

# Japan's Unwavering Commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Challenges, Cooperation, and Partnerships

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## o. Opening

- Thank you Rector Chintamani Mahapatra for the introduction, and good morning to you all. It is my pleasure to join this very timely and much desired event with distinguished speakers. I am delighted that especially from Japan, Prof. Akihiko Tanaka, President of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and one of the most respected Japanese scholars on international politics, is with us. I would like to thank JNU and Japan Foundation for organizing such an important conference.

## 1. Introduction

- In recent years, there is not a single day when we do not hear or read the word “Indo-Pacific”. “Indo-Pacific” is not just a geographical term any more but now a widely accepted term that embodies the commitment to achieve a peaceful and prosperous region as a whole.
- This view is confirmed by the fact that more and more countries are putting out their own visions for the Indo-Pacific region. One of the best known among them is India’s vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific announced by Prime Minister Modi at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018. The

United States and Australia have been advancing their own visions for some years now. The ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific came out in 2019. As Professor Rector Chintamani Mahapatra mentioned, in Europe, Germany and the Netherlands recently published their guidelines for the Indo-Pacific following France.

- The agenda of this conference, which includes a session on Southeast Asian countries as well as the one on European perspectives, also reflects this point and gives you a sense of how encompassing this concept of “Indo-Pacific” has become over the years.
  
- Before diving into the details, I would like to highlight that it was here in Delhi in 2007 that in his famous Confluence of the Two Seas speech, then Prime Minister Abe first pointed to the emerging dynamics of the region by describing the Pacific and the Indian Oceans as “seas of freedom and of prosperity”. Later, in 2016, during his visit to Kenya, he unveiled Japan’s “Indo-Pacific Vision”: a vision to make this region into a place “that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion.”
  
- Now a Free and Open Indo-Pacific has become the core diplomatic concept that Japan stands on. And it remains so under the current Prime Minister Suga’s administration. Immediately after assuming office, Prime Minister Suga reaffirmed Japan’s commitment to the vision in numerous phone calls with world leaders, including Prime Minister Modi, Prime Minister Morrison, and very recently with President Biden, among others. Consistency is also demonstrated by his first foreign visit destinations being Vietnam and Indonesia. It was also shortly after he became Prime Minister when Japan hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting despite

the COVID-19 related challenges; this is another testament to our continued efforts. Let me assure you that Japan's commitment to this vision remains unwavering.

## 2. Japan's Indo-Pacific Vision

- Today, I would like to share with you a) the background of Japan's Indo-Pacific vision, b) Japan's practical cooperation under the vision's three pillars, and c) the close partnerships Japan has forged to generate synergy under this vision.

### (i) Opportunities and Challenges in the Indo-Pacific

- First, let me illustrate the background of our vision, which is the opportunities and challenges that this region is facing. As mentioned earlier, it was in Kenya where then Prime Minister Abe revealed Japan's Indo-Pacific vision, which makes it clear that, for Japan, the Indo-Pacific means the vast area stretching from Africa to American Continent. Here, we see Africa with enormous potentials and Asia with spectacular growth. Dynamism forged by the confluence of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean is the driving force for global growth. In other words, the Indo-Pacific region is full of enormous opportunities. It is obvious to everyone's eyes that the center of gravity of global economy has shifted to the Indo-Pacific in the past decades. This shift makes it all the more important to ensure a rules-based order to promote peace and prosperity in the region.
  
- At the same time, the Indo-Pacific region is full of challenges. We have witnessed security challenges, including at India's northern frontiers, in the East and South China Seas, as well as in cyberspace. Fundamental principles including freedom of navigation and the rule of law have been tested. And sound

development is threatened by practices that lead to unsustainable external debt and insufficient technology transfer. This extremely important region faces these serious challenges. Here, against this backdrop, Japan presented the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, a vision that countries that share common principles could pursue together to make the region more stable and prosperous.

(ii) Practical Cooperation under Three Pillars

- Now, what concrete actions has Japan taken under this vision? This is where the second theme comes in: the three pillars that Japan's vision is anchored upon. They are (i) promotion and consolidation of fundamental principles of the international community, (ii) pursuit of economic prosperity, and (iii) commitment to peace and stability. Naturally, these pillars are formed in such a way that they correspond with the challenges we face in the region, which I explained earlier.
  
- For promotion of fundamental principles such as the rule of law at sea, Japan has widely shared its insights and experiences on maritime law including UNCLOS with the Indo-Pacific countries. For the pursuit of economic prosperity, Japan, as a flagbearer of free trade, has been leading the efforts to make rules to expand a free and fair economic area, such as CPTPP in 2018 and RCEP in 2020. For enhancing connectivity, Japan led the efforts to articulate critical principles in the area, which culminated into the "G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment" which highlights openness, transparency, economic efficiency, and debt sustainability. For ensuring peace and stability in the region, Japan has provided maritime equipment such as patrol vessels and high-speed boats to Southeast Asian countries, and dispatched Japanese experts to share our

maritime law enforcement experiences. The list of Japan's efforts under this vision goes on, and we are determined to do more.

(iii) Close Partnerships to Generate Synergy

- The last and third point is close partnerships to generate synergy under this vision. The vision of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific cannot be achieved by a single country, and it requires collective efforts of like-minded countries. In my previous capacity, I worked on Japan-Australia-US trilateral cooperation as well as coordination with ASEAN partners towards this vision. Many countries have shared this vision and begun embarking on collaborating on projects with us over the past couple of years. Now here I am in Delhi to work with Indian friends and very happy to witness much progress that has been made.
  
- It goes without saying that India is an indispensable partner in Japan's endeavor to achieve this vision. A free and open Indo-Pacific is a natural shared goal for the two Asian maritime and democratic powers: Japan in the Pacific and India in the Indian Ocean. Towards this goal, we have been deepening our cooperation in all areas such as maritime security and HA/DR as Professor Chawla mentioned earlier. In the area of connectivity, we act in concert in India as well as in third countries including Bangladesh and the Maldives. In India's North East, an area of strategic importance where India's Act East Policy and Japan's vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific converge, we are working together on key connectivity projects, the construction of roads and bridges, such as India's longest Dhubri-Phulbari river bridge and many others. Japan is also closely working with India on India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative by becoming the

leading country on connectivity.

- I would also like to emphasize that the centrality and the unity of ASEAN, which is the driving force for the development of the entire Indo-Pacific, is extremely important. ASEAN-led regional mechanism such as East Asia Summit as well as ASEAN Regional Forum is the premium architecture to promote peace and stability in the region. Japan strongly supports the ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, or AOIP, and Japanese and ASEAN leaders confirmed at their summit meeting last November that AOIP and FOIP share the fundamental principles. Our cooperation with ASEAN partners includes the development of roads and bridges along with Southern Economic Corridor and East-West Economic Corridor, port development, as well as soft connectivity enhancement such as business practice trainings.
- When Prime Minister Suga and President Biden had the first phone call last month, the two leaders shared the view on the importance of strengthening the U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific region, and affirmed that they would work side-by-side to address regional challenges and to realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Japan and the US have been working in tandem in enhancing capacity of the energy sector in Viet Nam and Indonesia. Also, in the digital domain, we are working on the Japan-Guam-Australia fiber-optic submarine cable system project. We certainly look forward to advancing our efforts with the new U.S. administration.
- At the beginning of my speech, I mentioned recent developments on Indo-Pacific guidelines in Europe. At the heart of a free and open Indo-Pacific vision are universal values such as freedom of navigation and the rule of law. This

vision is a collective effort to ensure and promote these principles and values, which transcend geographical boundaries. If the law of the sea were undermined in one region, its ramifications would equally weigh on the other side of the globe. This is exactly why Japan truly welcomes more and more nations including those in Europe are starting to articulate their own vision for the Indo-Pacific. On January 25<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Minister MOTEGI became the first Japanese Foreign Minister to address the EU Foreign Affairs Committee, when he elaborated Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision and welcomed Europe's engagement in the Indo-Pacific. As clearly stated in the very name of the vision, FOIP is an inclusive concept, open to cooperation with any countries which share the same values and vision.

- Lastly, the Quad is another vital framework for advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific. Last week, the four Foreign Ministers had the 3rd meeting and concurred on further advancing practical cooperation in various areas towards the realization of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", such as quality infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, HA/DR, education and human resource development. The four countries also conducted Malabar joint naval exercise last year. Based on the strategic convergence among the four countries, we will continue to act in concert to reinforce a free and open global order based on the rule of law.

### Conclusion

- Now the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a set of fresh challenges for the Indo-Pacific region. In addition to a massive health crisis and economic difficulties brought by world-wide restrictions of movement of people and goods, we also see

opportunistic attempts to unilaterally change the status quo in various corners of the region. Today, when we need to rise from the ordeal posed by COVID-19, it is becoming more important than ever to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific where freedom of navigation and overflight is ensured, free, open and transparent trade order is maintained, and countries are well connected by quality infrastructure. Japan will continue to play a leading role to this end along with all the partners who share the cause.

- Finally, I understand that this conference seeks to acquire a clear understanding of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision from various perspectives, evaluate the progress and challenges the vision has faced, and discuss novel actions and policies that can be formulated. To this end, I hope this conference will facilitate productive discussions with deep insights and constructive ideas from the distinguished speakers and participants throughout the four-day sessions. I would like to conclude my remarks by wishing the success of this conference.

Thank you very much.