

THE NATIONAL SECURITY & REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF JAPAN'S RAPIDLY AGING SOCIETY



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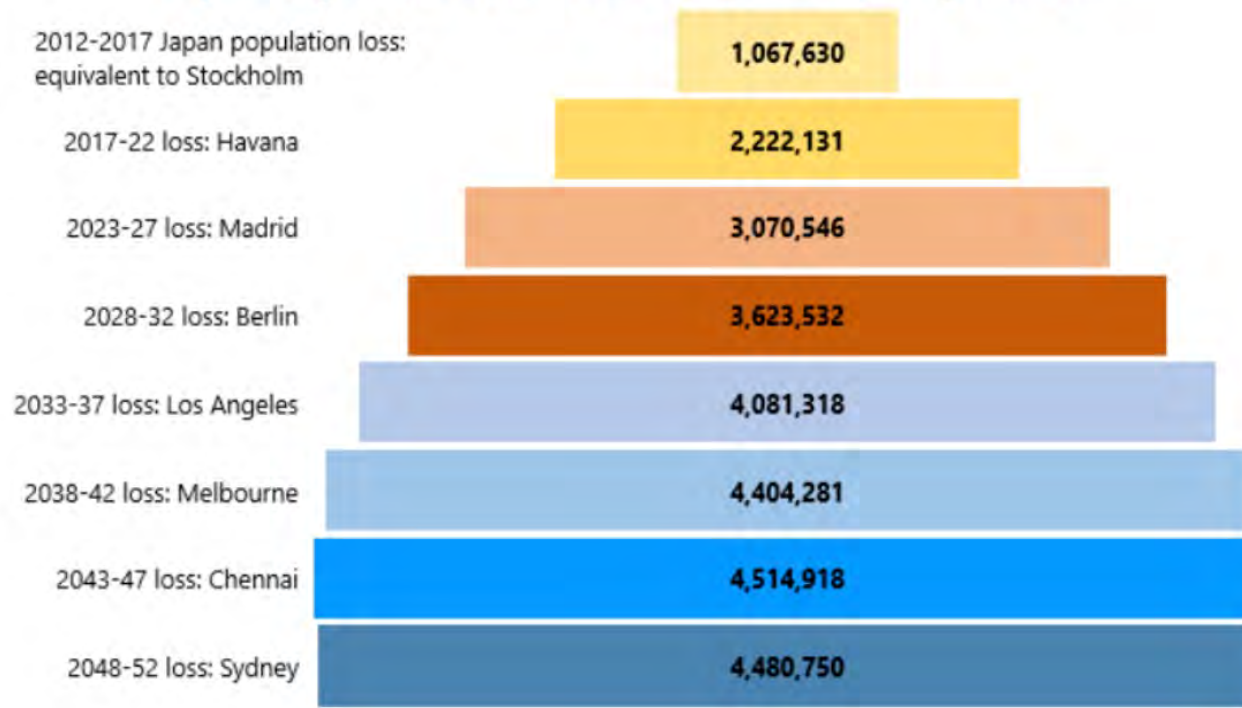
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Opening Demographic Statistics I:

- ▶ Today there are about 1.5 *million* fewer Japanese people in the world than a decade ago: more than the total population of most American cities and even some states.

Japan: Population Decline 2012–57; Estimated City Size Loss



Opening Demographic Statistics II:

- ▶ Japan is one of the first major countries in the contemporary world to experience population decline, but others in the Indo-Pacific will soon follow.
- ▶ By 2050 the populations of Japan and China will shrink by 75 million while the population of Asia as a whole will *increase* by over 700 million, 300 million in India alone.
 - Covid-19 is not likely to substantially affect these projections.

Opening Demographic Statistics III:

- ▶ **The United States is the demographic exception** in the developed world and among the existing great powers, with a predicted population **increase** of over 60 million by 2050 – compared to projected *decreases* in population in all of the major states of the developed world (the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan among them) as well as in China and Russia.
 - *This demographic shift – plus other aspects of demographic change like aging populations and gender imbalances – will cause states to adjust their national security strategies, and in turn create new regional security dynamics.*

Let me pause to say *“Happy Anniversary”*
to **The East-West Center**
– 60 years is no small feat!



&



Implications for the Indo-Pacific: A focus today on **the case of Japan**



Demographic change is a world-wide phenomenon with global implications

- ▶ The world's population is projected to grow **from 7.7 billion** in 2019 to 8.5 billion in 2030 (10% increase), and further **to 9.7 billion in 2050 (26%)** [and to 10.9 billion in 2100 (42%)].
- ▶ The population of sub-Saharan Africa is projected to double by 2050 (99%).
- ▶ Other regions will see varying rates of increase between 2019 and 2050:
 - Oceania excluding Australia/New Zealand (56%)
 - Northern Africa and Western Asia (46%)
 - Australia/New Zealand (28%)
 - Central and **Southern Asia (25%)**
 - Latin America and the Caribbean (18%)
 - **Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (3%)**
 - **Europe and Northern America (2%)**

Nine countries will make up more than half the projected population growth between now and 2050

- ▶ In descending order of the expected increase:
India (#1),
Nigeria, Pakistan, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania,
Indonesia (#7), Egypt, and
The United States (#9)
- ▶ *Around 2027, India is projected to overtake China as the world's most populous country.*

Not just “shrinking” but “aging”... ...and more...

- ▶ **The median age** in India today is about 30, in the US and China about 40, and in Japan almost 50.
 - Around 2035, India will still be comparatively much younger, up to about 32, the US will still be around 40, China up to 45, and Japan up to 55.
 - Put another way, as set out in a recent article in *The Economist*.
 - According to UN projections, during the next 25 years the percentage of China’s population over the age of 65 will more than double, from 12% to 25%. By contrast America is on track to take nearly a century, and Europe to take more than 60 years, to make the same shift.
- ▶ Moreover, the challenges are not limited to population shrinking and aging, but also the changing ratio of population size among generations and, in some countries, a growing imbalance in the numbers of males and females [*e.g.*, Hudson and Den Boer 2002, 2004; Eberstadt 2019]

Existing scholarship that considers “the graying of the great powers”

- ▶ ...such as by Goldstone, Kaufmann, & Toft 2012, Haas 2007, Jackson & Howe 2008 argues that [the resulting challenges to global security will be profound.](#)
- ▶ **Nicholas Eberstadt**, a long-time researcher on demographics based at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC, wrote an article in the influential US journal, *Foreign Affairs*, in 2019 called, **“With Great Demographics Comes Great Power.”**
 - [While he argues that favorable US demographics will be a source of US power in the future, he also notes the great challenges the US will face with the demographic decline of its traditional allies.](#)

Implications for the Indo-Pacific: A mixed and unclear picture



What we do not know from existing research...

... is how culture and politics will affect how states respond to demographic decline, such as:

- whether states will even remain committed to maintaining a robust military defense posture,
- how accepting populations will be of technological alternatives like unmanned systems, and
- whether gender roles will evolve in ways that favor adaptive change.

This is why I have conducted initial research on this project in Northeast Asia and why I have planned additional fieldwork in the Indo-Pacific once research travel is again possible vis-à-vis the pandemic:

- to study the political and cultural dimensions of demographic challenges and local thinking about possible technological solutions.

Demography is *not* destiny –
but will need to be reckoned with
more than to date

- ▶ both by policymakers and by scholars.

Let's take a bit deeper dive now into
the Japanese case.



Japan's Self-Defense Forces

have not met their recruitment targets since 2014

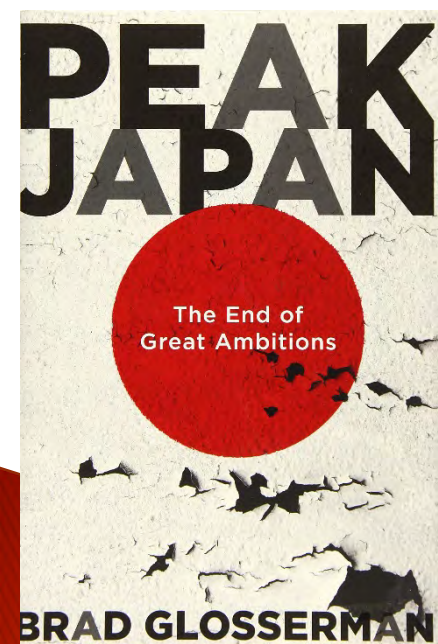
- ▶ In 2018, the JSDF set a goal of maintaining a force of 247,000, but only managed 227,000:
 - an 8% shortfall (20,000 troops) in total,
 - but said to be around 25% at the lower ranks. (*Economist* 2020)
- ▶ The number of Japanese between 18 and 26 years old, long the prime recruiting pool, peaked at 17m in 1994.
 - Note: *Japan has not enjoyed a replacement birthrate since the early 1970s – more than two generations ago – so a *fix* to this problem would not be easy: but how to correct the demographic shortcoming is not what my research is about.*
 - *I'm focusing, rather, on the effect of the coming changes.*

Can the Present Level of Defense Spending Continue?

- ▶ Beyond looking just at the effect on the JSDF, can the trend of recent years of *increasing* defense spending near annually continue over a projected future of a *declining* total GDP as a result of population decline? I suspect not.
 - Japan now runs the largest budget deficit of any developed country by far, 3.8% of GDP and a total debt of over US\$11 trillion, well over twice its GDP (vs. US \$22 trillion debt, about 104% of our GDP, so less than half).

The Paradox of a Stronger Japan, despite the demographic challenges I

- ▶ A 2019 book by Brad Glosserman, called *Peak Japan: The End of Great Ambitions*, sets out the argument that Japan's demographics signal a fundamental turning point for Japan. I'm not sure I agree, though – particularly in the area of national security. (But I recommend the book as a provocative and timely read.)

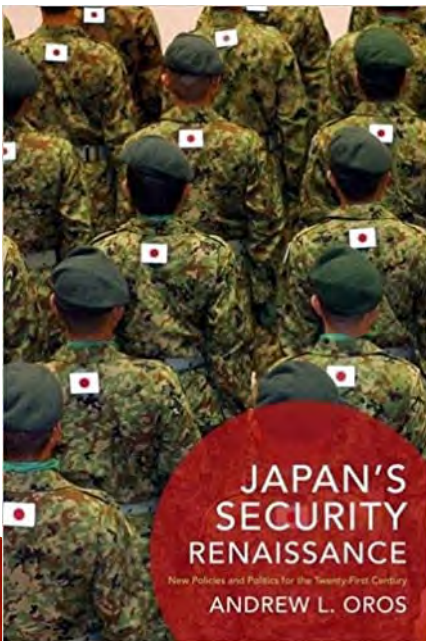


- Rather, what I would stress at this point in time, it is somewhat of a paradox that as Japan has experienced its first decade of what demographers now call “super-aging” (where over 20% of your population is over 65) and has experienced population shrinkage, its military forces are more capable than ever.

The Paradox of a Stronger Japan, despite the demographic challenges II

- I have described this as “Japan’s Security Renaissance” in my last book (which, again, I thank the EWC for supporting). Others, including fellow Washington, DC-based scholars [Sheila Smith](#) and [Jeffrey Hornung](#) also have written important work that documents Japan’s increasing military capabilities.

- Very recent discussion in Japan about defense again envisions further increases in capabilities, including perhaps another Rubicon crossed of developing [missile strike capability](#).
- Conversion of Izumo-class destroyers to carry F-35 aircraft and deployment of additional Aegis-equipped destroyers (bringing the total to 8) are two other of numerous examples of Japan’s expanding capabilities – despite the demographic challenges that already are affecting Japan.



The next steps of my research on Japan: future demographic challenges

- Robert Eldridge, formerly of the US Marine Corps, also has written recently (in Japanese) specially about challenges to the JSDF posed by demographic change.



- He offers about a dozen recommendations for addressing the current shortfall in manpower, several of which appear to be in the process of being implemented by the MOD – such as extending the recruitment and retirement ages, and making greater efforts to attract women into the JSDF.
- Additional ideas include outsourcing some of the current functions of the JSDF, such as maintenance and, more controversially, disaster relief activities.

- Look for a forthcoming book by Tom Le of Pomona College:
 - “*Japan’s Aging Peace*” (Columbia University Press, forthcoming ‘21)

The Bigger (Regional) Picture – Japan is not aging and shrinking in a vacuum

- ▶ All of Japan's neighbors are facing a similar future, though a bit delayed, including:
 - Other US allies in the region: South Korea and Thailand (though not the Philippines)
 - Other security partners to Japan and to the US: Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam
 - And, importantly, principal security concerns: China, North Korea, and Russia
 - Working-age populations in South Korea, Taiwan, and China already have begun to shrink, with those states' total populations projected to decline in the 2020s.
- ▶ Meanwhile, new potential security partners for both Japan and the US will grow in population and also maintain robust youth populations.
 - India and Indonesia are two of the Top Nine states for growth through 2050.
 - Not coincidentally, in my view, these states – and the Philippines – are among the states that both Japan and the US are seeking to deepen security ties with.

New technologies may offer *some* offsets for shrinking populations

- ▶ New technologies such as robotics and other unmanned systems, including artificial intelligence, may offer some offsets for shrinking populations.
- ▶ But at the same time, such new technologies themselves are also altering the nature of the regional security landscape.
- ▶ A few quick observations I have about the potential mitigating influence of technology are:
 - (1) There often still is a need for people to operate many so-called “unmanned” systems,
 - (2) different sorts of threats can employ technology differently, and
 - (3) there are a surprisingly number of non-high-tech potential solutions to shrinking populations and aging that also could be pursued – such as outsourcing and greater efficiencies.
- ▶ In the specific case of Japan, as retired Admiral Koda was recently quoted as saying in *The Economist*. “Drones and robots require operators and skilled engineers—the sort of people the JSDF already has trouble attracting.”

Thus, and to sum up,

these broader factors are why I am planning a book-length manuscript on this topic, in which Japan is playing a leading role.

- ▶ Demographic change is an important factor, but so are differences in security threats, the availability of technological solutions, and whether the political and social system is willing and able to adapt.
- ▶ In the case of **Japan**, demographic change is *beginning* to be felt in the security arena, some modest responses can be seen – *but more significant challenges are likely to be faced in the coming decade.*

Thank you for your interest !

I look forward to your comments and questions...

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*If you'd like to hear more about regional implications of demographic change in the Indo-Pacific, consider joining my upcoming talk for the Australian Institute of International Affairs on **Sept 2 at 8pm Eastern Time / Sept 3 at 9am Japan time / 10am Canberra time:***
<http://tdy.cl/se/f2XzSXM>

