

“A Quest for Global Resilience” Explained

This “Strategic Outlook 2025” looks back on the turbulent year 2024, when many democracies, including Japan and the United States, held national elections, and looks ahead to the year 2025, which will be even more eventful and challenging than the previous year. One of the objectives of this booklet is to provide some “food for thought” by presenting a vivid picture comprising the viewpoints of each of our researchers on the themes to be addressed at the 6th Tokyo Global Dialogue (TGD6), which will be hosted by JIIA in January 2025.

The title for the TGD6 is “A Quest for Global Resilience”. This reflects a sense of crisis that the post-Cold War world is losing the resilience it once had, as well as a strong message that Japan, a beneficiary of a resilient international community, must work to revive and restore such quality.

What, then, is causing the decline in the resilience of the international community? Before looking ahead to a future that is likely to become even more uncertain, one must consider how the various factors that supported the stability of the international community during the past 30 years or so of the post-Cold War era have been drastically shaken.

The first is, needless to say, the change of tone in US politics. JIIA does not warn against the rise of populism in the US based solely on inflammatory campaign narratives by the Trump camp marked by, among others, its declarations to impose tariffs even to allies and friends. However, the United States – which has since World War II sought to deter regional conflicts through military power, pursued economic stability through the US dollar as a world reserve currency, and ensured the peoples of many nations enjoy prosperity through the political leadership of its president – is about to unburden itself of these responsibilities for managing the liberal camp. This cannot be done without upsetting the international order. More than a decade after President Barack Obama stated in 2013 during the Syrian crisis that the United States was no longer the world’s policeman, the second Trump administration will further reflect the “America First” notion in its foreign policy.

It should be noted that, under the Biden administration, the US government established and made full use of a lattice network of alliances with key stakeholders, tailored to adjust to regions and issues at hand, to achieve a certain degree of stability. The idea of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” resonated with Trump, too, during his first administration, prompting him to strengthen ties with forces for stability in the Indo-Pacific region through the Quad. While strengthening the US-Japan alliance is an essential option for the US, which is poised to engage in a strategic competition with China, that alone will not bring about stability in the region. Based on the successes achieved in building this network, it is necessary for Japan to play a leading role and to engage the US in minilateral networks, without letting the US fall into an all-too-easy “ABB (anything but Biden)” mindset.

The second is the significant deterioration of global governance, the most prominent example of which is the dysfunctional UN Security Council. Just after the end of the Cold War, initiatives by countries such as Japan and Germany to gain permanent membership in the UN Security Council, which had begun to function as it should, were rejected by the existing permanent members with a famous caveat: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

However, the current Security Council faces a situation where the conflict between the Russia-China camp and the P3 (the US, UK and France) has become so acute that it is currently unable to even impose

effective sanctions. What is more, Russia, which is part of the P5, is the aggressor in a war in violation of the UN Charter. There is concern that it will become even more difficult for the Security Council to punish or condemn North Korea’s violations of international law in the future due to the veto power exercised by Russia or China. The legal order on international trade, too, remains severely damaged, with the US refusal to appoint a member to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Appellate Body leaving the judiciary function without a judge. Against this backdrop, the BRICS, which began with five countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), is expanding to become a camp defying Western countries’ dominance.

As one of the countries that benefited from the global architecture represented by the UN Security Council and the WTO as well as the prevalence of rule of law in the international community, Japan should focus on rebuilding the architecture.

To this end, it is essential for Japan to cooperate with countries that share a willingness to respect global governance. To start with, it is imperative to underscore the importance of utilizing the G7 framework, a gathering of developed countries that share the same commitment to resolving issues of global reach, to present their prescriptions to emerging and developing countries in the Global South to stimulate discussion. In the subsequent chapter in this Outlook (“Japan’s Course: Year One for Both Challenge Sharing and National Strategy” by Masafumi Ishii), ideas on how to reflect the views of emerging and developing countries without compromising the G7’s ability to establish norms are discussed. The G7 Chairs must continue their efforts along these lines. In the event that the Trump administration gives sole priority to an “America First” approach, as it did during its first term, Japan must be prepared to persistently continue its efforts with like-minded countries in order to maintain global governance.



(Photo: AP/Aflo)

Finally, one must underscore the enormous impact the flood of information will have on international affairs and on the efforts to protect universal values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. The media has heretofore, by and large, monopolized the function of “curator” of information to the public by selecting and presenting relevant information from the vast amount of information available. However, with the development of the Internet and the emergence of social networking services, the situation has changed drastically. Numerous actors have emerged who transmit information with their own unique framing that differs from the media’s curation, and some of these actors have acquired extremely large audiences. We have hence entered an era in which it is increasingly difficult to determine the rightness or wrongness of the information flying around. The development of generative AI will further accelerate this trend. This chaotic speech space is extremely conducive to political distrust, as well as to forces that seek to divide society, and to populists, thereby the risk of interference by other sovereign nations is increasing. The turbulence in international affairs will be amplified by the various actors in the discourse

space, but society as a whole must stand firm against any attempt to shake the fundamental values on which a nation stands.

The possibility of change in the US’s character and position as a superpower with the furtherance of an “America First” policy, the shaken foundation of global governance, and deepened confusion in the discourse space as it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish right and wrong: how can Japan unweave this “trilemma” and offer effective solutions in an international society where conflicts and disputes occur so frequently? I sincerely hope that the upcoming TGD6 will be a forum where the various practical ideas of leading international experts resonate with many practitioners as they engage in useful discussions to resolve these issues.

(November 18, 2024, Koichiro Matsumoto,
JIIA Managing Director for Research and Programs)