

## **What issue matters to you the most as a future leader of Australia and Japan?**

*Submissions should identify an issue, explain why it is important to the future of the Australia-Japan relationship, and make a case for what should be done going forward.*

**Word Count: 1242 (Excluding Reference List)**

### **The issue**

The sustainability of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision (FOIP) is a pertinent issue that must dominate the Australia-Japan dialogues. It is a framework that holds the key for international stability because it champions liberal multilateralism. The goals of FOIP are to promote maritime freedom and multipolarity within the Indo-Pacific, values shared by countries in the region (Hosoya, Yuichi, Yuichi 2020). However, strong reception is currently limited to Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) members. The FOIP vision cannot come to fruition until there is widespread support (Reeves and Wallace 2020; Taylor 2019). Three key obstacles can be identified. First, geopolitical engagement in the Indo-Pacific is often seen as a binary choice between China and the United States (Medcalf 2019). Thus, it is perceived that those who support the FOIP are in alignment with the United States. Second, many critics fear Asia's disintegration into mutually hostile armed blocs. Third, there are doubts that the vision can safely dilute China's *fait accompli* strategy and encourage the country to be a constructive regional partner (Satake 2019).

### **The importance of this issue to Australia and Japan**

The success of the FOIP is of pertinence to Australia and Japan because both countries require this policy framework to advance their respective national interests. Firstly, China's adventurism has driven its expansion of power and influence in the East China Sea, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean- all of which are at the expense of Australia and Japan's sovereignty (Koda 2016; Cook 2021). China's employment of grey-zone tactics is of significant concern to both Australia and Japan for its erosion of international law and attack on maritime freedom (Australian Government Department of Defence 2020). However, despite political aggression,

China remains a key stakeholder in each country's foreign policies because of its socio-economic influence.

Secondly, both countries are reliant on security cooperation with the United States to compensate for their limited military capabilities. Japan is severely limited by its constitution which prohibits the acquisition of strong defence capabilities whilst Australia's current capabilities would not allow it to survive a war of attrition (Walton 2020; Shoebridge 2021). The increasing conflict between the great powers, forces Australia and Japan into a difficult position. Rapport with the great powers are necessary for state survival, but express alignment is near impossible. Thus, the FOIP grants an avenue for both countries to enhance their security policies whilst also creating an environment where conflict is less likely to occur. This great power reliance necessitates a strategy that allows Australia and Japan to continue reaping the benefits from the great powers whilst also building a pathway to enhanced policy independence.

### **The solution**

China cannot be compelled into a system of interdependence if the rest of the world fails to demonstrate the value of interdependence themselves. As such, the first step is for Australia and Japan to devote significant energy towards recalibrating the attainment of support for FOIP. This can be achieved if Australia and Japan promote the FOIP as a neutral non-aligned movement that seeks to construct a liberal regional order underpinned by multipolarity (Posen 2020). For this to manifest, recalibration is required to ensure that the vision holds significant ballast in the international order. Australia and Japan should engage in "*creative coalition-building to push the boundaries of solidarity*" as QUAD solidarity exists as a diplomatic safety net (Medcalf 2019).

For FOIP's success, Australia and Japan should collaborate on constructing agreements that address gaps in infrastructure and defence capabilities of other countries. This strategy is significant because of two key implications. Firstly, this strategy would resonate in an international order injured by recent trends of protectionism. Secondly, this strategy will undermine the argument of the great power ultimatum, as countries feel empowered by their

domestic and international leverage. Resultantly, countries will have enhanced freedom to act independently as great powers lessen in influence. This will also encourage other countries in the region to engage in similar multipolar acts of their own.

The first space Japan and Australia should look towards is Indonesia. Consolidating ties with Indonesia would be a vital asset to the FOIP vision as President Widodo's recent revitalisation of the Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept will increase Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) support (Beeson et al. 2020). ASEAN is important because combined, it holds the third-largest population and is the fifth-largest economy in the world (Satake 2019). Japan's recent efforts in compounding Indonesia's mission to become a 'World Maritime Axis' has nurtured a diplomatic realm that enables increased dialogue surrounding the convergence of ASEAN and QUAD outlooks (Supriyanto 2014). Japan should continue to focus on enhancing Indonesia's raw military capabilities whilst Australia should strengthen Indonesia's defence training and maritime resources. This would demonstrate Australia's intent to focus on policy symmetries with Indonesia - a clear contrast to the usual predisposition (Lindsay and McRae 2018). The Australian Defence Force (ADF) could assist in enhancing Indonesia's procurement strategies and scientific research to support vulnerable Indonesian ports and anchorages (Supriyanto 2014). Furthermore, cross attachments between key Indonesian and Australian agencies would ensure both sides are informed of internal policy debates without compromising classified information (Supriyanto 2014). This could be achieved by placing Indonesian liaison officers at the Border Protection Command, the Australian Border Force and the ADF's Northern Command and vice versa at the Indonesian Maritime Security Coordinating Board (Supriyanto 2014). This collaborative addressal of Indonesia's resilience draws policy parallels to the Japan-China launch of the Maritime and Air Communication Mechanism, a crisis management measure that assigned each country their own maritime communications to avoid accidental aerial and naval clashes (Kyodo 2018). Both strategies demonstrate a clear intent to repair a potentially fraught relationship by highlighting the value of liberal values (Satake 2019). The successful curation of Indonesia's support would be even more pronounced given the country's history of conservatism and protectionist policies.

The second space Australia and Japan must look towards is South Korea. Whilst there is ample convergence between the ASEAN Outlook and the FOIP, varying ASEAN attitudes towards the great powers are not easily settled. Whilst inclusivity is a prerequisite for cooperative security, “*ASEAN could equally become a venue for big powers to control smaller members*” (Soeya 2020). Non-ASEAN countries are equally important to FOIP’s success. While geographic proximity should not be a forethought (Posen 2020), it is difficult to ignore how persistently tense the relations are between Japan and Korea. Japan should seek to drive an agreement like the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation 2007. According to a former South Korean official, South Korea dedicated substantial effort to studying the 2007 Japan–Australia declaration before proposing a similar declaration with Australia in 2009; the Joint Statement on Enhanced Global and Security Cooperation between Australia and the Republic of Korea (Soeya 2020). This would target South Korea’s longstanding pursuit to offset the threat of North Korea and dilute fears of Japanese aggression. This policy symmetry would encourage solidarity amongst these middle powers- a potential trilateral relationship could arise to provide regional stability (Soeya 2020). Resolving historic tensions would mark a milestone in Japan-Korea relations; this would add significant ballast to the FOIP vision.

### **Conclusion**

The FOIP has the grand potential of encouraging China to be a liberal player in the international order. However, this scenario cannot come to fruition if there is no support for the FOIP vision. Australia and Japan have the drive and the resources to overcome this hurdle if they seek to resolve areas of regional stability by constructing strategic security policies.

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