prepared and offered (Asahi Shimbun, 2023c; Brown, 2023a). On a broader level, the Russian aggression has marked a critical juncture for Japan and led to the overhauling of Japanese foreign policy posture and directions (O’Shea & Maslow, 2024). This article focuses on a less-explored aspect of Japan’s foreign policy change in the post-2022 crisis setting, namely the development assistance provided to Ukraine. It analyses this from a long-term perspective, exploring the trends in—and directionality of—Japanese development assistance to Ukraine in the context of Japan’s evolving role in the international community between 2014 and 2023. This timeframe permits an analysis of the ODA measures implemented since the annexation of Crimea and the onset of the conflict in the Donbas region (in March–April 2014, the first chapter of the current crisis).

This article intends to make a three-fold contribution to the existing scholarship. In the first instance, it contributes to the ongoing scholarly debate concerning Japan’s changing foreign policy under former PM Abe’s and PM Kishida Fumio’s administrations by applying role theory to explore Japan’s relationships with other states and Japanese foreign policy behaviour, focusing on the case of foreign aid to Ukraine. Whilst the interest of the academic community in role theory has grown noticeably in recent years, scholarly analyses of Japan that employ role theory remain limited (e.g. Debroux, 2017; Hirata, 2016; Maslow, 2015; Sakaki, 2013; Schnelle & Szczepanska, 2016). Additionally, Japanese ODA remains a novel field for the application of the role theory approach (c.f. Szczepanska, 2022). The manuscript applies a role theory perspective to explore how the fluctuations in Japanese ODA flows to Ukraine may contribute to our understanding of role conflict, as well as the rebalancing of and changes in Japanese foreign policy. In this article, ODA flows and instruments are construed as measures in the broader process of role enactment—used by Japanese decision-makers to operationalise (or not) their preferred national role conceptions (NRCs)—and role-conflict management. Hence, this article contributes to expanding the literature on the ideational notions guiding the behaviour of governments in the international arena, discussing how these notions are enacted in practice, and how governments negotiate the conflicting behavioural requirements stemming from competing ideational prescriptions. The manuscript addresses broader themes that have been explored by researchers of Japan’s foreign policy and IR utilising identity-focused approaches. This burgeoning strand of academic enquiry has made a number of contributions, illuminating the changes in Japan’s post-war national identity and exploring the role of former-PM Abe (and his successors) in this process and in engineering shifts in foreign policy directions and modalities (e.g. Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015; Hagström & Hanssen, 2015; Kolmaš, 2020). This article proposes a set of

conceptual notions that could be integrated into studies informed by the identity politics-framework.

Second, this article contributes new empirical knowledge on the understudied topic of Japan's foreign policy regarding Ukraine, as well as broader Japan–Ukraine relations. Studies on these topics have been extremely rare, whilst Japan's relationships and initiatives with other post-Soviet states in the Caucasus and Central Asia have attracted greater academic focus (e.g. Bibilashvili, 2021; Dadabaev, 2020; Murashikin, 2020; Murashkin, 2018). The topic of Ukraine often appears in the literature on Japan's foreign policy regarding Russia, especially since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and in connection with the G7 sanctions against Russia and former PM Abe Shinzō's efforts to regain the Northern Territories (e.g. Brown, 2019; Dian & Kireeva, 2022). The linkages between Japan and Ukraine have usually been addressed within the broader framework of Ukraine's diplomatic relations with Asia (Jiang, 1996) and Japan's approach to, and political/economic priorities in, Eastern Europe (Hutchings, 1999; Kitade, 2020). The most comprehensive work in this area was recently published by Udovik (2022), broadly tracing the relationship between the two countries over the last century. Understandably, given the most recent Russian attack on Ukraine and Japan's unequivocal condemnation of the aggression, the subjects of Japan's approach to and support for Ukraine and the broader meaning of this crisis for Japan have been the subjects of analyses by a number of commentators (e.g. Kitaoka, 2022; Mulgan, 2022; Pugliese, 2022; Sumi, 2022). Japanese scholars have explored themes such as the sense of a parallel between the situation in Ukraine and the possible contingency surrounding Taiwan; the role of the crisis in shifting the Japanese public's views on national security (Tsuruoka, 2023, pp. 241–264); the reasons for the 2022 Russian aggression (Hirose, 2023); and the relevance of the crisis and the maintaining of support for Ukraine in the broader national interests of Japan (Tsuruoka, 2024; see also, Koizumi in Ando, 2024 and NHK, 2024). Significantly, with the increase in contributions from Japanese scholars and commentators on a variety of subjects relating to the crisis, notable divisions have emerged on the subject of Ukrainian agency and in assessments of Russian actions (Hosaka, 2023). Nevertheless, there is still a dearth of studies on the relationship between Japan and Ukraine, and this article's findings will contribute towards alleviating this research gap, as well as adding to the extant knowledge on Japan's engagement with Eastern and Central Europe.

Finally, this article adds to the extant body of literature on Japanese foreign aid. Previous studies of Japanese development assistance to other regions and countries have focused on Japan's priorities and aid recipients in Asia, as the latter remains the most important destination for the country's ODA flows. In the case of the post-Soviet states, Japan's engagement in the provision of development aid to Central Asian countries—and the growing rivalry between Japan and China—has also been addressed in existing research (Murashkin, 2020; Insebayeva, 2024). As for Ukraine, Kozhyna (2017) discusses Japan's ODA in the context of supporting

country's reform efforts, and Udovik (2022, pp. 145–156) offers a general glimpse of the subject in her book, constituting rare examples of work exploring Japan's role as a donor in Eastern Europe (see also Hristov, 2006). Hence, this is another clear research gap that needs to be addressed.

The manuscript proceeds as follows. The next section presents the conceptual framework of the article, explaining the notions of NRCs, role conflict, and role enactment. The methods utilised to gather empirical data are then briefly presented. After the methodological approach has been clarified, information on Japan's competing meta- and issue-specific NRCs under the Abe and Kishida administrations are presented, and the challenge posed by the 2014 and 2022 Ukraine crises to their successful enactment is described. The article discusses the friction between the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC promoted by PM Abe (2012–2020) and inherited by Kishida Fumio (2021 onwards)—conceptualised as a supra or overarching NRC, applicable across multiple policy-fields—and the issue-specific role conceptions guiding Japan's foreign policy behaviour towards Russia (*persistent negotiator* NRC). The article then illuminates the trends in the flows of Japanese ODA to Ukraine, focusing on the period between 2014 and 2023. In summary, the article first reveals that, after the eruption of the 2014 crisis, ODA measures to Ukraine were temporarily increased to respond strategically to the situation. However, their compensatory value, in terms of alleviating and managing the conflict between the two abovementioned NRCs and the ensuing gap between the prescriptive requirements of *proactive contributor to peace* NRC and the actual foreign policy behaviour (conception–performance gap), was limited. Second, the manuscript posits that, after the 2022 Russian aggression, the Russia-focused NRC was rendered dormant and the enactment of the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC through concrete ODA policy measures increased, bolstered by the growing alignment between the Japanese government's (principled) discursive pronouncements and actions. The concluding section summarises the article's findings and offers some final thoughts on the subject of Japanese ODA to Ukraine.

Contradictory national role conceptions (NRCs), role enactment, and the conception–performance gap

Role theory originated in the social sciences and was adopted into FPA and IR scholarship in the 1970s, primarily due to the conceptual advancements of Holsti (1970). Broadly speaking, role theory is designed to study and explain human attitudes and behaviour within a given social framework. Roles are 'constituted by ego and alter expectations' (Harnisch, 2011, p. 8), with the former encompassing the actors' own expectations of their purpose and function within the group (*ego expectations*) and the expectations that the actors believe the other members of the group to have (*alter expectations*; Elgström & Smith, 2006, p. 5) (see also Schnelle & Szczepanska, 2016, p. 35). Following Cantir and Kaarbo (2016, pp.

17–18), we refer here to ‘ego expectations’ as ‘national role conceptions’ (NRCs). Significantly, the latter may be subjected to the process of role contestation, with a plethora of domestic actors engaging in contests to gain recognition of—and secure primary status for—their own preferred role conceptions (see Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016). In the case of ‘alter expectations’, one should bear in mind that not all alter expectations are equally important. Those partners in an interaction whose expectations matter most for the actor’s role conception (and performance) are considered *significant others*. The choice or constitution of a significant other is often based on past experiences (Harnisch, 2011, p. 12) and reflects both the material interests and the immaterial ‘needs’ that derive from the actor’s identity (Wendt, 1999, p. 328) (see also Schnelle & Szczepanska, 2016, p. 35).

The conceptual apparatus of role theory distinguishes ‘[...] the ideas about the scope of foreign policy behaviour that is appropriate for the state, from role performance, or the actual foreign policy behaviour’ (Breuning, 2011, p. 23). Hence, role performance—or role enactment—is understood in this manuscript as ‘the behaviour of the actor according to the demands of the role’ (Kaarbo & Cantir, 2013, p. 466), with a focus on the actual displayed attitudes.

Notably, policymakers and other stakeholders may hold and support several NRCs at once. The nature of the latter can either be broad and overarching in their scope, reflecting sets of beliefs on how the state should generally act in or across multiple policy domains or in relation to specific policy areas (i.e. issue-specific NRCs and/or geographic areas of differing salience). In the second case, the exploration of such issue-specific NRCs can help to account for the foreign policy behaviour of states in relation to those well-defined issues or geographic fields (Breuning, 2011, pp. 26, 32–33; cf. Debroux, 2017, pp. 9–10 on meta- and context-specific roles). The existence of multiple NRCs, in turn, can be a source of strain and lead to *role conflict*.

Drawing on the work of Aggestam (2006), Cantir and Kaarbo (2012, p. 10) note that role conflict emerges ‘when dominant role conceptions in the role-set are incompatible with one another’, a situation which can be precipitated either by some roles having emerged ‘from different institutional contexts, both domestic and international’, or, ‘when [the] conditions and context within which they were originally formulated change’. The available scholarship offers further conceptualisation of intra- and inter-role conflicts (e.g. Harnisch, 2012; Harnisch, Frank, & Maull, 2011). Whereas the former notion captures cases in which domestic and/or international stakeholders and audiences contest specific role enactment (or NRCs), the latter applies to situations in which certain roles performed by the state become ill-matched, as they prescribe incompatible or competing behaviours. As a consequence, ‘the contradictory role enactment means that one role reduces the other’s salience’, and ‘[...] role conception can be hindered by the enactment of other roles’ (Karim, 2023, pp. 97–98).

The presence of role conflict necessitates measures that will result in either foreign policy adaptation or change. Sakaki (2013, p. 16) proposes that, in order to manage and ameliorate the tensions and contradictions that fuel role conflict, decisions-makers may resort to selected coping measures. One such measure would be to simply 'enact one role at the expense of another'—with the role conceptions remaining in their original form, but with the state—through its role enactment—de facto prioritising one to the detriment of the other. An alternative solution assumes the pursuit of compromise between the two by complying with 'both behavioural expectations in part or adher[ing] alternately to one and the other'. Both of these strategies, however, carry substantial risks, as their deployment—marked by a 'conception–performance gap' (Elgström & Smith, 2006)—may result in criticism of their legitimacy and consistency deficits. The pursuance of compromise, as discussed by Sakaki, corresponds with 'adjustments changes' in foreign policy, as suggested by Hermann (1990), encompassing limited shifts at the level of the undertaken effort and/or the scope of those impacted by the policy in question. More substantial forms of adaptation involve 'programme change', requiring the introduction of new tools and approaches to attain specific goals or aims, and 'goal change', necessitating the revision of foreign policy aims. Finally, the most substantial form of change is an 'international orientation change', denoting a comprehensive overhaul of a country's foreign policy (Breuning, 2011, p. 30; Strycharz, 2022). Building on the body of foreign policy change research, Harnisch et al. (2011) have conceptualised the dimensions, degrees, and mechanisms of role change, distinguishing between three levels characterised by increasing degrees of complexity. These levels begin with 'role adaptation', designating a 'change of instruments and strategies with stable foreign policy goals', moving onto 'role learning', capturing the transformation of foreign policy goals, and finally onto 'role transformation', which involves a 'change of identity and thus [of] interests' (pp. 252–253).

As noted earlier, the occurrence of role conflict is an important trigger for role modification and change. Likewise, a 'conception–performance gap', stemming from a divergence between role conception and enactment, or indeed a crisis situation, can induce a drive to enact revisions at the level of ideas and behaviour (Harnisch et al., 2011, pp. 256–257). In fact, those sources of role change can be interconnected and mutually influencing, as the eruption or existence of crisis can bring to the fore tensions and incompatibilities between NRCs and actual behaviour, or between two or more roles, the presence of which might have been muted, latent, disregarded, or successfully managed with minimal effort prior to the crisis situation.

In this manuscript, a role theory approach is used to discuss the tensions between the competing NRCs guiding Japan's foreign policy behaviour, viewed through the lens of the country's development assistance to and cooperation with Ukraine. We are also interested in establishing how far specific role-enactment measures in the field of foreign

aid to Ukraine could be understood as alleviating the abovementioned inter-role conflict.

Finally, the role-theoretical framework utilised in this article shares similarities with approaches rooted in identity theory, each of which underscores the importance of ideational factors and norms for the construction of interests and foreign policy behaviour, as well as the relevance of 'others' in how 'self' is constructed, understood, and enacted. Despite these similarities between the conceptual DNA of the approaches, it is possible to differentiate between them in terms of their overarching analytical focal points. In the case of the identity-theory approaches, the analytical focus is on 'being', whilst the notion of 'roles' centres on the appropriate 'function' and 'purpose' of states (or other actors) within a given group, thereby emphasising action. Writing on the relationship between identities and roles, Nabers (2011) proposes that 'the basic link between the two [...] is one of reciprocity and co-constitution', and further explains that, 'identity supplies an actor with a standpoint or frame of reference in which to interpret his or her social situation and the expectations of appropriate behavior that comes with it'. Therefore, identity is understood as, 'a set of meanings that characterizes an actor in a role', with Nabers placing role between identity and behaviour and ascribing to the concept a mediating function between the latter two (pp. 82–83). Hence, this conceptualisation helps to illuminate 'how emergent subjects "live out their identities and act"' (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015, p. 13). Hagström and Gustafsson (2015, p. 13–14) observe that there is scope for further scholarly contributions on the linkages between identity and proclivity to action. Role theory, with its conceptual apparatus, including notions of NRC, could make useful contributions to this. If identities delimit the 'range of imaginable conduct' (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015, p. 13), they influence the process of defining the scope of appropriate foreign policy behaviour for actors, states, and others, which is a focal concern of role theory. Additionally, the notions of role enactment and role conflict may support discussions of how certain identity is translated into action, including contestation over the appropriate and necessary course of action (e.g. specific NRC/roles being anchored in separate or even competing identities). Although further theoretical and empirical exploration of the analytical potential of linking identity and role theory is beyond the scope of the current study, it seems that this line of inquiry could enhance the conceptual attractiveness of the approaches.

Data gathering and analysis

The empirical data used in the article to illuminate Japan's NRC and obtain insights into the trends and directionality in Japanese ODA to Ukraine were gathered from official governmental documents. These documents include speeches and statements made by PM Abe and PM Kishida, and data on specific types of ODA programmes realised in Ukraine—the

number of projects, their overall value, and their main beneficiaries—compiled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Furthermore, a selection of documentary materials produced by UN agencies (e.g. UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR) and other international organisations involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance (e.g. IOM) was analysed to glean insights about Japanese contributions to the projects realised in eastern Ukraine since 2014. Finally, documents produced by Ukrainian actors are also utilised as a source of data.

To elucidate the meta- and context-specific NRC, the article is informed by qualitative content analysis that explores their ideational constituent parts and related behavioural prescriptions. Here, the discussion on the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC is based on previous enquiries into this subject. The article then extends this analysis to the Russia-specific NRCs in Japan's foreign policy role set under PMs Abe and Kishida, by investigating the two leaders' understandings of how Japan should conduct itself in its relationship with Russia (a 'significant other') and how these NRCs have guided Japan's foreign policy behaviour towards Ukraine, including its provision of ODA.

Looking at the data on Japanese ODA support to Ukraine, the study observes the division between loans and grants. Subsequently, the character and focal points of Japanese ODA initiatives in Ukraine were assessed through analysing 1) the number and financial value of the grants and loans, 2) the causes supported through them, 3) their beneficiaries, and 4) their geographical locations. Our analysis excludes foreign aid initiatives focusing on Chernobyl and nuclear disaster-related projects, due to their targeted issue-specific focus. Furthermore, we have omitted from our discussion the technical cooperation initiatives that involved the dispatch of advisers, survey teams, and trainees, as tracing the flows of the grants and loans provided to Ukraine during the selected period offers more pertinent data for this investigation of the tensions between Japan's competing NRCs and role enactment. Finally, the analysis of the character and focal points of the selected ODA initiatives offered insights into their alignment with and contribution towards the broader NRC operationalisation, as well as highlighting their value for alleviating conflicts between competing behavioural expectations.

Japan's evolving foreign policy NRCs and the Ukraine crises (2014–2023)

After returning to power in December 2012, Prime Minister Abe Shinzō embarked on a quest to redefine Japan's role in the international community by envisioning and implementing more robust foreign policy under the banner of being a *proactive contributor to peace*. The introduction of the latter was an important discursive innovation by PM Abe's administration, neatly bringing together under one roof the core role-conceptions

conceived previously by high-ranking Japanese decision-makers.¹ The *proactive contributor to peace* NRC is defined as Japan striving to be a ‘rules promoter, a commons’ guardian, and an effective ally and partner to the US and other democracies’ (MOFA, 2013). At the same time, it asserts that the country will continue on its path as a ‘peace-loving nation’, whilst increasing its efforts to ensure ‘peace, stability, and prosperity’ in the international realm, including the safeguarding of the Asia-Pacific (Kantei (Prime Minister of Japan & His Cabinet), 2013, p. 4). In summary, the new NRC constituted a favoured alternative to the long-established anti-militarist power role-conception and re-affirmed Japan’s commitment to its patron and the country’s preparedness to share the security-related responsibilities of the USA in the global and regional arenas. Ultimately, the role of *proactive contributor to peace* became the principal ideational determinant of Japanese foreign and security policy under PM Abe (see Szczepanska, 2022, pp. 97–98). Both PM Suga Yoshihide (2020–2021) and Kishida Fumio (2021 onwards) inherited the above-mentioned meta-NRC as a significant ideational compass, guiding the country’s foreign policy behaviour, with the idea having become embedded in a number of official documents, including the first National Security Strategy (2013).

The annexation of Crimea by Russia (2014), the latter’s subsequent active support for separatist forces in the Donbas region, and the aftermath of the unfolding Ukrainian crisis posed a considerable challenge for the Japanese administration and its chosen foreign policy course, with competing expectations of how the situation might be addressed. Over the years, PM Abe repeatedly underlined the significance of a partnership relationship with Russia because, in his opinion, the countries’ bilateral relations had ‘the greatest latent potential anywhere’ and Russia was ‘an important partner’ for Japan in its quest to ‘contribute to the stability of the region and the world’ (Kantei (Prime Minister of Japan & His Cabinet), 2014a; see also 2013, pp. 25–26). PM Abe strongly advocated for Russia to be ‘constructively involved in the various issues facing the international community as a responsible nation’ and repeatedly invoked his commitment to ‘tenaciously continue negotiations with Russia’ to achieve the resolution of the territorial problem and encourage Russia to pursue a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine issue (Kantei (Prime Minister of Japan & His Cabinet), 2014b, 2014c, 2016a, 2016b, 2019). This focus on pursuing dialogue and multi-angle collaboration—and the assurances of a close relationship with Putin—were clearly discernible in PM Abe’s official communication during his time in the office. We address this ideational cues guiding Japan’s practice through the term *persistent negotiator* NRC. This focus on keeping the consultations alive ultimately resulted in 27 meetings between PM Abe and President Putin (Brown, 2021).

This continuing collaboration with Russia was deemed crucial to prevent the strengthening and consolidation of the Sino–Russian relationship and to enlist Russia’s support in managing the (nuclear) threat posed by North Korea, with Russia’s behaviour in East Asia—rather than in

Europe—constituting the prime consideration among certain parts of the Japanese political and security establishment (Brown, 2018). This, in turn, lent purchase to assertions that close cooperation would be conducive to Japan's goals of proactively contributing to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and the broader international arena. Moreover, PM Abe's push to secure a breakthrough and conclude an agreement with Russia on the Northern Territories, even at the expense of scaling back Japan's original claim—his 'new approach' (2016 onwards)—involved greater cooperation in the economic and security fields (Brown, 2019). Finally, the concerns about safeguarding Japanese economic interests—especially the need to diversify access to energy sources by developing a viable northern sea route—was another factor weighting the scales in favour of cooperation with Russia (Brown, 2018, pp. 871–872). These considerations, emanating from domestic stakeholders including PM Abe and his administration, guided Japan's foreign policy behaviour towards Russia and led to the continuing engagement with Russian counterparts.²

Nevertheless, Russia's destabilising acts in Eastern Europe and disregard for international rules and norms could not be ignored or simply brushed off. This would have clashed with PM Abe's declarations that Japan was to act as 'rules promoter' and as an 'effective ally and partner to the US and other democracies'—the remaining building blocks of PM Abe's *proactive contributor to peace* NRC, especially during Obama's tenure as US President. Hence, responding to the need for a stance in line with the above-mentioned ego (and alter) expectations, the official Japanese response to the unrest in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea included the expected expressions of censure regarding Russia's behaviour. This included the voicing of 'grave anxiety and concern' over Russia's decision to send its armed forces into Ukraine (MOFA, 2014a), statements that the Crimea referendum 'has no legal effect and Japan does not recognise its outcome' (MOFA, 2014c), all whilst underlining Japan's support for Ukraine's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. In addition to sharing verbal criticisms, Japan joined the sanctions imposed against Russia by the G7. However, these punitive measures were considered weak (Brown, 2019, p. 150), as 'it was necessary to ensure that Japan's sanctions would not be an obstacle' to PM Abe's efforts to resolve the territorial issue (Sumi, 2022, p. 12). In summary, the Ukraine crisis exposed the friction between the ambitious ideational and behavioural tenets of the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC and the need to act as a *persistent negotiator* in dealings with Russia to prevent closer cooperation between the latter and China and to avoid endangering prospects for the resolution of the territorial conflict.

PM Kishida Fumio's administration has largely inherited Abe's favoured NRC, including its permissive approach to Russia. Furthermore, as Foreign Minister (2012–2017), prior to becoming PM in 2021, Kishida participated in the promotion and operationalisation of the NRCs conceived by former PM Abe. As noted by Murata (2023, pp. 7–8), the relative weakness of

Kishida's own Kochikai faction within the LDP meant that the current PM 'needs to play the role of Abe's legitimate successor' to maintain support among Abe's former adherents. Certain new additions—such as the prominence of nuclear non-proliferation and economic security—represent Kishida's individual stamp on the broader foreign policy direction inherited from Abe, but these constitute an expansion of Japan's 'proactive' role in international affairs, rather than any departure from the baseline established by the Abe administration. Nevertheless, the 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine allowed Kishida—who had been less personally committed than Abe had been to improving the relationship between Japan and Russia (Tsuruoka, 2024)—to suspend the close contact with the Russian government as a foreign policy priority for Japan. This decision was instrumental in opening up new avenues for closing the conception–performance gap in Japan's foreign policy towards Ukraine.

However, as noted by O'Shea and Maslow (2024), PM Kishida's decision to shelve the policy of engagement with Russia has not gone unchallenged, as officials in MOFA and Kantei, as well as some members of LDP, have argued for caution and restrained reactions, fearing possible negative fallout from unequivocal siding with the G7 and Ukraine against Russia. These voices testify to the extent to which Abe's 'new approach' to Russia has gained roots amongst the political and state apparatus in Japan. Nevertheless, since the 2022 Russian aggression, the former PM Abe has himself engaged in stronger criticism of the aggressor (Abe, 2022). Furthermore, as Brown (2023b) suggests, the ranks of pro-Russian political figures in Japan have been declining. Whereas the lack of expected outcomes of 'new approach' and the subtle shift in the position of its main architect have buttressed PM Kishida's pro-Ukraine course, another important factor has been the need to align Japan's responses with those of the other G7 members, who have demonstrated a much stronger commitment to supporting Ukraine than they did in 2014.³ This has provided a broader framework for Japan's actions, including the ODA measures benefitting Ukraine discussed in this article.

Shortly before the conflict erupted, PM Kishida expressed Japan's readiness to offer substantial emergency loans to the Ukrainian government (Reuters, 2022); and since the Russian aggression began, Kishida has supported sanctions against Russia and allocated emergency humanitarian assistance funds to Ukraine. These pro-Ukraine policy measures reflect Japan's broader commitment to protecting and strengthening the existing rules-based world order—a pillar of Kishida's 'Vision for Peace', unveiled in a keynote speech during the 2022 Shangri-La Dialogue event announcing the onset of pragmatic 'realism diplomacy for a new era' (MOFA, 2022e, p. 3). Over the past two years, Japan, along with its G7 partners, has implemented numerous rounds of sanctions against Russian actors to 'starve Russia of G7 technology, industrial equipment and services that support its war machine' (White House, 2023), with the most recent cycle coming into force in December 2023 (The Japan Times, 2023). Unlike in

the past, Russia and its actions have been clearly marked as a threat, with the newest version of Japan's National Security Strategy stating that '[...] Russia's aggression against Ukraine has easily breached the very foundation of the rules that shape the international order. The possibility cannot be precluded that a similar serious situation may arise in the future in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in East Asia' (Cabinet Secretariat, 2022, p. 2). The above-mentioned steps are clearly in line with the normative compass prescribed by the adjusted *proactive contributor to peace* NRC. Having said that, although the *persistent negotiator* NRC is not currently guiding Japan's foreign policy, its future remains open. As noted above, PM Kishida does not appear to have the same personal investment in the cultivation of the Russia–Japan relationship. However, whilst addressing the problem of the Northern Territories in February 2022, a few days after the Russian aggression commenced, PM Kishida stated that he was engaged in negotiations with Russia and did not wish to leave the matter to 'the next generation' to resolve. He also assured the general public of his unwavering commitment to seeing it through, despite the international situation making discussions on the prospective peace treaty very difficult (Kantei (Prime Minister of Japan & His Cabinet), 2022a). The policies of resolving the territorial problem and securing a peace treaty were also repeatedly confirmed as enduring priorities for PM Kishida's administration in recent years (Kantei (Prime Minister of Japan & His Cabinet), 2022b, 2024). According to Chavez and his colleagues, the cases of states discarding NRCs are uncommon, and 'instead they [states] downgrade their centrality' (Sakaki, 2013, p. 15). This approach seems evident in today's Japan. Whilst the Russia-centred NRC has been rendered dormant, it may well be reactivated (albeit possibly in an adjusted form) by a different Japanese leader when the geopolitical situation improves. But for now, its relevance and influence has waned.

In the next sections, the article investigates the steps undertaken by Japanese decision-makers in relation to ODA to Ukraine, exploring the developments that occurred after the Ukrainian crisis began in 2014. Unlike the post-2014 sanctions the development assistance measures were less high-profile, less antagonistic, and in the sole purview of the Japanese government to provide. A closer investigation of specific ODA measures will allow us to assess the extent to which these policy measures were reflective of the prescriptive behaviour endorsed by the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC and, finally, whether these role enactments could be considered compensatory actions, helping to alleviate the role conflict and offset the leniency towards Russia prior to 2022. Subsequently, the exploration of forms and flows of ODA to Ukraine since the 2022 Russian aggression illuminates how PM Kishida's government has operationalised the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC in practical terms since the *persistent negotiator* NRC was temporarily retired.

Responding to the 2014 crisis: Japan's ODA to Ukraine between 2014 and early 2022

Although, during the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Japan provided assistance to the former and its constitutive parts to facilitate the transition towards market economy and political stability (MOFA 1992), the history of Japanese ODA to Ukraine commenced in the second half of the 1990s, beginning with technical cooperation initiatives (MOFA, 1998). In the first few years, grant support was provided primarily for cultural and medical purposes (MOFA, 2001, 2024a). From 2003 onwards, Ukrainian actors (non-governmental organisations, local governments, and other institutions, e.g. hospitals) gained access to the Grant Assistance for Human Security Projects (GAHSP) scheme, which provided small-scale grants for social, health, and educational initiatives. Until 2010, aid for cultural projects constituted a significant number of the allocated grants (through cultural grant assistance), after which time the number of supported projects began to decline. Conversely, from 2010 onwards, the number of projects sponsored *via* GAHSP in the medical-assistance field began to increase. Likewise, grants for initiatives to improve the educational environment in local kindergartens and schools began to appear more often among the sponsored projects. Most of the funds were granted to Ukrainian non-governmental actors (MOFA, 2024a). Conversely, larger grants have only rarely been allocated—for instance, for the purpose of aiding Ukraine's economic reforms and to help the government address systemic vulnerabilities through structural reforms, for the improvement of medical equipment in children's hospitals,⁴ and for flood-response emergency relief goods. Last, but not least, the first-ever Japanese ODA loan to Ukraine was granted in 2005 for the infrastructure project to develop the Boryspil State International Airport (MOFA, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2024). Localities and actors in western and central Ukraine constituted the majority of beneficiaries in terms of the numbers of sponsored projects. Prior to 2014, Japan's ODA to Ukraine prioritised non-contentious and low-risk social infrastructure projects aimed primarily at supporting various aspects of human security. The focus on investing ODA funds to improve medical facilities in Ukraine was not only a response to real-life needs on the ground, it also corresponded with Japan's chosen role as a champion of global health.

After the Russian annexation of Crimea (March 2014) and the subsequent outbreak of war in Donbas, Japanese assistance to Ukraine was provided on both bilateral and multilateral bases, visibly increasing the extent of the Japanese involvement *via* ODA in Ukraine. This involvement focused on three priority areas: first, the improvement of the economic situation in Ukraine; second, support for democratic consolidation; and third, the fostering of a dialogue for national integrity within Ukrainian society (MOFA, 2016).

First and foremost, the number of large-scale loans and grants visibly increased. In terms of loan support, in 2014 and 2015 two rounds of

Economic Reform Development Policy Loan (10 billion and 37 billion JPY) were extended to Ukraine. This assistance, organised in cooperation with the World Bank, was intended to support the stabilisation of the economy and society of Ukraine by promoting reconstruction of national finances and various institutional reforms (MOFA, 2014g, 2015e). The 2015 support was promised during the first-ever visit of Japanese Prime Minister to Ukraine (MOFA, 2015d). Finally, in June 2015, the largest-ever loan (worth more than 100 billion JPY) was allocated for the improvement of sewage treatment in Kiev, namely the renovation of the Bortnychi Sewage Treatment Plant—the second industrial infrastructure project to be funded by Japan through ODA in Ukraine (MOFA, 2015c). Significantly, however, after this initial uptick in loan initiatives, there were no other agreements of this kind until 2022.

The situation differed slightly for the more substantial grants allocated to Ukraine. Between July 2014 and March 2015, grants cumulatively worth close to two billion JPY were offered (MOFA, 2021b). This included, in July 2014, non-project grant support (350 million JPY) intended to support the purchase of equipment for the medical and scientific fields to promote the country's socio-economic development. Interestingly—and in accordance with the spirit of 'Abenomics'—it was observed that the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake (2011) were expected to benefit from this arrangement through the purchase of items produced in those areas (MOFA, 2014f, 2021b). The following year saw two instances of non-project grant aid for purchasing medical equipment and other products from Japanese providers, with each grant worth 500 million JPY (MOFA, 2015b). Similarly, as in the case of the 2014 grant, the initiatives were clearly intended to both support Ukraine and promote the interests of Japanese economic actors, with hopes expressed that those initiatives would benefit Japanese SMEs by creating demand for their products in a new country and, through this, aid the revitalisation of the Japanese economy (MOFA, 2021b). This use of Japanese ODA projects to both support and mobilise the Japanese private sector was also evident in the 2015 Development Cooperation Charter (MOFA, 2015a). In effect, all of the above-mentioned grants included distinct elements of self-interest and thus represented the new direction of Japanese development cooperation implemented under the Abe administration. Before the eruption of the 2022 crisis, grant aid was allocated to Ukraine twice more. In 2019 a grant for the Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine was intended to improve the credibility of public broadcasting stations and facilitate high-quality programming through the establishment of a news reporting system and the provision of new equipment (230 mln JPY, MOFA, 2019). As such, it served the broader purpose of supporting democratic processes in Ukraine. The grant support allocated in 2021, in turn, was meant to enhance Ukraine's capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through the purchasing of health and medical equipment (200 mln JPY).

It is worth mentioning that the questions of Crimea and Donetsk and Luhansk regions featured in the decision to provide the grant, as there were concerns about the spread of disease amongst the populace affected by the conflict (MOFA, 2021a).

Although the more substantial ODA funding initiatives for Ukraine waxed and waned, the small-scale support provided through the GAHSP scheme actually grew between 2015 and 2022. During this period, the overwhelming majority of funding—both in terms of numbers of initiatives and their monetary value—was allocated for health-related projects and educational projects, rather than culture and sport-related initiatives (MOFA, 2024a). Hence, the focus on improving public health in the country remained a constant feature of Japanese ODA.

Finally, since 2014, Japan has collaborated with a wide range of international organisations—including the OSCE, Council of Europe, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNOPS, WFP, OCHA, IOM, ICRC, IFRC, and WHO—to deliver projects designed to support internally displaced persons (IDPs) and to realise initiatives in the Donbas region (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts), as well as projects aiming to promote democratisation in Ukraine. By February 2018, the grant aid channelled *via* international organisations for the benefit of Ukraine and its population had reached 49.1 million USD (Embassy of Japan in Ukraine, 2018), and this continued in various forms in the subsequent years, including throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Assistance was extended to respond to the immediate humanitarian needs of IDPs and local populations in eastern Ukraine, and the projects realised due to Japanese funds included the provision of shelter and ‘WASH’ (water, sanitation, and hygiene) infrastructure; the facilitation of access to education for children impacted by the ongoing conflict (e.g. restoration of educational facilities and provision of education kits and school supplies, notably in the vicinity of so-called ‘contact line’ localities; the conducting of mine-risk education and stress-mitigation training for educational staff; and the fostering of resilience among youth and the stabilisation of their communities (MOFA, 2014e, 2014h, 2016; Reliefweb, 2016a, 2016b, 2018; UNICEF, 2018, 2023). A number of programmes to restore social-service infrastructure (e.g. medical institutions, libraries, cultural and youth centres) and enhance employment opportunities and entrepreneurial prospects for IDPs and local citizens in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions—including offering vocational training and support for SMEs—were implemented by UNDP and IOM (IOM, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Reliefweb, 2015; UNDP, 2016, 2017). In addition to benefiting social utility buildings, Japanese financial support enabled UNHCR to conduct necessary repairs of properties damaged during the conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblast (UNHCR, 2019). This assistance, delivered *via* international partners and institutions, was intended to foster social, economic, and political resilience. Overall, the abovementioned initiatives constituted a new development in the history of Japanese ODA to Ukraine.

Responding to the 2022 crisis: Japan's ODA to Ukraine after the Russian aggression

Since February 2022, assistance initiatives—both bilateral and multilateral—for Ukraine have increased immensely in terms of their numbers and sheer volume, encompassing emergency aid, grants, loans, debt relief, and material help. Predictably, the largest quantities of assistance have been extended in the form of loans. In April 2022, Japan (in cooperation with the World Bank) offered a loan of up to 13 billion JPY for the purposes of stabilising Ukraine's economy (MOFA, 2022c). In June of the same year, this initial loan financing was extended by 65 billion JPY, fulfilling PM Kishida's earlier verbal promises to increase his country's backing (MOFA, 2022d). Additionally, in early 2023, Japan, as a member of the Group of Creditors of Ukraine, agreed debt-relief measures to alleviate the pressure on Ukraine's economy (MOFA 2023b). Nonetheless, Japan's contribution was among the lowest of those of the G7 economies. In February 2023, in the run up to the G7 summit in Hiroshima, PM Kishida, seeking to close this gap, pledged that Japan would provide guarantees for further loans from the World Bank to the sum of 5.5 billion USD (approx. 737 billion JPY; *Asahi Shimbun*, 2023a). Of the promised sum, 471 million USD was allocated as a grant to the World Bank's multi-donor Ukraine Relief, Recovery, Reconstruction and Reform Trust Fund (URTF) in April 2023. At that point in time, Japan's contribution helped to double the financial leeway available through the fund to support Ukraine's key sectors and infrastructure (World Bank, 2023a). Towards the end of June 2023, a 1.5 billion USD loan from the World Bank was guaranteed by Japan. This loan was intended to alleviate the poverty brought about by the ongoing war, to buttress reforms to improve transparency and accountability in the use of public resources, and finally, to support the functioning of the Ukrainian market economy (World Bank, 2023b).

At the same time, numerous smaller grants were extended to Ukraine. For instance, 'Economic and Social Development Programme' was allocated to strengthen Ukrainian health and medical infrastructure, which—at that point—had been doubly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the disastrous consequences of the Russian invasion (MOFA, 2022c). Further grant aid materialised in March 2023, with the provision of approximately 75.5 billion JPY for de-mining and debris-clearance actions, for government provision of basic utilities and services (e.g. electricity, sewage, transportation), and to support the Ukrainian agricultural sector (MOFA, 2023d, 2023f). As such, the funds were intended to contribute towards the recovery and reconstruction of the country. This allocation of grant aid was in line with PM Kishida's commitments presented during his visit to Kiev (2023).

Additionally, throughout 2022 and 2023, several emergency grants and other sums were allocated to various international institutions and actors (UN bodies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, OCHA, and UNOPS, as well as ICRC and IOM) to fund the response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis

in Ukraine. The international partners' experience of funding projects in eastern Ukraine since 2014 facilitated the process of mounting a response under the new wartime conditions. Furthermore, for the first time, Japanese NGOs joined the humanitarian effort. The two largest grants were allocated in March and April 2022 (cumulatively 200 mln USD) to implement projects by international organisations in the fields of WASH, medical care, and food and shelter provision to support Ukraine's population—and the neighbouring countries of Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary—in dealing with the Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russian aggression (MOFA, 2022a, 2022b). Smaller grants were provided to facilitate the transportation of equipment and medical products, offer articles such as generators/solar lanterns needed to alleviate the consequences of the damage to Ukrainian energy infrastructure, as well as material supplies for the national police service of Ukraine (MOFA, 2022f, 2023c). Furthermore, Japanese government financially supported the WHO's efforts to foster resilience to COVID-19 in Ukraine and neighbouring countries by supplying refugees with PPE, medical equipment, and medication (MOFA, 2023a). Finally, after the destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant dam in Southern Ukraine led to widespread flooding in the surrounding areas and the evacuation of local residents, an emergency grant was extended, along with material help (e.g. water purifiers and tanks, drain pumps, etc.), through JICA (MOFA, 2023g). By June 2023, the above-mentioned aid amounted to approximately 220 million USD.

In addition to substantially increasing its ODA flows to Ukraine, over the last two years, Japan has consistently participated in multilateral meetings devoted to supporting Ukraine through the ongoing crisis, including the High-Level International Donor's Conference for Ukraine in May 2022 (Warsaw) and the Ukraine Recovery Conferences in July 2022 (Lugano) and June 2023 (London). Additionally, support for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction featured prominently on the agenda of the G7 summit in Hiroshima (May 2023) hosted by Kishida's government (White House, 2023). PM Kishida also reaffirmed his solidarity with Ukraine during the surprise visit to the country prior to G7 summit in March 2023—as the last of G7 leaders to reach Kiev—and emphasised Japan's commitment to utilising ODA to 'support to the socio-economic development of Ukraine, including support [for] nuclear safety and medical and cultural institutions' (MOFA, 2023e, p. 3). In July of the same year, Akihiko Tanaka, the current president of JICA, visited Ukraine. During the visit, there was discussion of the prospects for further collaboration in the fields of debris, mining, and other unexploded-ordnance clearance—as well as agriculture and the human resources development of Ukrainian civil service members (JICA, 2023). Furthermore, it was agreed that the Reconstruction Agency—an institution created in 2012 to support the restoration of areas damaged during the Great East Japan Earthquake (2011)—would share its expertise with Ukraine in the field of securing basic needs for disaster-affected

populations (State Agency for Restoration & Development of Infrastructure of Ukraine, 2023).

Discussion: towards closing the conception–performance gap

As discussed earlier, seen from role theory perspective, the 2014 Ukraine crisis exposed the friction between the ambitious ideational and behavioural tenets of the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC and the need to act as a *persistent negotiator* in dealings with Russia. This occurrence of inter-role conflict—challenging the salience of the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC—necessitated the implementation of coping measures to address the situation. In the early aftermath of the Crimea annexation and the outbreak of hostilities in Donbas, and in the context of Japan's ODA to Ukraine, the Japanese government opted to pursue a compromise, choosing (reluctant) participation in G7 sanctions against Russia, providing discursive support for Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, and increasing ODA support for Ukraine—especially in 2014 and 2015. However, by 2016, with few exceptions, the period of intensifying ODA support for Ukraine was largely finished. This development corresponded with the marked disappearance of Ukraine from Abe's speeches and statements. In 2014 and 2015, the subject of Ukraine and the ongoing crisis had featured on Abe's discursive agenda, culminating in the first-ever visit of a Japanese PM to the country in June 2015. However, from 2016, the attention devoted to Ukraine diminishes, dissipating in the context of Abe's 'new approach' policy to Russia, with its renewed push towards promoting cooperation with Moscow to secure a breakthrough in the dispute over the Northern Territories (Brown, 2019). Hence, in the context of the post-2014 Ukraine crisis PM Abe and his administration undertook efforts to achieve compromise between the conflicting behavioural expectations, but ultimately the role conflict was managed by 'enact[ing] one role at the expense of another', with issue-specific/geographic concerns taking primacy over ideational factors.

In the field of foreign aid, the implemented compromise involved 'adjustment changes', with rather time- and scope-limited shifts in the ODA efforts undertaken by the Abe government in response to the breach of international norms and rules represented by the conflict in southeast Ukraine. Additionally, the projects in eastern Ukraine realised through international actors may be considered representative of a 'programme change', as they were new tools deployed to provide support to the local populace. Hence, the article conceptualises ODA initiatives as modes through which compromise in role conflicts may be pursued in practice on the ground. One aspect to ponder is the compensatory aspect or value of the abovementioned forms (or any others) of pursuing such compromise—that is, how far such measures can be said to alleviate or mitigate the friction between conflicting behavioural expectations.

As noted above, the ODA support for Ukraine through increasingly substantial loans and grants decreased after 2016, and the 2014 and 2015 grants had clear economic self-interest elements written into them. The engagement with Ukraine through development assistance and cooperation channels was largely maintained *via* the growth of small-scale GAHSP initiatives for Ukrainian stakeholders, and the projects realised by the above-mentioned international actors in eastern Ukraine. Although these initiatives were undoubtedly important for Ukraine, they were less visible and more low-profile than the large-scale bilateral grants and loans had been.⁵ The 2017 ‘Country Assistance Policy for Ukraine’, recognising the need for further assistance to the country, clearly states that, ‘from [a] geopolitical point of view Ukraine plays a significant role in ensuring regional stability [...] [and] it is essential for Japan, as a responsible member of the global society, to undertake fundamental measures in support of the independence of Ukraine’ (MOFA, 2017, p. 1). Nevertheless, as Kitade (2020) highlights, the amount of ODA allocated to Ukraine was still much lower than that delivered to Azerbaijan as of 2018. Hence, the compensatory value of the ODA measures to manage the conflict between the two NRCs and the ensuing conception–performance gap in regard to Ukraine was rather circumscribed.

In summary, it is perhaps most fitting to speak about a ‘role adaptation process’ in the wake of the 2014 Ukraine crisis, as existing ODA measures—with their focus on democratisation, reconciliation, and human security issues—were temporarily increased to respond strategically to the crisis and to more vigorously enact the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC, but neither the meta- nor issue-specific roles underwent ideational changes.

Conversely, since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the operationalisation of the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC *via* ODA measures has increased exponentially. In Japanese ODA support to Ukraine in the post-2022 environment, we can clearly observe substantial transformation, including ‘programme change’ and ‘goal change’, with a wide range of development and humanitarian measures offered to help meet Ukraine’s financial and social needs under conditions of ongoing armed conflict and strongly orientated towards sustaining the Ukrainian state. The downgrading of the *persistent negotiator* NRC in the role set of Japan’s foreign policy—and its being rendered dormant in the post-2022 context—has resolved the conflict between the meta- and issue-specific roles. This shift has increased the salience of the supra-NRC, closing the ‘conception–performance gap’ and increasing the alignment between Japan’s proactive foreign policy posture in speech and the government’s actions.

Conclusions

The aim of the presented article was to explore the changes in Japan’s foreign policy through the lens of Japanese ODA to Ukraine between 2014 and 2023. The article has utilised a role theory approach to discuss the

tension between the competing NRCs guiding Japan's foreign policy behaviour towards Ukraine, showing how these ideational notions have guided—and been reflected in—the concrete foreign aid measures offered by Japan.

From a role theory perspective, despite the efforts of former PM Abe to align the *proactive contributor to peace* and *persistent negotiator* NRCs, these meta- and issue-specific roles were ill-matched and contradictory, with the 2014 Ukraine crisis exposing the inter-role conflict when the NRCs demanded incompatible behaviours: namely, the censoring of Russia for its blatant breach of international law and aggressive behaviour towards its neighbour, along with the fostering of cooperation and affinity with the Russian government to achieve a breakthrough on the Northern Territories issue and the peace treaty. This article has demonstrated that, whilst the Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas led to an initial increase in Japanese engagement in Ukraine through ODA (as well as to diplomatic exchanges with the country), closer investigation has revealed the limits of this particular change in the foreign policy measures deployed in response to the crisis. Conversely, the post-2022 ODA measures—in conjunction with the other policy steps supporting Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction—have demonstrated an increasing alignment between the prescriptive requirements of the *proactive contributor to peace* NRC and the role-enactment measures contributing to the closure of the conception–performance gap in Japan's foreign policy towards Ukraine. Hence, the change in Japan's foreign policy role set was reflected in the implementation of robust ODA measures to respond to Russia's most recent violation of international law and to support Ukraine through the crisis. The continuing support to Ukraine has increased both the salience and credibility of its *proactive contributor to peace* NRC.

In early 2024, the sum of support pledged to Ukraine by Japan reached around 12 billion USD (Nakano, 2024). Whilst this placed Japan in fourth place among bilateral donors in terms of total allocations of aid, it translated to roughly 0.13% of the country's GDP, putting Japan behind the Baltic, Nordic, and Central European states—which occupy the top positions—but still considerably ahead of Australia and South Korea, for instance (Kiel Institute for the Global Economy, 2024). Furthermore, as noted in the article, loans account for a large percentage of the support, with Japan able to provide only very limited military aid. Nevertheless, the importance of contributions to meet the economic and fiscal needs of the country at war should not be underestimated (Tsuruoka, 2024). Furthermore, the organisation of events laying the groundwork for the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine, such as the Japan–Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction (19 February 2024) (MOFA, 2024b), demonstrated Japan's commitment to expanding its bilateral linkages with the country and maintaining focus on Ukraine and its needs, despite reports of 'war fatigue' amongst Western supporters. Additionally, in October 2023, Japan and Ukraine began

negotiations regarding a bilateral agreement on security guarantees, with the provision of support for the economic recovery of Ukraine considered to be an important part of the package (President of Ukraine, 2023). Although some commentators have drawn attention to the limits of such security agreements between Japan and Ukraine (see Tsuruoka, 2024), the abovementioned initiatives contribute to fostering ties between the countries and help to reverse the previous trend of Ukraine's relative lack of importance in Japan's foreign policy.

Finally, the conceptual tools used in this article could be applied to explore other cases of intra-role conflict in Japanese foreign policy involving frictions between specific NRC (meta-, issue-, and region-relevant); alignment and disjuncture between ambitious behavioural prescriptions and actual behaviour; and ODA measures used to operationalise NRC and/or manage frictions between NRCs. The case of Georgia in the periods up to and after the Russian invasion in 2008 could offer one fruitful line of inquiry. Georgia was mentioned (alongside Ukraine) as a part of the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity' (MOFA, 2007) and as a 'value-based diplomacy'—despite its decreasing relevance since its heyday during the first Abe cabinet (2006–2007)—was still present in the discursive repertoire of Japanese leaders (Harris, 2009). Second, Japan's response to the 2021 coup in Myanmar could be of interest, having revealed a disjuncture between Japan's assertions of the importance of liberal and democratic values and its unwillingness to enact substantial measures against the repressive military regime, whilst only cautiously approaching the question of suspending its ODA projects (Black, 2024, pp. 156–165). Such prospective studies could offer comparative insights into NRCs in Japan's foreign policy and their enactment through ODA measures.

Notes

1. The crucial NRCs of *exporter of security*, *promoter of universal values*, *reliable partner*, and *regional stabiliser* (including economic stabilisation through ODA; Sakaki, 2013, p. 20) may be encompassed by this, as their constituent components are commensurate with the key features of PM Abe's NRC.
2. Nevertheless, the turn towards an increasingly collaborative and measured approach to Russia pre-dates PM Abe's return to power, having commenced in 2011, when the DPJ still controlled the government, and followed a period of increasingly tense exchanges between the two countries on the territorial issue that arose in 2009 (Brown, 2014, p. 84). Prior to the momentous shift executed by Abe – and despite occasional utterances advocating alternative solutions to the Northern Territories and peace treaty issues – the official stance underlined the validity of returning all four disputed islands to Japan (Bukh, 2022, p. 923; Hamakada and Rozman, 2022). This was rooted in the argument that the islands had been illegally taken from Japan by the USSR, underscoring Japan's victimisation by 'the Other'. PM Abe's 'new approach' to Russia was not initially universally embraced. For instance, in 2016, MOFA was unwilling to engage in negotiations over the Northern Territories, prioritising sovereignty and preferring to 'shelve' the matter. For this reason, PM Abe turned to METI officials for support (Iwashita, 2019, pp. 116–117; see also Hakamada and Rozman, 2022 on MOFA-METI divide). Since 2018, PM Abe's approach and policy measures have become a subject of criticism due to the lack of visible progress (Hakamada and Rozman, 2022).

3. In the years following the annexation of Crimea, Japan's 'significant others' – namely the EU and the USA – similarly returned to accommodating Russia. Admittedly, the latter was suspended from the G8 in 2014 (with the 'G8' thus becoming the 'G7'), with sanctions imposed in response to the Russian violation of international norms and law. Nevertheless, the pro-Russian stance of the USA under the Trump administration, with the former president's sympathy towards Putin, overshadowed concerns regarding Ukraine. In the case of EU, the latter condemned Russia's actions and expressed support for Ukraine. The crash of a Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over conflict territory marked an important turning point in the EU's approach to the crisis (European Council, 2014, 2023; Sobczyk, 2015). However, the EU retained its dependence on Russian fossil fuels (Siddi, 2022) and leading European political figures such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel continued to pursue vigorous dialogue with Putin. Hence, the actions of Japan's counterparts among the 'like-minded countries' prior to the 2022 crisis did not encourage any significant increase Japan's commitment to Ukraine. However, this situation has changed dramatically since the 2022 Russian invasion, with the members of G7 maintaining a clear focus on its support for Ukraine.
4. These included medical facilities in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk/Dnipro, Kirovograd [Kropyvnytskyi], Donetsk, and Luhansk – namely, all the localities in southern and eastern Ukraine now located close to the contact line or under Russian control.
5. In the case of the largest ODA loan for the Bortnychi Sewage Treatment Plant project, the assessment and preparatory work took place prior to the eruption of 2014 crisis, with the environmental impact evaluation report for the project accepted by Ukrainian government in April 2014 (JICA, 2015, pp. 2–3). The project responded to the assistance priorities defined in Japan's 2013 country-assistance policy for Ukraine, focusing on the enhancement of infrastructure and of energy-conservation and -efficiency.

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