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How Australia can work with Japan in the Indo-Pacific

H D P Envall

HOW AUSTRALIA CAN WORK WITH JAPAN IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

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'How Australia can work with Japan in the Indo-Pacific'

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INTRODUCTION

Australia has long viewed Japan as a key strategic partner in Asia. Since 2007, the two countries have been working to deepen their strategic partnership, which was formalized when they signed the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in March that year.[1] In the following years, they have set out multiple agreements to enhance cooperation, notably an Economic Partnership Agreement, an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, as well as a Reciprocal Access Agreement.[2] The two countries' governments meet regularly at the highest level and cooperate closely across a range of forums, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). They also have a detailed agenda for future cooperation covering economic and strategic affairs, including working together to reduce the global impact of Covid-19.[3]

Both countries have also shifted how they define their shared region, dropping the established terminology of "Asia-Pacific" and instead deploying, or redeploying, the "Indo-Pacific" concept. For its part, Japan has developed its vision of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (*jiyū de hirakareta Indotaiheiyō*), or FOIP, while Australia seeks to "promote an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region."[4] As Thomas Wilkins argues, the two countries' embrace of the Indo-Pacific reflects their shared view of how the region's "economic dynamism and strategic competition" should be addressed, such as by boosting India's role, by keeping the US engaged, and by facilitating cooperation amongst like-minded countries when dealing with China.[5]

As a regional order-builder, Japan has come to play an key role in the Indo-Pacific. According to Saori Katada, it has become something of a "pivotal state" driving regionalism and shaping the norms and rules of the Indo-Pacific.[6] Japan is also significant for Australia. First, as an entrepreneurial state engaged in order-building, Japan represents a useful model for Australia as it pursues its own order-building initiatives. Second, Japan's preferred vision for regional order, FOIP, is well aligned to Australia's own thinking. Although a bigger player than Australia, Japan also cannot match the strategic influence of the US and China but must collaborate in any order-building project with like-minded countries.[7] In short, the two countries share a strong interest in creating a regional order that is rules-based, multilateral, and opposed to unilateral coercion. So, what might Australia learn from Japan's attempts at order-building in the Indo-Pacific? And how might the two countries cooperate more effectively as they pursue their visions for the region?

The aims of this paper are to: (1) outline Japanese and Australian approaches to order-building in the Indo-Pacific; (2) compare the two approaches and ascertain their strengths, weaknesses, and differences; and (3) using Japan's FOIP as a guide, consider options for Australia to enhance its role as an Indo-Pacific order builder and to further develop its partnership with Japan in regional order-building. The paper concludes by offering an overall assessment of the two countries' Indo-Pacific strategies along with key recommendations for how Australia might better cooperate with Japan. The central argument is that, while the respective strategies of the two countries share similarities, reveal common interests, and indeed contain various strengths and weaknesses, Australia's attempt at Indo-Pacific order-building has been under-developed compared to Japan's FOIP. Further, Australia's approach has been overly focused

on identity assertion—justifying its place in the region—and has lacked a strong strategic component tying together policy ends and means. In attempting to build an "Indo-Pacific" order, Tokyo and Canberra have both faced resourcing challenges. Unlike Japan, however, Australia has cut its investment in the types of resourcing, beyond national defense, that might underpin an effective order-building strategy. As Brendan Taylor notes, the Australian government has struggled to manage the "divergence between the rhetoric and the implementation" of its strategy.[8] In other words, it has failed to bridge the gap between its Indo-Pacific rhetoric and reality. Such weaknesses, nonetheless, point to possible areas for future learning and cooperation as Australia seeks to deepen its engagement of Japan and play a greater role as an order-builder in the Indo-Pacific.

Able Seaman Clearance Diver Benjamin Johnson (right) demonstrates diving equipment to Chief of Staff for the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force, Admiral Yutaka Murakawa, during his tour of HMAS Waterhen, Sydney. (LSIS Tara Byrne | Royal Australian Navy)

AUSTRALIA'S INDO-PACIFIC: FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY?

The Indo-Pacific is not a new idea for Australia. Policy debates on this wider region date back to the 1950s. Indeed, where Australia looked to "Asia" in the early postwar period, its geopolitical focus leant westward rather than on East Asia. The actual term "Indo-Pacific," however, only appeared rarely.[9] Accordingly, as an explicit geopolitical concept, the Indo-Pacific emerged in the Australian context relatively recently—in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. One of the responses to that humanitarian disaster was the Tsunami Core Group set up by Japan, the US, Australia and India to coordinate relief activities, a grouping that would lead to the formation of the Quad.[10] From this point, the term spread rapidly, appearing in the 2012 *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper, the 2013 National Security Strategy, and the 2013 Defence White Paper.[11] The concept also entered the wider public debate during this period, to be promoted, rejected, or dissected by key practitioners-turned-commentators as well as journalists and scholars.[12]

In the contemporary Australian debate, the Indo-Pacific concept represents a claim about changing patterns of regionalization as well as a recommendation for responding to these changes. What was previously the Asia-Pacific, as Rory Medcalf, a "long-time spruiker" of the Indo-Pacific idea, argues, is shifting into a "two-ocean system, with China turning south and west and India turning east."[13] The Indo-Pacific term is intended therefore to offer new insight into the connections emerging across diplomacy, trade, and security between these two oceans.[14] It is a "maritime 'super-region' with its geographical center in Southeast Asia,"[15] and its formation is being driven by the rise of China and India, the "thickening" of their interactions, and the impact of all this on other actors, notably the US.[16]

The Indo-Pacific idea can therefore be understood in two ways, as Taylor explains.[17] In its first sense, it is a *conditional* idea, explaining the changing nature of the region. The Indo-Pacific is an emerging regional system—a

geopolitical and geoeconomic reality. But it is also a strategic concept or, as Nick Bisley notes, "a device to organise policy in a contested geopolitical climate."[18] Because this new region is characterised by growing strategic competition as a result of China's rise, other states must develop "new partnerships" to hedge against this competition and protect their own interests.[19]

Both understandings jostle for prominence within the Australian debate.[20] Overall, however, the term resonates with an Australian audience because it helps the country to reimagine its place in the regional order and so move from the periphery to the region's center.[21] In the past, Australia's position on the margins, at the southern end of the "Asia-Pacific," has given the country's security debates a somewhat abstract quality.[22] For Medcalf, the Indo-Pacific idea "recognises that Australia is an integral part of its region, not peripheral to it. At last, here is a definition of Asia that automatically includes Australia."[23] The Indo-Pacific thus viewed can be said to be "literally where Australia belongs."[24]

These notions of "belonging" emerge clearly in Australia's official governmental discourse. Indeed, governmental rhetoric looks not dissimilar to Medcalf's outlook, perhaps reflecting his role as an "early adopter" of the concept whilst working as an Australian intelligence analyst.[25] Defined in basic geographic terms—as a region stretching from the "eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia"—the Indo-Pacific offers Australia a sense of belonging absent with alternative definitions of the region and then a rationale for action in response to this new reality.[26] Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has tapped into this belonging narrative, noting that the Indo-Pacific "is where we live." He has then used this assertion to argue that this new region would be where Australia could "make the most meaningful impact and contribution."[27]

Australia's overall strategic objective for the region is that it be "open, inclusive and prosperous," as well as "safe, secure and free." It should deliver opportunities for business and promote "international rules," with peace sustaining long-term growth. At the same time, Australia wants a region where its "ability to prosecute [its] interests freely is not constrained by the exercise of coercive power."[28] Australia comes closest to articulating its preferred method achieving these goals when its states that, to ensure a strong regional order, it will support a regional balance of power and cooperate with like-minded countries to achieve this.[29] China is thus a central, if sometimes only indirectly addressed, factor in Australia's Indo-Pacific thinking. According to the former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Frances Adamson, Australia aims to incorporate "a more powerful China into a regional order."[30] In turn, the primary mechanism for establishing a stable balance of power and incorporating China into the region order is to keep the US engaged in the region. Consequently, the alliance with the US remains "central" to Australia's Indo-Pacific outlook as it was to the earlier Asia-Pacific outlook.[31] As the 2016 Defence White Paper highlights, a "strong and deep alliance is at the core of Australia's security and defence planning."[32] With this in mind, the Australian government has substantially increased its defense spending in recent years. In 2021–22, for example, spending rose by 4.1 percent from the previous year to AUD$44.6 billion (US$31.4 billion) or 2.09 percent of Australian GDP.[33]

The core premise of the Australian government's Indo-Pacific engagement, according to Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne, is that "regional players, not just the global superpowers, can have a profound impact in shaping the region's future."[34] What would Australia be doing in order to shape the region? Payne has argued that the country would be "investing in people, in economies, in security and systems."[35] This would include investments in Covid-19 vaccine and economic recovery programs focused on Southeast Asia and the Pacific, participation in various multilateral institutions (albeit in established forums largely focused on East Asia) and improved bilateral relations (again, apart from India, largely focused on Asia and the Pacific).[36]

JAPAN'S INDO-PACIFIC: FROM STRATEGY TO VISION?

How did Japan arrive at its Indo-Pacific vision? The outline, if not the terminology, of Japan's FOIP vision appeared during Abe Shinzō's first stint as Japanese prime minister in 2006–2007. As such, while Australia may have been the first to "officially redefine" the region as the Indo-Pacific, Japan had already begun developing the idea as a strategy rather than descriptor.[37] Speaking in India in 2007, Abe argued for the creation of a "broader Asia" that would draw in multiple nations from across the region, notably Japan and India but also Australia and the United States. In particular, he talked of the "confluence of the two seas" (*futatsu no umi no majiwari*), meaning the Indian and Pacific Oceans.[38] A decade later, in 2016, Abe spelled out this vision further, stating that Japan bore "the responsibility" of linking together a wider Indo-Pacific region that valued "freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy" and that would be "free from force or coercion."[39] Later that year, in a meeting with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Abe would also use the new term, referring to a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and arguing that a "free and open Indo-Pacific" would be "vital to achieving prosperity of the entire region."[40]

In developing FOIP, the Japanese government has attempted add broad strategic aims to its regional vision. First, Japan seeks to maintain and, where possible, expand its regional order. The implication is that the Indo-Pacific is viewed by Tokyo as not yet an integrated region but a nascent one requiring active order-building. Second, in pursuing this order-building project, Japan seeks to influence the rules and norms likely to become standard in future.[41] These goals run through FOIP's three

official objectives, which are to: (1) establish and promote "fundamental principles such as the rule of law and freedom of navigation"; (2) pursue "economic prosperity through enhancing connectivity"; and (3) ensure "peace and stability" through "capacity building."[42] Japan's FOIP is an attempt to preserve those elements of the US-led liberal order that Japan sees as most benefiting its national interest. These are the "postwar norms of free trade and global institutions that underpin multilateralism and interdependence."[43] The task is then to make this preserved order appeal to the region.[44]

Japan has been pursuing these goals across both security and economic dimensions. Security-wise, it has attempted to create "regional resiliency" (i.e. capacity to resist coercion) by building up the capabilities of local states.[45] Economically, it has looked to develop regional "connectivity" as a means not only to increase prosperity but also to build a consensus as to the rules by which this should be realized. Abe's Partnership for Quality Infrastructure, announced in 2015, set out Japan's ambition to "spread high-quality and innovative infrastructure throughout Asia, taking a long-term view."[46] Japan has subsequently become the major investor in Southeast Asia, even ahead of China, with a view to establishing itself as the long-term, reliable, "gold standard" investor in the Indo-Pacific.[47]

Japan's efforts at developing FOIP should be seen as complementing its own defense plans—what Kei Koga calls its "core interest."[48] Under the Abe administration, Japan pursued an active program of national defense reforms.[49] These ranged from the institutional, such as the establishment of a National Security Council (NSC), to the alliance, with updated Japan-US Defense Guidelines. The NSC set out Tokyo's first formal National Security Strategy while also overseeing defense procurement and operating as a central agency for crisis management and coordination.[50] Alliance reforms were aimed at delivering greater interoperability between Japanese and US militaries and setting out practices for the two countries to improve "whole of government" coordination.[51] The Abe government also "reinterpreted" the Constitution to allow for collective self-defense under certain conditions and developed a new defense force strategy based on a "dynamic joint defense force."[52]

The Japanese government has sought to establish within FOIP and implicit balancing mechanism. Officially, "no country" is "excluded from partnership," as noted in the 2020 *Diplomatic Bluebook*."[53] In practice, however, Japan's aim appears to be to constrain Chinese unilateralism by emphasizing a set of normative expectations for regional conduct. As an indirect strategy, FOIP is designed to remain open to China where it accedes to these norms but sets in place mechanisms to counter Beijing if it moves to coercion. This fits with what Yoshimatsu describes as Japan's "dominance-denial" approach.[54] Japan's ambition is to find a way to appeal to multiple audiences, keep the US engaged, and influence Southeast Asian regionalism. Keeping Southeast Asian states in support of the Indo-Pacific has been particularly important for Japan. It even reformulated its FDIOP strategy into a "vision" in order to reassure Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members regarding what they saw as the military connotations of a strategy.[55] In short, it is attempting to set itself up as a "pivotal state" across the region's security as well as economic realms.[56]

FOIP is undoubtedly tied to the leadership of former Prime Minister Abe. That Abe stepped down in September 2020, under political and health clouds, has raised the question of whether his successors will continue to pursue the FOIP agenda.[57] So far, Abe's successors have followed this script. Abe's immediate successor, Suga Yoshihide, stuck close to Abe's plans during 2021.[58] Kishida Fumio, who became prime minister in October 2021, also appears to be following FOIP's broad parameters. In response to growing regional tensions, notably between the US and China over Taiwan, Kishida may in fact boost FOIP's balancing dimension—by increasing Japan's defense spending, strengthening Japan's participation in the Quad, and "vigorously" promoting a "free and open Indo-Pacific."[59]

COMPARING INDO-PACIFIC VISIONS

How do the Australian and Japanese approaches to the Indo-Pacific compare? Australian and Japanese visions of the region align across multiple areas. Core goals, such as establishing a regional balance and a stable order appear in both countries' Indo-Pacific discourses, as do terms such as inclusivity, resiliency, and prosperity. This highlights the level of coordination that has already gone on between the two states in developing their regional visions. Still, the two countries' Indo-Pacific plans are not identical. Australia's Indo-Pacific or "Two-Ocean strategy," according to Medcalf, is "more pragmatic and objective" than Japan's FOIP.[60] In Medcalf's view, Australia's vision is "grounded in the reality that the Indo-Pacific is the most logical and objective geographic basis for a coherent worldview … quite literally where Australia finds itself to be." Second, Australia's strategy gives it "more scope for cooperation with diverse partners holding distinct interests and priorities."[61]

Australia's Indo-Pacific vision does indeed make substantial identity claims. Prime Minister Morrison's characterization of the Indo-Pacific as "where we live" is an assertion of Australia's belonging to the region. Seeking to draw a line underneath earlier anxiety over Australia's place in Asia, Morrison is making an argument about the authenticity of Australia's position in this new/old Indo-Pacific.[62] Claims around "belonging" can then be used to justify Australia playing a larger regional role. "[T]ogether in our region we share a future," Morrison argues. "We have much to contribute and much to gain." After all, Morrison asks, "Where else would Australia want to be?"[63]

Morrison's assertion is strong as a geographical statement, and it may help to justify an action list for the government. But it is not a strategy per se, at least in terms of integrating policy ends and means. Assertions of belonging offer little detail on how Australia intends to achieve key Indo-Pacific goals, such as how to achieve a stable balance of power, build prosperity, resist

coercion, or integrate China into the regional order. Rather, they seem addressed at alleviating, for a domestic audience, Australia's long-held anxieties regarding the country's place in Asia. As David Walker explains, these cover everything from invasion fears, through racial worries, to economic concerns. Importantly, they are not merely questions of history but also relate to questions of future prosperity and survival.[64] By comparison, rather than focus on its own problematic Asian identity, it is Japan that has adopted the more pragmatic approach, focusing its efforts on developing practical search for policy mechanisms aimed at realizing its order-building goals. In short, if Japan's FOIP is a strategy calling itself a vision, Australia's Indo-Pacific approach is a vision calling itself a strategy.

This is not to argue that Japan's FOIP is without problems. Criticism of FOIP has focused on whether even a large state such as Japan has the resources to fully underwrite FOIP's geoeconomic let alone its geopolitical dimensions. Tomohiko Satake and Ryo Sahashi note that FOIP will likely become a "utopian dream" instead of a "meaningful vision or strategy" if it lacks the necessary resourcing or the support of like-minded partners.[65] Whether Japan can be an effective coalition-builder is also open to debate. Japan still faces challenges in terms of addressing its own wartime history as well as managing the many different views on the Indo-Pacific today—for example, as held by the US as opposed to many states in Southeast Asia. Despite its attempts at nuance, Japan faces a clear risk that FOIP will inevitably be pushed in a more hardline direction and become a strategy of containment.[66] Even before that occurs, its recalibration of FOIP from strategy to vision may prove too transparent to please ASEAN audiences. Japan's capacity to be the region's pivotal state might also be questioned. In terms of security, at least, Tokyo is in many ways vulnerable. It sits outside important Indo-Pacific arrangements, such as AUKUS and the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing group.[67] Its relationship with South Korea, an obvious partner for FOIP, remains strained, with Seoul seemingly ambivalent about the strategy. Likewise, the results of its indirect balancing of Beijing have so far been mixed. While it has succeeded in blocking China from gaining an infrastructure monopoly in the region, it has struggled to nudge the country toward abiding by the rule of law or to limit its coercion in the South China Sea.[68]

After long periods of arguably "free riding" on US military power in the region, Japan and Australia are seeking to strengthen their security capacities. As noted earlier, both countries have sought to increase their defense spending significantly. Japan now spends nearly twice as much as Australia in US dollar terms. However, Australia's spending is nearly double Japan's as a share of GDP. Both countries have also been active in building up their defense relationships around the region. In this respect, Australia has an advantage as a long-standing security actor in Asia, with multiple well-established relationships, such as through the Five Power Defence Arrangements and a range of capacity building programs in the Pacific Islands.[69] Interestingly, in their search for strategic partnerships, both Canberra and Tokyo have often pursued the same countries, most notably India (with mixed success), but also others such as Vietnam and the Philippines (as well as each other).[70] They have also been active players in multilateral and minilateral partnerships, such as through the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus and the Quad.[71]

The major difference between the Indo-Pacific strategies promoted by Japan and Australia concerns how they resource order-building beyond defense. On investment into Asia, for example, Japan has become the major player in the region competing with China, especially in Southeast Asia. Conversely, as Shiro Armstrong notes, "Australia's investment into Asia has failed to materialize in a major way."[72] According to the OECD, Australia's annual outward foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to ASEAN and India shrank between 2015 and 2019, meaning that its overall FDI position grew only sluggishly. By comparison, Japan upped its investment substantially.[73] Over this period, Australia's total outward FDI position with ASEAN grew by 24 percent, from approximately US$25.6 billion to

US$31.8 billion. By comparison, Japan's grew by 54 percent, from US$164 billion to US$253 billion. In terms of total FDI positions with India, Australia's grew by just 17 percent, from approximately US$1.2 billion to US$1.4 billion. Japan's grew by 100 percent, from US$14 billion to US$28 billion.[74]

Japan, with the much larger economy, can naturally invest more in the region. Perhaps more importantly, however, Japan's past as a mercantilist power gives it an advantage when it comes to coordinating state and market in order to engage in regional order-building. As the *Economist* points out, because Japan has a long history where the "private and public sectors worked seamlessly together," it has been able to coordinate a fully national strategy. It can do this, for example, through bodies such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Japan International Cooperation Agency, or the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.[75] Still, given that Australia was the world's 15th largest international direct investor in 2020, some of the difference stems from choice rather than size or capacity.[76] Put simply, Australia has not prioritized Asia or the Indo-Pacific in its outward international investment, a failure conceded by the government in the 2017 White Paper, which stated that Australia's direct investment into Asia was "relatively low."[77]

The story is similar for Official Development Assistance (ODA). Again, according to the OECD, Australia's total net ODA falls well behind Japan, in both absolute and proportional terms. In 2020, whereas Japan's total ODA amounted to 0.31 percent of the country's gross national income, Australia's only amounted to 0.19 percent. The Australian figure, moreover, has declined over the past decade.[78] This pattern is repeated in Asia. While Japan has strongly focused its ODA efforts on the region, Australia has again fallen behind. In 2018, Japan's bilateral ODA to Asia amounted to US$7.5 billion (out of a total of US$13.3 billion), while Australia's ODA to the region in 2019–20 came to just US$2.7 billion, with approximately US$1.3 billion of that focused on the Pacific. Australian ODA to Southeast and East Asia fell from US$877 million in 2018–19 to US$861 million in 2019–20.[79]

A Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force explosive ordinance disposal technician enters the water in preparation for a dive under the guided-missile cruiser USS Mobile Bay during Exercise Malabar 2016. (Wikimedia Commons)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND COOPERATION

The claim that Australia has the more "pragmatic and objective" approach is, therefore, not well supported by the evidence.[80] As noted earlier, Japan's FOIP does contain a range of weaknesses, and the current Kishida administration will find maintaining the necessary breadth of engagement especially challenging. Yet Japan has been developing a strategy for order-building, whereas Australia, whilst certainly active in the region, has struggled to shift beyond its identity narrative. As the country playing catch-up, Australia needs to flesh out its strategic goals with more detailed and properly resourced policy mechanisms. Australia should not simply duplicate Japan's FOIP when devising its own Indo-Pacific strategy but should instead look to its own interests and capacity as a middle power. Nonetheless, Japan's FOIP offers Canberra opportunities for both learning and cooperation as it undertakes this task.

To begin, the Australian government should articulate its objectives with a view to appealing to Asian audiences. It should avoid being seen as merely promoting self-interest or engaging in domestic politicking.[81] Rather than explain its strategy in terms of looking after "Australia's prosperity," being "active in advancing [Australia's] interests," or seizing "opportunities globally," Australia should seek to show how it aims to build a prosperous and stable regional order.[82] In fact, Japan offers both a guide and cautionary tale about appealing to regional audiences. Tokyo has long struggled to articulate its engagement of Asia in positive terms. Its failure to do so in the early 1970s with respect to Southeast Asian nations pushed Japan to adopt the Fukuda Doctrine and establish a more broad-based engagement of ASEAN.[83] Even today, Japan can find it difficult to sell its agenda to the region. For example, its approach to the Pacific Islands, where it has been active through the Pacific Islands Leaders

Meeting (PALM) summits, has been criticized due to Tokyo's tendency, as seen from the region, to simply inform local leaders of its policies rather than co-create them.[84]

In terms of putting together a more considered set of policies, Japan's FOIP offers one possible approach through what Katada calls Japan's "state-led liberal strategy." Katada characterizes this model as a regional plan intended to promote rules and standards that cover everything from trade and investment, through finance, to foreign aid and development.[85] Essentially, Tokyo is attempting to make use of institutional projects, such as the CPTPP and RCEP, along with its own economic heft, to become a "pivotal state" able to influence the type of regionalism that emerges in the Indo-Pacific. Japan can do this not only because it has the material capability but also because its history of mercantilism, as noted earlier, allows it to more easily bring together state and market actors to deliver strategic goals. This may be hard for a country such as Australia to emulate, given its preference for more laissez-faire economics.

Still, Australia does also have a history of state engagement in the economy. Further, the recent joint acquisition of Digicel Pacific by the Australian government and Telstra, a private telecommunications company, suggests that Canberra may be moving toward engaging with the region on a more geoeconomic basis.[86] It also has other strategic assets that it could deploy. A state-led liberal strategy rests not only upon being able to coordinate state and market but also on being a credible liberalizer and institution-builder. Long highly cautious when it came to trade liberalization, Japan reversed this trend in the 2010s to make the country a major player in international trade negotiations, notably those over the TPP and CPTPP.[87] While Australia lacks Japan's economic weight, it can draw on its own, arguably longer, track record of institution building and trade liberalization in the region. Australia was a leading player in the establishment of the Cairns Group of agricultural producers and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. Similarly, Australia also has a long history as a major foreign aid actor in the Indo-Pacific, especially in the Pacific Islands region, as illustrated by its Colombo Plan of the 1950s and 1960s.[88]

Effective regional institutions that codify open trade and investment rules and norms are thus clearly in Australia's interest. They also fulfil other goals shared by Australia and Japan, such as bringing together like-minded partners from around the Indo-Pacific and keeping the US engaged in the region (or hedging against future withdrawal). For Australia, strong institutions also offer a safer path toward becoming a greater investment and development player in the Indo-Pacific. Accordingly, Australia should continue working with Japan in expanding the "mega" trade arrangements, the CPTPP and RCEP, as well as the Quad and the ADB. The Australian government already acknowledges that the ADB's "strategic priorities closely align" with its own and that the ADB has the capacity to leverage "significant financial resources and expertise for sustainable development and poverty reduction."[89] Although it is a major donor to the ADB, Australia's current contributions are still well behind Japan's and, indeed, its own contribution during the 2013–16 replenishment period.[90] Of course, while institution building will be important, Australia should not ignore bilateral cooperation with Japan. As Armstrong suggests, working "in partnership with Japanese companies would reduce risk" as well as "connect to existing networks and businesses on the ground."[91]

On aid, Australia's comparatively weak position stems from choices made during the 2010s. In 2013 (the same year that it adopted the Indo-Pacific term), the Australian government led by Prime Minister Tony Abbott merged the national aid agency, AusAid, into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade while also making substantial cuts to the country's aid budget. Whereas Japan has reoriented its ODA policies to be deployed strategically, Australia has allowed its aid program to be overtaken by partisan politics and domestic populism.[92] Like Japan, Australia should ensure that its ODA policy gives it more "strategic influence" in the region while working to better insulate its policy

from domestic affairs.[93] Further work with Japan across a range of non-traditional security issues, notably humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), would help Australia build its profile as a contributor to regional order. Canberra, therefore, should not only take a lead role in response to the recent volcano and tsunami near Tonga but sustain this response beyond the immediate crisis.[94]

Australia also needs to determine where to focus its engagement efforts *within* the Indo-Pacific. Japan's FOIP, while ostensibly expansive in its outlook, is in reality more narrowly focused. In some ways, Tokyo's primary region of interest is not so much the Indo-Pacific as South and Southeast Asia.[95] As Medcalf notes, Australia could "step up" its capacity building in Southeast Asia, notably in areas such as environmental monitoring and maritime security.[96] Australia and Japan could also work together to find new ways to engage India, particularly on trade. Yet, as a middle power used to marshalling finite resources through "niche diplomacy," Australia should determine where its resources will have maximum effect. The Pacific Islands stands out as the region where Australia has the greatest interest and capacity to act as an order-builder, such as in HADR. Indeed, given its long engagement of this region, Australia can bring to bear considerable knowledge and expertise on the Pacific Islands and so compensate for Japan's limitations in the area.[97] So far, through its Step-up policy for the Pacific, Australia has "committed to a step-change" in its engagement of the Pacific Islands region.[98] The Step-up has entailed a range of initiatives, but a long-term commitment will be crucial to the plan's success. Already, Australia and Japan are cooperating with the US in the Trilateral Infrastructure Partnership, which is building an undersea telecommunications link in the region. It is important, however, that Canberra and Tokyo do more to align their Indo-Pacific visions with the preferences of Pacific Islands countries, such as by engaging more on climate change.[99]

Fumio Kishida met with Australian PM Morrison at the COP26. (Wikimedia Commons)

CONCLUSION

Australia and Japan are by now well established as strategic partners who collaborate closely across economics and security. Both also promote order-building strategies for what they view as their new region, the Indo-Pacific. Japan has its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision while Australia has been actively promoting an Indo-Pacific that is open, inclusive, and prosperous. The analysis provided here demonstrates how the two countries' Indo-Pacific strategies largely overlap but also diverge in important ways. But what also becomes noticeably apparent from this analysis is the under-developed nature of Australia's approach compared to that of Japan. Even as there are doubts about Japan's FOIP, it nonetheless represents a full strategic framework linking means to ends. By comparison, Australia has struggled to implement its plans and so bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality in its vision for the Indo-Pacific. This is likely due in part to its "pragmatic" foreign policy tradition that eschews "grand conceptual frameworks" and tends to lead, instead, to activity lists for the government. Beyond this, however, the Australian governments appears fixated on asserting to a domestic audience its identity of belonging in the Indo-Pacific, arguably as an expression of a fourth, anxiety-based, tradition in Australia's foreign policy.[100]

This is not to suggest that Japan's FOIP has been an unalloyed success. Indeed, significant questions remain about Tokyo's approach. Does Japan have the capacity to resource its goals? Can it manage diverging perspectives and build deeper regional coalitions? Will it be able to continue finessing its complex relationship with China? How might its own identity anxieties complicate its engagement with the region? The flexibility Japan has so far achieved in engaging but also balancing China may prove unsustainable in the face of growing Sino-American rivalry and heightened tensions around regional flashpoints, such as Taiwan. For similar reasons, Japan may also find that appealing to different audiences, especially within Southeast Asia, becomes more difficult in future. Is its recalibration of FOIP for ASEAN audiences too transparent? Further, while it has achieved some successes in engaging South and Southeast Asian countries, it has done less well in Northeast Asia, where its wartime legacy remains a major obstacle to improved relations. Properly resourcing FOIP into the future will also require Japan to address long-term economic and demographic challenges. Indeed, Tokyo may also have reached its limits as a coalition-builder and pivotal state in Asia.

Still, Japan's FOIP does offer Australia a guide to developing a more coherent approach to the Indo-Pacific. Through FOIP, Japan has achieved a more balanced, middle-ground approach for dealing with China and countering its influence, at least partially. If Australia could adopt such an approach, it may be able to move beyond its recent tendency of swinging from uncritical engagement to unproductive antagonism when dealing with China. Japan's successes in Southeast Asia also highlight the value of long-term, sustained interactions, responsiveness to local outlooks, and awareness of opportunities to fulfil unmet strategic needs. That Japan, despite its history problems, has been able to maintain regional engagement while pursuing its own military buildup suggests that it is possible to combine defense planning and order-building initiatives provided that the latter are properly framed. Australia, despite its long engagement of regional actors, has found it difficult to make its plans appear more than a defense buildup and thus move beyond its reputation as America's "deputy sheriff."[101]

Finally, Australia's failure to properly resource its Indo-Pacific vision could be reversed by framing policies in areas such as development and aid as strategic.

Nevertheless, while the difficulties in building an Indo-Pacific order are substantial, there is clearly great potential for Australia and Japan to cooperate more closely in developing their respective strategies. Keeping this in mind, the paper concludes by setting out several key recommendations for Australia as it works to build an Indo-Pacific order as well as deepen its partnership with Japan.

Key Recommendations

1. Australia should reduce the emphasis on identity assertion and "belonging" in its Indo-Pacific vision and focus instead on developing a more coherent strategic plan for the region, one that bridges the divide between rhetoric and reality. Japan's FOIP, despite its own weaknesses, does offer a guide to developing a more strategic approach to order-building.
2. Australia should broaden its vision of the region beyond the geopolitical to encompass a greater geoeconomic outlook. To better interact with key Indo-Pacific actors, it should invest more in its diplomatic capabilities, substantially boost its development assistance, be more active as an investment player, and frame all these policies in more strategic terms.
3. Given the challenges faced by Japan in resourcing its FOIP agenda, Australia should as a regional middle power concentrate its efforts on key areas within the region. Since Japan and Australia share many strategic goals, it makes sense for the two countries to coordinate their engagement of key relationships, such as with ASEAN countries and India. It also makes sense, however, to review burden sharing opportunities. With its comparative advantage and vital strategic interest in the South Pacific, for example, Australia should take the lead in engaging with Pacific Islands countries by continuing to build the Pacific Step-up.
4. Finally, as it develops a full Indo-Pacific strategy, Australia should continue to cooperate closely with Japan not only on a bilateral level but also multilaterally. Both countries benefit from effective regional institutions—such as the CPTPP and RCEP on trade, the ADB on development, and also the Quad. Such institutions provide the best way to hedge against the risks posed to regional stability by a distracted United States. They also offer the best way to embed the rules and norms of an open Indo-Pacific order that is crucial to the interests of secondary powers such as Japan and Australia.

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99 For more on Australia's Step-up policy, see Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Australia's Pacific Regional Development Program," accessed November 25, 2021, https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/development-assistance/development-assistance-in-the-pacific. On the Trilateral Infrastructure Partnership, see Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, "Australia Partnering with Japan and the United States to Finance Palau Undersea Cable," October 28, 2020, https://www.aiffp.gov.au/news/australia-partnering-japan-and-united-states-finance-palau-undersea-cable. Regarding the misalignment of visions, see, for example, Joanne Wallis, "Contradictions in Australia's Pacific Islands Discourse," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 75, no. 5 (2021): 487–506; Morgan, "Oceans Apart?" 60; Derek McDougall, "Australia's Humanitarian Response to Disasters in the South Pacific," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 6, no. 3 (2021): 202–20, at 205.

100 Taylor, Is Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategy an Illusion?" 108; Walker, "Significant Other," 23–27.

101 Craig A. Snyder, "Southeast Asian Perceptions of Australia's Foreign Policy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 28, no. 2 (2006): 322–40.