

JAPAN'S STRATEGIC MESSAGING FOR A 'FREE AND OPEN INTERNATIONAL ORDER (FOIO)': CAN IT PRESERVE ITS INDO-PACIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS?

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The “free and open international order (jiyū de hirakareta kokusai chitsujo) based on the rule of law,” or “FOIO,” is emblematic of Japan’s overriding ideal as pursued across multiple administrations. Introduced in early 2017 following the better-known “free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),” it became Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s major diplomatic message in 2023. Underpinned by the rule of law among nations, the FOIO represents the latest evolution in Japan’s attempt to preserve the existing international order amid the growing challenges posed by China and other authoritarian states. Focusing on this policy trend, this paper presents the first in-depth analysis of Japan’s evolving strategic messaging from FOIP to FOIO. Importantly, it discusses the challenges and potential benefits of this shift, and emphasizes the need for Japan to balance its promotion of the FOIO without undermining the strategic value of the FOIP and its laser focus on security and stability.

Introduction

Signaling a more comprehensive approach going beyond the confined Indo-Pacific geography, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his administration now regularly feature a “free and open international order based on the rule of law.” For example, meeting with her Swedish counterpart, Tobias Billström, in Stockholm in January 2024, Japan’s Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa expounded that “cooperation among like-minded countries is more important than ever as the free and open international order based on rule of law is being shaken.”¹

Japan promotes this idea even vis-à-vis states within the Indo-Pacific region. In Tokyo in December 2023, Kishida met

with the leaders from the member-states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to commemorate the 50th anniversary of relations, where he said, “we will be better able to secure a free and open international order based on the rule of law. Let us together create peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region (...).”² Promoting this slogan appears to illustrate the Prime Minister’s strong leadership, given its frequent appearance in official speeches and documents of his cabinet. For example, the December 2022 *National Security Strategy* pointedly referred to Japan’s national interests and stated that “(...) Japan will maintain and develop a free and open international order, especially in the Indo-Pacific region where Japan is situated.”³

Whereas Tokyo's language demonstrates its determination to preserve the principles of international law from authoritarian challenges, the new nomenclature often eclipses the better known and highly successful "free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" in government discourse. As argued in our article titled "RIP FOIP?" with a question mark,⁴ the FOIP was absent when Kishida made a policy speech at the Diet in October 2023. The Indo-Pacific was described only as a "growth center," depriving it of its strategic connotations. Tomohiko Taniguchi, the speech writer of the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, criticized the government's current messaging in a *Sankei Shimbun* column.⁵ Making the messaging shift visible to the public, Taniguchi's claim stirred a heated debate on its strategic consequences.

Arguably, the Indo-Pacific is alive in Japan's diplomatic parlance, which continues to reference it along with the FOIP. However, as the "free and open international order" aims to gain greater consensus and build better strategic connections globally, the shift tends to blur the focus on the Indo-Pacific. This may come with profound consequences on Japan's grand strategy to counter China. What should we then make of what Tokyo promotes as its new message? Will it astutely complement and enlarge Japan's geographically bounded Indo-Pacific policy? Or is it doomed to harm the iconic FOIP and weaken Japan's China-focused geostrategy? While positioning its argument as part of strategic communication analysis, this paper will focus on Japan's act of "messaging" and will answer these and other questions.

Inheritance of an Idea

The term "free and open international order (*jiyū de hirakareta kokusai chitsujō*)" characterizes much of what Japan's administrations have pursued prior to Kishida's current promotion. Following the FOIP's launch in August 2016, the "free and open international order" was introduced in early 2017 under the administration of Shinzo Abe (2006-2007, 2012-2020). However, the idea surfaced in various narratives long before, reflecting a broad consensus for the concept in Japan. In a nutshell, it is the "intellectual asset" that has been inherited and incorporated into Tokyo's diplomatic orientation.

Who introduced the "free and open international order" into Japan's diplomatic parlance at the Prime Minister's

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Office or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) remains unknown. What is clear is that Japan's "vision of order" was addressed earlier than what the current messaging promotes.⁶ Discernable in public debate for decades, this vision of order has informed Tokyo's normative diplomacy, of which the current FOIP and FOIO are only manifestations. As early as July 1980, one of the research groups, commissioned by Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira, presented its report on "comprehensive security (*sōgō anzenhoshō*)."⁷ The report stated, "The basic reason why the maintenance of close cooperative relations between Japan and the United States is a top priority for Japan's comprehensive security is that Japan, together with America, aspires to a *free and open international order*" (translated by the authors and emphasis added).⁸

Database and internet searches suggest that early usage at the government level was seen in the *National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and Beyond*, issued in December 2010 under the administration led by the former Democratic Party of Japan. The document spelled out Japan's security objective "so as to maintain and strengthen a free and open international order (...)."⁹

The term's usage may have reflected discussion across various platforms. For instance, Yoichi Funabashi, a famous columnist at *Asahi Shimbun*, delineated the idea in a column dated November 3, 2010.¹⁰ Expressing worries about the friction China would cause, Funabashi said, "What is important is to protect and foster a 'free

and open international order' based on 'the rule of law,' including China. This is essential for sustainable peace and stability in the region and the world" (translated by the authors).

As some kind of bridge between the intellectual debate and practice of foreign policy, Shotaro Yachi, a well-known diplomat and close aide to Abe, emphasized this idea in his writings. For example, just prior to Abe's second term in office, Yachi wrote, "What kind of engagement should we seek toward China? This means pursuing a 'free and open international order.' That international order is a free and open maritime order and an international trade and economic system. Regional structures in Asia should also be non-exclusive" (translated by the authors).¹¹

In contrast, the "free and open Indo-Pacific" is relatively young, although Abe laid its foundation in his "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech in New Delhi as early as August 2007.¹² The FOIP only appeared in Japan's diplomatic parlance in August 2016 as Abe launched his grand strategy at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) in Nairobi. The FOIP's essence, including the rule of law, was included in Abe's speech.¹³

During Japan's tenure as G7 Chair in 2023, the term "free and open international order based on the rule of law" was used much more systematically. Foreign policy documents and statements of the Japanese government as well as the prime minister's allocutions now regularly refer to this terminology.

From Shadows to Spotlight

By early 2017, the FOIP's usage had become more pronounced, but importantly began the term "free and open international order"—with or without its counterpart, "the rule of law." Visiting Paris in January 2017, then-Foreign Minister Kishida wrote in a French newspaper, "It is essential that Japan and Europe support a free and open international order, in particular by asserting themselves together as champions of free trade (...) and by actively collaborating in promoting the rule of law" (translated by the authors).¹⁴ This was followed by Abe's visit to the Philippines, Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam from January 12 to 17, which also emphasized a "free and open international order based on the rule of law."¹⁵

The exact reasons for its sudden introduction remain unclear, but this period corresponds with the arrival of the Donald Trump administration in Washington. In his contribution to the French newspaper, Kishida touched upon protectionism and a tendency to look inward (*repli sur soi*). In March, after a meeting with Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany, Abe did so, too, stating that he "agreed with Angela that a free and open international order is the foundation of peace and prosperity" and that "in cooperation with the United States, Japan and Europe must keep hoisting the banner of free trade high" (translated by the authors).¹⁶ As these statements suggest, Japan's leaders and MOFA officials may have endeavored to mitigate any effects of Trump's America-First policy, particularly on the international trade order,¹⁷ while countering China's increasingly hegemonic behavior.

The term's usage continued especially at the bureaucratic level during Abe's time in office. His successor, Yoshihide Suga (2020-2021), and his administration then picked up the idea. Perhaps as a way to overcome the regionally bounded FOIP concept, then-Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, for example, advocated it during his visit to Central America and the Caribbean in July 2021.¹⁸ In September, Suga underscored "the importance of a free and open international order based on the rule of law" at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly.¹⁹ The "free and open international order" appeared at the trilateral level, too, when the short-lived Japan-U.S.-Brazil Exchange (called "JUSBE") referenced it in its November 2020 meeting in Brasilia.²⁰

The term was then passed on to Prime Minister Kishida (2021-present). While his foreign minister used it in

his work,²¹ Kishida's flagship "Realism Diplomacy for a New Era," announced at the Diet in January 2022, only mentioned the FOIP.²² But the "free and open international order" gained traction in Kishida's discourse after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The "Kishida Vision for Peace," launched at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2022, featured a slight variation, "the rules-based free and open international order,"²³ suggesting that Kishida's new initiative did not intend to "sloganize" the current terminology.

However, during his tenure as G7 (Group of Seven) Chair in 2023, the term "free and open international order based on the rule of law" was used much more systematically, as he pledged at the Diet in January of that year.²⁴ Foreign policy documents and statements of the Japanese government as well as the prime minister's allocutions now regularly refer to this terminology, almost always accompanied by "the rule of law."

Partner countries seem to share Japan's normative vision. For instance, Prime Minister Kishida and U.S. President Joe Biden issued a joint leaders' statement in May 2022 plainly titled "Strengthening the Free and Open International Order."²⁵ In what can be considered a growing sign of endorsement, the heads of multiple other states and governments, including Denmark, Egypt, Ghana, India, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, the Philippines, South Korea, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam, have embraced or supported Kishida's cause for a "free and open international order based on the rule of law" thus far.²⁶ So did the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the G7 at the secretary-general and summit levels, in January and May 2023 respectively.

The Meaning of Japan's New Messaging

The shift in Japan's strategic messaging to the admittedly wordy "free and open international order based on the rule of law" speaks volumes. It is Japan's answer to the *Zeitenwende* and is the culmination of Japan's diplomatic thought process dating back to the Cold War period.

Japan rightly perceives a grave challenge to the core principles of international law—notably sovereignty and territorial integrity. This has been prompted primarily

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by the actions of authoritarian regimes such as Russia in Ukraine, but can equally be applied anytime to stronger, larger states that prey on smaller, weaker ones. A situation like Ukraine's can readily lead to catastrophic consequences in East Asia, particularly with regard to Taiwan. As such, Japan's emphasis on the "peaceful resolution of disputes," another important principle of international law, also critically serves to challenge Russia's and China's aggressive territorial appetites.

Japan has a track record of robustly defending the rules-based international system. It upholds a broad range of international norms and institutions, including those related to free trade. Nevertheless, Japan's approach is, at the same time, accommodating and inclusive as it eschews outright liberalism. Although Kishida's administration often features "human dignity," Japan has only made subdued assertions about human rights and democracy, except when Tokyo references cases of egregious abuse such as those committed by Russians in Ukraine. As Ryoko Nakano points out,²⁷ the Japanese vision of order exhibits some original aspects that distinguish it from the so-called "liberal international order (LIO)." This makes Japan's messaging different from that employed by much of the West. In addition, because the LIO's framework is theoretically and analytically weak,²⁸ Tokyo's approach provides a far more practical and productive way to engage with the so-called "Global South."

Relatedly, the term *jiyū de hirakareta* (“free and open”) reveals an interesting etymological background. For years now, the term LIO has been translated into Japanese as “*jiyū de hirakareta kokusai chitsujō*” or “free and open international order.”²⁹ This translation may have eschewed the more elusive *jiyūshugitekina* or *riberaruna* (both meaning “liberal”) in Japanese, but it suffered from a lack of rigor. Consequently, the government’s introduction of a “free and open international order” (or “*jiyū de hirakareta kokusai chitsujō*” in Japanese) has brought both clarity and consistency to the translation.

The difference from the Western LIO approach aside, Japan’s normative vision is inherently strong, in part, because its theoretical background rests firmly in the community of nations. It should therefore be, in theory, readily acceptable and beneficial to most states and will play a key role in Tokyo’s endeavors to reach the Global South, via mutually referential concepts.³⁰

The concept of building a “free and open international order based on the rule of law” like Japan’s is readily found elsewhere. Back in October 1970, the UN General Assembly adopted the so-called Friendly Relations Declaration (Resolution 2625 (XXV)) which reaffirms “the faithful observance of the principles of international law” and still validates Japan’s claim in many regards. More

recently, ASEAN’s June 2019 *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (AOIP) emphasized “a rules-based framework” and “respect for the principles of international law, such as UN Charter (...)” as the AOIP’s principles. Whereas the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) prefers “a more representative, fairer international order,” its August 2023 Johannesburg declaration also recognizes the importance of “sovereign equality.”³¹

Tokyo’s messaging about “the rule of law” may be in conformity with widely held international ideals, but it tends to display a specific orientation. As commonly held, the rule of law generally means the denial of arbitrary power within any state. However, it has gradually come to be understood as having global application as “the international rule of law.”³² Admittedly, Japan understands and articulates it in both the domestic and international senses, as exemplified by MOFA’s statement that the rule of law is “the basis of the international order that consists of friendly and equitable relations between states, as well as an essential cornerstone of a fair and just society within a country.”³³

The term “the rule of law” is thus a special hallmark that allows Japan to uphold these principles, while implying the values of liberal democracy (without pronouncing it as such) and challenging authoritarianism rhetorically. Yet Tokyo tends to use “the rule of law” in the context of the “free and open international order” to assert the principles of international law *among states*.³⁴ This is a meaningful assertion in a world that typically challenges these principles by brute force and coercion.

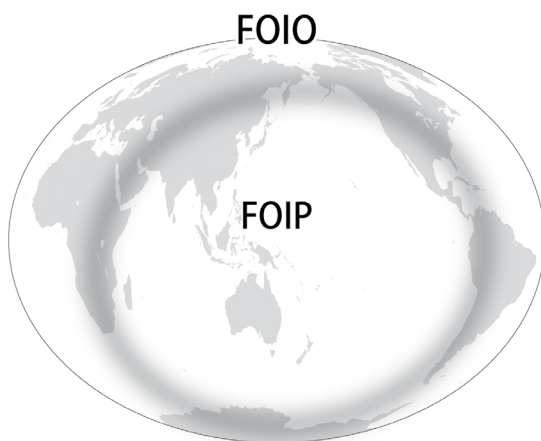
The FOIO-FOIP Nexus

Despite its merits and rightness, the “free and open international order based on the rule of law” lacks panache. Even abbreviating the verbose nomenclature, which would lead to “FOIOBRL” or “FOIO-BRL,” yields substandard results. From a strategic messaging perspective, there would be great utility in opting for a clear and appealing message like that offered by the FOIP. The answer, we believe, can be found in the simpler, more straightforward “free and open international order (FOIO),” although its intended meaning is the “international order based on the rule of law.” The omission of these few words from the abbreviation by no means devalues “the rule of law,” which underpins the FOIO conceptually.

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In essence, the shift from “Indo-Pacific” to “international order” is a consequential evolution that facilitates Japan’s extended outreach. Despite the FOIP’s recognition and clear mobilizing power, the geographically bounded Indo-Pacific left blank much of the rest of the world and thus may have appeared irrelevant to those outside its boundaries. The geographical extension by the FOIO rightly fuses the FOIP with the “panoramic perspective” already advocated by the Abe administration. Indeed, the FOIO resembles what we previously ideated as the “free and open global ocean”³⁵ as well as an “Indo-Pacific Plus” concept.³⁶ Both were suggested to overcome the bounded nature of the Indo-Pacific geography, and the FOIO concept is congruent with and expands them.

Correlation between FOIO and FOIP



Note: This original map is a composite of the authors’ research. It is partially based on a conceptual explanation by MOFA.

To illustrate, a strategic connection across Eurasia is already the reality. Whereas Europeans are now more inclined to the Indo-Pacific agenda, the FOIO has functioned as a common language between some European states and Japan, which regularly references this term in its diplomatic dialogue.³⁷ Kishida’s renewed worldwide approach may also reasonably help bridge a divide that has opened between the G7 and the political South. In addition, although the Indo-Pacific, quite legitimately, has been associated with the maritime order,³⁸ Japan’s promotion of an “international order” will bring into play a range of international law principles beyond maritime governance.

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In explaining the FOIO in Stockholm, then-Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi was right in positioning the FOIP “as the embodiment of this order in the Indo-Pacific region.”³⁹ The FOIP is the regional variation of the FOIO (see Map) and, as such, these two notions should be considered as complementary. With the FOIO as a superordinate concept, the “free and open” banner can be applied to a variety of regions, spaces, and themes, as we have already seen when government bodies use terms like “free and open maritime order” and “free and open economic order.” To cite another example, the December 2022 joint statement of the Central Asian and Japanese foreign ministers embraced a “free and open Central Asia” along with FOIO.⁴⁰

There are other potential benefits as well. The FOIO’s introduction necessarily allows for a more detailed focus on geopolitics and likely theaters of conflict. The Asia-Pacific, for example, more than the Indo-Pacific, is likely to be the theater of a crisis given the flashpoints of Taiwan, Japan’s Senkakus, and the South China Sea. Threatened by the nuclear-armed states of China, Russia, and North Korea, the narrower East Asia region, including the less-focused Sea of Japan area, is more fundamental to Japan’s military strategy and national interests than the greater Indo-Pacific region. In addition to the “classical” Quad, composed of Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S., what may be seen as a nascent “Asia-Pacific Quad” with the Philippines replacing India was tried out in 2023.⁴¹ This, in turn, seems to testify

to the return of the Asia-Pacific in a more strategic context.

Pros, and then Cons

There are challenges, indeed. As Japan “talks big” about the FOIO, the issues are proportionally large, too. Upholding the FOIO in the global arena, especially the rule of law among nations, will expand the “intellectual fronts,” requiring another layer of Herculean efforts. Japan must therefore navigate its legal and cognitive strategy intelligently, anticipating counteractions from both China and Russia and addressing skepticism from the political South. As the “international order” increasingly becomes a point of contention among great powers, championing it represents a bold challenge. This is even more so for a country devoid of enforcement power, as its defense may require the application of force. Japan may well advocate the FOIO, but alone it does not have the power to guarantee either the rule of law or an order. The effectiveness of Japan's claim must ultimately be backed up by American power.

Yet, if American foreign policy resonates in Tokyo, it will inevitably face the same criticism and skepticism from the Global South. Japan will need to respond to charges of a perceived “double standard” in its treatment of the ongoing crises. Tokyo must be able to clearly articulate whose “rules”—universal or America's—it is defending. Ultimately, Japan's policymakers must convince a wide audience that its efforts are somehow distinct from those

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of the “Collective West” and have universal utility. Another point to consider is that the rule of law equally applies to Japan. Its policymakers should be aware that Japan's insistence on the rule of law will eventually constrain it in a cognitive campaign as well as other conflict situations, armed or not.

Promoting the FOIO will inevitably produce the “lights and shadows” that result from Tokyo's prioritization of issues and regions, and its identification of preferred partners. Japan will most probably need to choose regions and countries for the FOIO's promotion, with Central Asia being a potential regional showcase and Europeans being value-laden partners. In that eventuality, keeping the FOIO's implementation low-key may also be strategically astute. If using the abbreviation “FOIO” increases the notion's visibility, not using it might be a pragmatic solution for Japanese policymakers.

Nonetheless, if Japan advocates a universal idea and endeavors to be specific about the target region at the same time, some may see it as a policy of opportunism. The challenging task for Tokyo will thus be to justify this distinct approach while promoting the message of the FOIO worldwide. Whereas strategic thought certainly validates what many may consider Japan's selective behavior, Japanese policymakers must nevertheless eventually find a valid explanation for such acts.

In truth, Japan's diplomatic evolution from FOIP to FOIO illustrates the country's strategic adjustment to global challenges that extend beyond the confines of the Indo-Pacific. The FOIO concept can effectively guide Tokyo's engagement in both the Indo-Pacific and beyond when it is sustained by internationally agreed-upon principles. Even so, Japan will face acute challenges in promoting FOIO and FOIP simultaneously.

There is a risk of the FOIP and FOIO blurring what Japanese diplomats hope will be clear, concise, and resonant messaging. The conceptual twins have fundamentally different traits: the FOIO is a universal ideal, whereas the FOIP is a regional one. To put it another way, while FOIO expands Japan's normative scope globally, it simultaneously diminishes its regional focus and, more critically, its focus on China—an inherent and structural flaw in FOIO.

Challenges with Simultaneous Promotion

Arguably, Kishida's defense policy has demonstrated Japan's determination to face China boldly. This became clear in late 2022 when his administration promulgated three strategic documents as well as a "historical" increase in defense spending.⁴² However, the FOIO could potentially undermine such a resolute display unless it is paired with an equally alert stance about China's behavior. Taniguchi clearly saw the FOIO's dilemma when he said, "Beijing is probably the one who [is] most amused" (translated by the authors).⁴³ To avoid such a pitfall, Japan's leaders and MOFA officials may frequently highlight China and its associated threats in their discourse. If not, they should emphasize the "Indo-Pacific" consciously and skillfully even as they promote the FOIO.

This is because the Indo-Pacific is laden with symbolism and strategic value which the "international order" does not yet possess. The glue that holds the Quad together may be China,⁴⁴ for instance, but it was Abe's powerful vision of an Indo-Pacific order and security architecture that *included India* that led to the quartet's inception in 2007 and its resurrection in 2017. The term is a fixture in the military and strategic realm, too. It now guides important

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operations of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, such as its annual "Indo-Pacific Deployment" and is anchored in the name of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

For many, the term has become synonymous with sounding the alarm that led to a broad pushback against authoritarian revisionism. While Japan advocates for the FOIO, regularly referring to the Indo-Pacific will help draw the attention of various states—inside or outside the Indo-Pacific—to the ongoing security challenges posed by China.

The Indo-Pacific must be kept "free and open." As the FOIP's author and guardian, Japan must cherish this well-established, powerful trademark to pursue a noble objective. Japan should not forsake what has become a diplomatic asset and strategic communication success. Admittedly, in some instances, it makes sense to deliberately conceal or downplay the FOIP, as some local governments, such as those of Pacific Island states, tend to be wary of the FOIP's geopolitical implications. Yet at present, nothing can replace FOIP as the essence and lodestar that links Japan with the other Quad members and many other like-minded states across the Indo-Pacific. For Japan, cherishing the FOIP means exploring its strategic and diplomatic accomplishments with regional partners. There is absolutely no way for Tokyo to abandon those who have supported its flagship FOIP initiatives domestically and abroad.

In summary, Japan's FOIO epitomizes its cherished vision turned into a compelling diplomatic message and proves Japan's ongoing thought leadership. The FOIO is a universal message as it aligns with global interests that prize the peaceful resolution of disputes, territorial integrity, and

freedom from coercion and predation. At “history’s turning point,” Japan is justified in upholding the FOIO as an overriding ideal for itself and the globe. In other words, it is the essence of the “Japanese Dream” that speaks to Tokyo’s aspiration to be both relevant and beneficial to the world.

Nevertheless, the challenges brought by the FOIO’s promotion must not be underestimated. Japan’s scholars and strategists alike have welcomed Kishida’s initiative to emphasize the rule of law prior to examining these weighty aspects. It is therefore time to focus on the concrete challenges posed by the FOIO’s messaging to Japan’s foreign policy, particularly vis-à-vis its China strategy. Now that the FOIO flag has been hoisted, it cannot easily be struck, and Kishida’s as well as future administrations must address what may become an enduring conundrum. As importantly, political leaders should carefully approach their domestic audience to avoid giving the impression of pitting “Kishida’s FOIO” against “Abe’s FOIP.”

In promoting the FOIO, Japan should not jeopardize the FOIP’s hard-won achievements. It may be tempted to engage a hard-to-reach and amorphous world, but the trade-off of gaining the latter for the former is unpromising in terms of Japan’s diplomacy, security, and sovereignty. As the success (or failure) of Tokyo’s current FOIO emphasis impacts the FOIP, caution is necessary. Making the FOIP and FOIO coexist together will require considerable skill. Japan must strike the right balance.

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Endnotes

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- 14 Fumio Kishida, "Fumio Kishida: 'Le Japon considère la France comme un partenaire privilégié en matière de défense' [Fumio Kishida: 'Japan considers France a privileged partner in defense matters']," *Le Figaro*, January 5, 2017, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/2017/01/05/31002-20170105ARTFIG00216-fumio-kishida-le-japon-considere-la-france-comme-un-partenaire-privilegie-en-matiere-de-defense.php>.
- 15 For example, speaking at a press conference, Yoshihide Suga, then-Chief Cabinet Secretary, explained that "we will plead the importance of working together with major countries in the Asia-Pacific region, which are responsible for a free and open international order based on the rule of law" (translated by the authors). *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, January 11, 2017 (retrieved from its paid database).
- 16 See Abe's remark at a joint press conference in Hanover on March 20, 2017, on the Public Relations Office's webpage at <https://www.gov-online.go.jp/prg/prg15116.html>.
- 17 Ironically, the Trump administration's arrival has prompted the trade talks between Japan and the European Union (EU), which finalized the negotiations for their Economic Partnership Agreement in December 2017.
- 18 As expected, Motegi stressed this term during a press conference in Jamaica. See the record at https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken23e_000015.html.

- 19 Yoshihide Suga, "Address by Prime Minister Suga at the Seventy-Sixth Session of the United Nations General Assembly" [Transcript of a recorded speech], MOFA, September 24, 2021, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/unp_a/page4e_001176.html.
- 20 MOFA, "Joint Statement on the Japan-U.S.-Brazil Exchange," November 10, 2020, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100113910.pdf>.
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- 25 MOFA, "Japan-U.S. Joint Leaders' Statement: Strengthening the Free and Open International Order," May 23, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100347252.pdf>.
- 26 As of mid-January 2024. The information is based on the documents provided online by MOFA.
- 27 Nakano, n. 6.
- 28 Brendon J. Cannon, "*Jiyū de hirakareta Indo-Taiheiyo to riberaru na kokusai chitsujō: Hyōron* [The Free and Open Indo-Pacific and the Liberal International Order: A Critique]," *Kokusai Mondai [International Affairs]*, No. 687 (2019): 37-48; 44.
- 29 For example, a research program named the Asia Pacific Initiative (API) uses such a term for the LIO's translation in Japanese. Yoichi Funabashi founded API's preceding body. See its website at https://apinitiative.org/project/liberal_international_order/.
- 30 Brendon J. Cannon and Kei Hakata, "Japan as the Global South's Advocate: Why the 'Rule of Law' Benefits All" [Commentary], RUSI, May 22, 2023, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/japan-global-souths-advocate-why-rule-law-benefits-all>.
- 31 BRICS, "XV BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration, BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism," August 23, 2023, <https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Jhb-II-Declaration-24-August-2023-1.pdf>.
- 32 Ian Hurd, "The international rule of law: law and the limit of politics," *Ethics & International Affairs* 28, no. 1 (2014): 39-51, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679414000045>. The UN General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) also uses the term "the rule of law among nations."
- 33 MOFA, "Diplomatic Bluebook 2023," September 29, 2023, Chapter 3: 250, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2023/pdf/pdfs/2023_all.pdf.
- 34 For instance, Japan clearly listed the agenda as "the rule of law among nations" when it convened a ministerial-level open debate at the UN Security Council in January 2023. See also Gaimushō [MOFA], "*Kokka-kan no hōnoshihai [The rule of law among nations]*," September 4, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/shihai/page22_004119.html. In this sense, MOFA's usage of the French "*l'État de droit*" should be corrected to "*la primauté du droit*," as its double-pronged understanding of "the rule of law" conforms to the term's contemporary usage.
- 35 The idea for a "free and open global ocean," or FOGO, was introduced in the process of formulating what became the "Blue Infinity Loop" project at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in 2019. See Teruaki Aizawa, "*Sonogono 'Jiyū de hirakareta Indo-taiheiyo (FOIP)' no hensen to tenkai* [The subsequent evolution and developments of the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)']," Sasakawa Peace Foundation, June 2019, https://www.spf.org/oceans/analysis_ja02/post_20190621-copy.html.
- 36 Kei Hakata and Brendon J. Cannon, "Where Does Central Asia Fit in the Quad's Indo-Pacific Plans?" *The Diplomat*, May 25, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/where-does-central-asia-fit-in-the-quads-indo-pacific-plans/>.
- 37 Among many examples is Lithuania, a state with which Japan issued a joint statement on strategic partnership in October 2022. In it they affirmed their willingness to "work toward the realization of a free and open international order based on the rule of law." See MOFA, "Joint Statement on Strategic Partnership between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania," October 26, 2022, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100412172.pdf>. Subsequently, Lithuania published its Indo-Pacific strategy in July 2023. Besides its content, the cover of the Lithuanian paper is a telling example of strategic

- messaging. It graphically includes Japan's Northern Territory (occupied by Russia) as the Indo-Pacific's remit shown in deep grey, whereas it excludes the Russian territory from it. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Lithuania, "Secure, Resilient and Prosperous Future: Lithuania's Indo-Pacific Strategy," July 5, 2023, <https://www.urm.lt/uploads/default/documents/ENG%20Strategy.pdf>.
- 38 Teruaki Aizawa, "Indo-taiheiyō ni okeru kaiyō gabanansu: FOIP no shiten kara [Ocean governance in the Indo-Pacific: from a FOIP perspective]," Sasakawa Peace Foundation, April 2022, https://www.spf.org/oceans/analysis_ja02/20220413_t.html.
- 39 Yoshimasa Hayashi, "Keynote Speech by Minister HAYASHI Yoshimasa at the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum in Stockholm" [Speech transcript], MOFA, May 13, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100503743.pdf>.
- 40 MOFA, "Joint Statement of the Ninth Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the 'Central Asia plus Japan' Dialogue," December 24, 2022, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100439775.pdf>.
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- 43 Taniguchi, n. 3.
- 44 Brendon J. Cannon and Ash Rossiter, "Locating the Quad: informality, institutional flexibility, and future alignment in the Indo-Pacific," *International Politics* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-022-00383-y>.