

Japan's Values-based Diplomacy & The Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision

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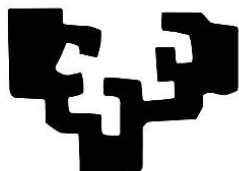
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Abstract

This dissertation briefly explores the Japanese values-based diplomacy from the post-Second World War II period to the present with an emphasis on Shinzo Abe's diplomatic initiatives focused on "universal values". The research is primarily carried out on a chronological fashion that first analyzes the earliest examples of a values-based diplomacy up to the most recent ones. Based on both primary and secondary sources, I observe how, up to the 1990s, Japanese diplomacy rather followed a low profile diplomacy in which the promotion of democratic values was manifest in the relations with the Western Bloc, but rather avoided with Asian partners. However I argue that, with the end of the Cold War, Japan started to incorporate democracy promotion objectives more actively in his diplomatic initiatives for Eurasia as a means to rekindle his diplomatic exercise. Among the most notable examples we can find the publishing of the Official Development Assistance Charter in 1992, the Partnership for Democratic Development and the Silk Road Action Plan. The factors that might have pushed Japan to do so—i.e. the will to change the international perception of a mercantilist Japanese diplomacy, the interest to highlight its own democratic character in the region and the synergies generated by it with the United States—can also be considered in the later articulation of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiatives. Both of them, however, should be interpreted as direct expressions of Shinzō Abe's self-proclaimed "assertive" and "strategic diplomacy" based on a set of "universal values". After an analysis of Shinzō Abe's policies, I conclude stating that the allusions to the concepts of the "rule of law", "freedom", "freedom of navigation" and "democracy" characterize the diplomacy of a government cabinet devoted to the protection of the so-called "rules based international order" in the face of an increasingly strategic Indo-Pacific region.

Introduction

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, Japan has engaged itself in an assertive promotion of the liberal precepts of the rule of law, freedom and openness in Asia. This particular campaign can be traced back to 2006, when Shinzō Abe assumed the role of Prime Minister for the first time and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spearheaded by Tarō Asō, advocated for the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity based on “universal values” (*fuhenteki kachi*). The Liberal Democratic Party’s comeback in late 2012 confirmed its leaders’ will to engage in a “proactive contribution to peace” and the resolution to play a leading role in the maintenance of “Open and Stable Seas” for the Indo-Pacific region. Recently, in 2016, the two aforementioned concepts of “freedom” and “openness” have most remarkably been fused together in the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” diplomatic leitmotif proposed by the third Abe Cabinet.

Research problem and objectives

The objective of this dissertation is to examine the most notable instances of the post-World War II values-based Japanese diplomacy as a precedent for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. Even if the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” and the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” appear to be the most notable examples of a values-based diplomacy, this paper tries to answer whether it can be asserted that the promotion of “universal values” such as the rule of law, democracy or freedom was an unprecedented choice or not. Through the analysis of Tokyo’s diplomatic exercise and the elucidation of its sources, I will try to signal at which point Japan started adding such an idealist coating to its policies in Asia and, in order to do so, I will refer to Japan’s international doctrines in the light of his international position after World War II. Moreover, I will briefly touch upon the motives that might have pushed Japan to promote a set of “fundamental” or “universal” values in his vicinity. With this in mind, this dissertation will try to shed some light into the multifaceted Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative as the archetype of a values-based diplomacy.

Documentary analysis

The analyzed material is mainly composed of bilateral diplomatic statements. This set of data is available to public access thanks to the governmental policy records available online. I treat these as primary sources because of their nature as official documents published by the governments involved. In fact, the body of primary sources for this dissertation is largely drawn from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Most

of them have been translated into English but some others are only available in Japanese, language that I am proficient on. The primary sources will be cited in the footnotes. As for the secondary sources, I extensively rely on the works of International Relations scholars such as Yoshihide Soeya¹ and Victor D. Cha² for their account on the history of Japanese diplomacy. For an account on the history of democracy diplomacy in Japan, I have consulted, among others, the works of Maiko Ichihara³ and Daniel M. Kliman and Daniel Twining⁴.

Research limitations

As for the research limitations of this dissertation, I acknowledge that the great number of diplomatic statements I refer to might deviate from the actual steps taken by the governments involved, defeating the purpose of a holistic and exhaustive analysis on Japanese diplomacy or the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative. Nonetheless, as the main issue for this dissertation has been narrowed down to the articulation of values in Japan's diplomatic activity, the reason to primarily delve into diplomatic statements might be vindicated. Furthermore, the space constraints in this dissertation disallow me to further expand on the rest of the actions taken by Japan, let alone the actions taken by the different stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region. It would also have been interesting to analyze China's international posture and its adherence to the so-called Core Socialist Values over the years to see how they might collide with values advanced in Shinzō Abe's assertive diplomacy.

Overview of the structure

This dissertation is divided in four chapters in order to explore Japan's values-based diplomacy and some of the policies that set a precedent in the elaboration of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision in a sequential approach. To begin with, I observe the evolution of Japan's diplomacy in the context of the Cold War and the Hub and Spokes security architecture. The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the emergence of a more active promotion of democratic and institution-building initiatives in Japanese diplomacy at the outset of the 1990s that might answer to a number of specific factors. The third chapter delves into the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, the Quadrilateral

¹ Soeya, Y. (2019). *Nyūmonkougi. sengonihongaikōshi*. [Introduction to the Diplomatic History of Postwar Japan].

² Cha, V. (2016). *Powerplay: the origins of the American alliance system in Asia*.

³ Ichihara, M. (2013). Understanding Japanese Democracy Assistance. *Democracy and Rule of Law*.

⁴ Kliman, D. & Twining D. (2014). Japan's Democracy Diplomacy. *Asia Paper Series*. Accessed 17th May 2020: https://spfusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/6_Japans_Democracy_Diplomacy.pdf

Security Dialogue and the Japan-Mekong Partnership Program as the most remarkable examples of Shinzō Abe’s diplomacy prior to the Free and Indo-Pacific vision. The last chapter is entirely dedicated to the latest example of Japan’s values-based diplomacy, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. In this chapter, I am first going to expound the geographical boundaries of the Indo-Pacific region, its strategically relevant areas and its potential maritime flashpoints in East Asia in order to understand what matters are at stake when Japan articulates such a broad diplomatic vision. Then I am going to point to some policy changes that substantiated this initiative before delving into the policy itself. The dissertation will end with a chapter devoted to the conclusions of this analysis.

Japan’s Post-World War II Diplomacy

The purpose of the following section is to briefly examine the starting point of the post-World War II Japanese diplomacy as the bedrock for the latter adoption and promotion of liberal values. For this purpose, one has to consider the singularity of the San Francisco System. I will also consider, Japan’s international engagement by virtue of its “UN-centered diplomacy” and the Fukuda Doctrine.

The San Francisco System

Asia’s security architecture largely owes its present form to the foundations laid by the U.S. bilateral security management in the region after World War II. Following the San Francisco Conference in 1951, the United States’ arrangement of a series of exclusive bilateral defense treaties with several Asian nations led to the formation of the Hub and Spokes architecture or the San Francisco System⁵. Contrary to Europe, Asia’s security architecture was characterized by a series of bilateral security agreements that tied several Asian nations (the spokes) only to the United States (the hub), and not between each other collectively. As a result, the United States contracted exclusive security treaties with Australia and New Zealand, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and the Republic of China as security allies.

Japan’s role in the Hub and Spokes architecture was deemed essential by the U.S. because it was seen as the only great power capable to stabilize the region in favor of American anti-communist interests⁶. Therefore, by engaging in an asymmetrical military

⁵ See note 2

⁶ See note 2

alliance, the U.S. secured an ally of paramount importance in its containment strategy. In exchange, Japan was gradually admitted to the U.S.-backed international organizations while embracing its position as a nation of the “free world” and its values. The most salient trait of Japan’s postwar diplomacy, however, was the adoption of a low-profile diplomacy based on the so-called Yoshida Doctrine.

The Yoshida Doctrine

The keystone of the Yoshida Doctrine⁷ was to bandwagon to the U.S. grand strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, while keeping a low profile and self-limiting stance under the 9th article of the newly drafted constitution. This allowed Japan to minimize military spending and facilitate instead the reconstruction of the nation's ruined economy. In order to understand this stance, one has to consider the main institutions that resulted from the legacy of the Allied occupation period. Namely, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and the Japanese constitution. Tightly embedded in an alliance framework, Japan capitulated its offensive power projection to the Treaty on Mutual Security with the U.S. and the 9th article of the constitution⁸. Tokyo then turned to a low-profile stance in international politics to focus on economy, while identifying itself as a member of the Western bloc. In line with this, Japan comfortably embraced the values of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as “the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law”⁹.

The introduction of a UN-centered diplomacy

Japan was ultimately admitted to the liberal international institutions that emanated from the Breton Woods Conference, joining the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in 1952. Later, the rise of Japan’s international position consolidated to a greater extent with its admission to the United Nations. When Japan joined for good the United Nations in 1956, Tokyo pledged—as reflected in the first Japanese Diplomatic Bluebook published in 1957—to a ‘*Kokuren chuushin shugi*’ or an UN-centered diplomacy based upon the principles of the charter of the United Nations¹⁰. This course of action was to be based on 1) Tokyo’s cooperation with the “free world”, 2) the

⁷ Named after the 45th Japanese Prime Minister, Shigeru Yoshida.

⁸ Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. (1946). *The Constitution of Japan*. Accessed 14th May 2020: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

⁹ As seen in the *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan*.

¹⁰ See p.85 note 1

maintenance of its position as an Asian member and 3) the respect of the United Nations Charter.

Over the years, the Yoshida Doctrine and the UN-centered diplomacy allowed Japan to become a full-fledged IMF member in 1964, while also becoming an official member state of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Japan also became a member of the G7, in consonance with its acquired economic development and democratic nature.

As for the expression of his Asian nature, Japanese involvement would prove instrumental in the formation of the regional supranational organizations. Japan endorsed the formation of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and, later, would play a significant role in the formation of the APEC, the ASEAN Regional Forum or the East Asia Summit, pushing even for the realization of an East Asian Community. One interesting feature in Tokyo's search for multilateralization in East Asia was, and continues to be, the interest to bring in Australia, New Zealand or, later, India as strategic democratic allies close to the United States, against the notion of an "Asia for Asians". The Free and Open-Pacific is a case in point for this.

In the end, the focus on economic diplomacy was as much a working formula stemming from the Yoshida Doctrine, as the sheer "manifestation of the inability of Japanese diplomacy to participate directly in great-power politics"¹¹. Nonetheless, in the 1970s, Japan understood the need to appropriately fill the political vacuum left by the Guam Doctrine of President Nixon and started to substantiate his economic cooperation with ASEAN with the notion of shared "cultural bonds" between the Asian people.

The Fukuda Doctrine

As the capitals of Indochina went to be administered by communist regimes, the United States adopted a retrenchment policy in order to partially disengage from the region. In this context, the United States wished Japan to increase its political role in the region¹². As Soeya points, this also provided Japan, for the first time in many years, with greater maneuverability in order to carry out a more independent diplomacy¹³. And Japan

¹¹ See note 1

¹² De Miguel, E. (2013). Japan and Southeast Asia: From the Fukuda doctrine to Abe's five principles. *Unisci Discussion Papers*, 32, pp. 99-116

¹³ See p. 156 note 1

played accordingly. This reinvigorated policy stance towards Asia was made manifest in the Fukuda Doctrine.

The Fukuda Doctrine was first made manifest in Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda's *Our country's policy towards East Asia* speech at the Manila Hotel in Manila on 18th August 1977¹⁴. The policy speech opened with laudatory words towards ASEAN's collective progress and cultural diversity. Later on, Prime Minister Fukuda pledged to strengthen Japan's partnership with ASEAN, not as a mere "spectator" (*bōkansha*), but as a "good cooperator" (*yoki kyōryokusha*). The following lines were particularly devoted to reassure all the attendants that, even if Japan had achieved to become an economic power, its economic might would never be translated into a militaristic Japan. Finally, Fukuda assured that Japan's relationship with ASEAN was not a relationship based on mere "shared material interest" (*bushitsutekina sōgorieki*) but one of "heart-to-heart understanding" (*kokoro to kokoro no fureai*) with its Asian neighbors. For this purpose, Takeo Fukuda promised to revitalize people-to-people exchange in the academe, the sports and other cultural fields. As an equal cooperator, Japan also pledged to cooperate for greater mutual understanding with the Indochina nations and, by doing so, contribute to the prosperity of the region.

This speech tackled with several issues that were a nuisance for Japanese diplomacy at the time. As mentioned above, Japan's post-World War II international policy was largely based on a low-profile diplomacy rather turned to economic cooperation. However, Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka's visits to Bangkok and Jakarta in 1974 made clear that anti-Japanese sentiments were latent in Southeast Asia¹⁵ and revealed the shortfalls of an economic diplomacy. In order to mend this issue, the Fukuda Doctrine sought to improve Japan's soft power in Asia while dealing with the memories of its past aggression in Asia. As a result, the ASEAN-Japan Forum was established as a formal dialogue venue, as well as the ASEAN Cultural Fund with an amount of 250 million USD. Moreover, in 1979, a Japan Scholarship Fund for ASEAN Youth was also put in place as some of the first initiatives that were to foment ASEAN-Japan relations¹⁶.

The Fukuda Doctrine's longstanding contribution to Japan's relationship with Southeast Asia was then taken over by several Japanese Prime Ministers who choose to

¹⁴ Speech available in Japanese: <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/docs/19770818.S1J.html>

¹⁵ See p.157 note 12

¹⁶ See p.104 note 12

pursue its legacy. For instance, Prime Minister Takeshita's International Cooperation Initiative¹⁷ in the 1980s was significantly substantiated by the New ASEAN-Japan Partnership for Peace and Prosperity¹⁸ built upon the spirit of the Fukuda Doctrine's appeal to Asian cultural bonds and its economic diplomacy. Similarly, Shinzō Abe alluded to Fukuda's legacy when promoting his own doctrine for East Asia as I am going to explain later.

In the end, Tokyo did not indulge in overt democracy or freedom promotion in his neighborhood for pragmatic reasons. Among others, the historical problems originated in World War II seemed to have a strong deterrent effect for that matter. Thus, Japan rather focused on emphasizing the cultural similarities among Asian nations, while also bringing about capital investment to the region. While democratic values were present in U.S.-Japan joint communiqués for instance¹⁹, Japan exhibited a lack of interest in promoting these in Asia. Scholar Ming Wan in 1998 noted the following: "Japan has avoided confronting Asia since the end of the Second World War. Tokyo has adopted a two-track foreign policy, one for the West and other for Asia"²⁰. This is going to radically change with the promotion of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity under the first Abe cabinet. However, I argue that Japan already started incorporating democratic values in the articulation of some of its international initiatives for Asia some years earlier. Hereafter, I will identify a set of policies that started actively promoting democracy outside of the framework of cooperation within the U.S.-Japan alliance and the West. In order to substantiate this argument, I am going to point to a number of factors that might have prompted this reaction.

Post-Cold War Values-based Diplomacy

Around the 1990s, Tokyo started to pursue a more assertive democracy diplomacy as a way to rekindle its diplomatic efforts. In fact, it can be observed that the MOFA took bigger interest in actively contributing to the expansion of a westernized set of values

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (1989). Section 3. Tasks for Japanese Foreign Policy. *Diplomatic Bluebook 1989*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1989/1989-1-3.htm>

¹⁸ Takeshita's speech for the presentation of his initiative in Manila, accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/1988/s63-shiryu2-3.htm>

¹⁹ For example, the Suzuki-Reagan joint communiqué underscored both countries shared values of democracy and liberty. Available online at: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/50881b>

²⁰ Wan, M. (1998). Human rights and U.S.-Japan relations in Asia: Divergent allies. *East Asia*, 16(3-4), 137-168.

with the end of the Cold War. We can see this in such policies as the Silk Road Action Plan, the Partnership for Democratic Development initiative and the 1992 ODA charter. Later, they were followed by the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, two initiatives that eyed Asia's evolving nature. All of this would later substantiate the values-based policy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

We can observe some components that would have sparked Japanese interest to finally draw a set of values into play in the 1990s. On the one hand, there is the international criticism for carrying out a mercantilist diplomacy or a "checkbook" diplomacy, as it was labeled during the Gulf War²¹. In addition to this, Maiko Ichihara also points to the increasing domestic criticism for the lack of a clear policy on the implementation of ODA²². On the other hand, some scholars seem to acknowledge that, around the mid-1990s, there was more interest within the Liberal Democratic Party to carry out a pro-Taiwan foreign policy that would go against China's position on international affairs²³. One cannot also forget the inherent synergies such a policy could have had with the U.S. shift "From Containment to Enlargement"²⁴ while the world was experiencing the so-called "third wave of democratization".

"Checkbook Diplomacy"

The end of the Cold War and the diplomatic fiasco of the Gulf War demanded a reconfiguration for Japanese diplomacy. In fact, Tokyo's international role was questioned when the 13 billion USD with which Japan contributed to the war were labelled as mere "checkbook diplomacy"²⁵. As a response, Japan modelled his legislation in order to be recognized as an international actor capable of contributing to the international society. Among the most notable examples, the International Peace Cooperation Law enacted in 1992 and the 2001 Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Laws reflected the Japanese resolve to get more involved internationally by dispatching Self-Defence personnel overseas. This trend was also manifest in the 1997 U.S.-Japan

²¹ Hiroshi, N. (2011). The Gulf War and Japanese Diplomacy. *Nippon.com*. Accessed 15th May 2020: <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/c00202/the-gulf-war-and-japanese-diplomacy.html>

²² See note 3

²³ See pp. 242-246 note 1. See also: Zakowski, K., Bochorodycz, B., & Socha, M. (2018). *Japan's foreign policy making: Central government reforms, decision-making processes, and diplomacy*, p. 120.

²⁴ Lake, A. (1993). *From Containment to Enlargement*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html>.

²⁵ Friedman, T. (1991). Baker Asks Japan to Broaden Role. *The Washington Post*. Accessed 15th May 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/12/world/baker-asks-japan-to-broaden-role.html>

Guidelines that extended the scope of areas considered crucial for Japan’s security with an eye on North Korea and the Taiwan Strait.

Taiwanese Democratization

When the democratization steps undertaken by Lee Tung-Hui sparked Chinese backlash during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, a number of Chinese ballistic missiles landed near the Japanese sea lanes in Okinawa, causing a major diplomatic turmoil. Interestingly enough, Yoshihide Soeya observes that, even though prior to the 1990s Japanese conservative politicians did not seem too keen to appeal to the “universal values” of freedom and democracy abroad, the Taiwan Strait Crisis offered conservatives alike a good argument to rally these principles against Beijing²⁶. It might be possible to assert that the cognizance of China’s strength, as it started flexing its muscles in its vicinity, prompted Japan to embrace a higher degree of realism in his foreign policy. Furthermore, as figure 1 shows²⁷, a noteworthy slump in the Japanese public opinion polls on China backed this particular stance.

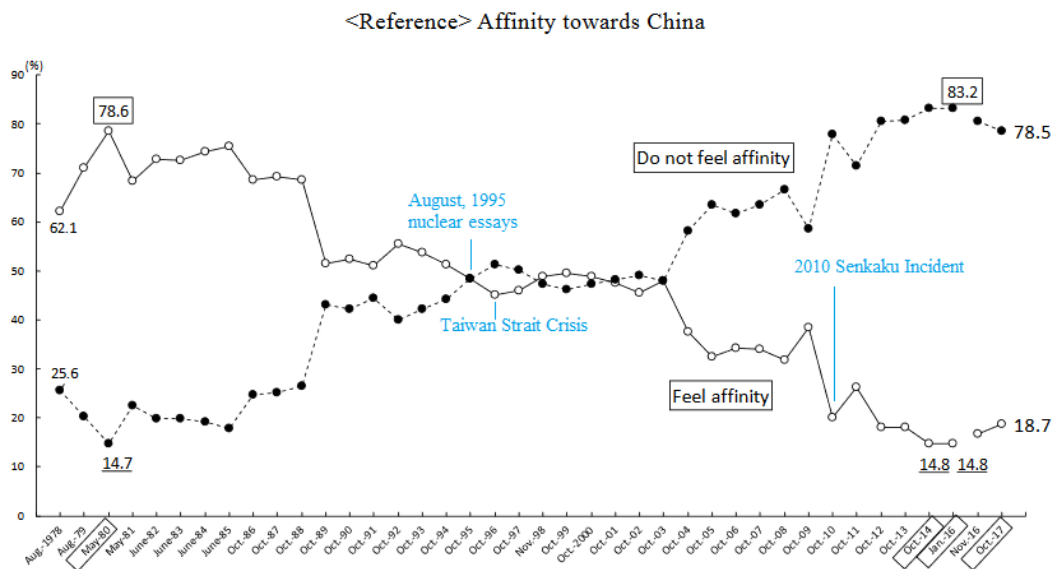


Figure 1

The Alliance for the 21st Century

Finally, when the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis had just been drawn to a close, on April 17th 1996, Japan and the U.S. issued a joint declaration on security called “Alliance

²⁶ See p. 246 note 1

²⁷ [Edited] Source: The Government of Japan. (2017). *Overview of the Public Opinion Survey on Diplomacy*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h29/h29-gaiko/summary.pdf>

for the 21st century”²⁸. In it, both heads of state reaffirmed “their commitment to the profound common values that guide our national policies: the maintenance of freedom, the pursuit of democracy, and respect for human rights”. Thus, the adherence to this set of values was also carried out in consonance with American involvement in the region. And particularly because two significant security issues inherited from the Cold War period—the situation of Taiwan and North Korea—remained unresolved.

Henceforth, I explore some of the value-laden initiatives carried out by Japan internationally as a precedent to Shinzō Abe’s values-based “assertive diplomacy”. This lets us see that democracy promotion was not an unprecedented choice at the time of Abe’s first cabinet. The abovementioned conditions might have been behind Japan’s decision to adopt a set democratic values for the Asian continent at its own convenience. In fact, some scholars like Green also point to a shift in Japanese diplomacy from Commercial Liberalism to “Reluctant Realism” at that moment in history. Firstly, there is the decision to frame the Official Development Assistance scheme in order to quench the domestic and international criticism towards Tokyo’s “checkbook diplomacy”. In line with this, Japan continued expanding his diplomacy in Eurasia with the Partnership for Democratic Assistance and the Eurasian diplomacy.

1992 ODA Charter Reform

Although domestic criticism would have started to be more prominent around the 1980s amid cases of corruption by ODA recipient nations²⁹, the necessity to revise ODA accelerated with the wave of democratic openings around the world. In 1991, the Kaifu Cabinet started mingling with the idea of four new “guidelines of ODA” that led to the formulation of an ODA charter in 1992³⁰ under the Miyazawa Cabinet. This effectively introduced “democratization” and “market-oriented economy implementation efforts” next to the previous “humanitarian and moral considerations”³¹ as determinants for countries to be actual recipients of Japan’s ODA³². Notwithstanding the scholarly challenge against the legality of the same Charter for being susceptible to fall in a quasi-

²⁸ The Government of Japan & the Government of the United States of America. (1996). *Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on security. Alliance for the 21st century*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/security.html>

²⁹ See note 3

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (1992). *Japan’s Official Development Assistance Charter*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/summary/1999/ref1.html>

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (1994). *History of Official Development Assistance*. Accessed 14th Mayo 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/summary/1994/1.html#1>.

³² See p. 143 note 20

intervention in foreign domestic affairs³³, the Japanese government maintained this consideration in his subsequent ODA reforms.

Partnership for Democratic Assistance

On the occasion of the 22nd G7 Lyon Summit in 1996, Prime Minister Hashimoto announced his will to redouble Japan's efforts on democracy promotion abroad under the label of the *Partnership for Democratic Assistance* in line with the ODA Charter³⁴. Japan had already alluded to democratic values under the auspices of the G7, this time, however, Tokyo seemed ready to promote them in Asia. The concrete measures included assistance in the establishment of judiciary and electoral systems, as well as training for court officers, executive officials and police officers, among others. With this initiative Japan embarked on the accompaniment of young democracies as it would later strive to do with the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity.

Eurasian Diplomacy

As former MOFA diplomat Kazuhiko Togo examines³⁵, from 1997 to 2001, Japan pursued a Eurasian diplomacy of its own. On July 24th 1997, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's speech at the Japan Association of Corporate Executives³⁶ reflected Japan's newfangled resolve to give shape to a new Eurasian diplomacy especially in dealing with Russia, China and the Silk Road region. In line with this, the Government of Japan put together the "Silk Road Action Plan"³⁷ orientated towards the reinforcement of 1) political dialogue to promote trust and mutual understanding, 2) economic and natural resources exploitation cooperation for a prosperous mutual aid and 3) peaceful cooperation for nuclear nonproliferation, democratization and stabilization³⁸.

The inclination for the post-Cold War Japanese diplomacy to more actively include democracy issues on its policies on top of the Silk Road diplomacy's geographic

³³ See p. 159 note 20

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (n.d.) *minshutekihattennotamenopattonashippu (PDD) Partnership for Democratic Development*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiiko/pdd/index.html>

³⁵ Kazukiho, T. (2014) Eurasian Diplomacy in Japan, 1997-2001. *Reflections on Japan's Post-Cold War Foreign Policy*. The Nippon Communications Foundation. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/c00205/eurasian-diplomacy-in-japan-1997%E2%80%932001.html>

³⁶ The Government of Japan. (1997). *Address by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto to the Japan Association of Corporate Executives*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/0731douyukai.html>

³⁷ Green, M. (2001). *Japan's Reluctant Realism, Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power*.

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2002). *Taishirukurodo chiikigaikounitsuite [On the Silk Road Regional Diplomacy]*. Accessed 14th May 2020: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/yojin/arc_02/silkroad_a.html

stretch might have served as solid antecedents to pave the way for the tailoring of an Arc of Freedom and Advantage. Hereafter, I analyze Shinzō Abe’s diplomacy in relation to the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as a final chapter before the analysis of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

Shinzō Abe’s Diplomacy

As expressed in his book *Towards a beautiful Country (utshukushii kuni he)*, Shinzō Abe’s diplomacy is characterized by the pledge to strengthen the democratic partnership of the “Quad” countries and the resolve to contribute to the advancement of universal values in Asia. Abe is also known to hold the U.S.-Japan military alliance dear. On top of this, under his premiership, Japan has parted with some of the self-imposed constraints stemming from the Yoshida Doctrine by loosening the previous arms export restrictions and by extending the right to individual self-defense to a collective self-defense right by means of the 2015 military legislation reform.

At the occasion of the 166th policy speech at the National Diet³⁹ in 2007, Shinzō Abe vowed to carry on with his *shuchō suru gaikō* (assertive diplomacy, diplomacy that raises its own voice) based on three pillars: 1) strengthened cooperation with countries that share the same fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, 2) the construction of an open and innovative Asia, and 3) the contribution to world peace and stability. Additionally, Abe characterized the “U.S.-Japan alliance for the world and Asia” as the cornerstone of Japan’s diplomacy. This determination towards closer alignment with the U.S. and the rest of the countries that share fundamental values with Japan was particularly channeled through two frameworks: the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

Arc of Freedom and Prosperity

As transpired in Japan and India’s statement for a *Partnership in a New Asian Era*⁴⁰ during the previous Koizumi cabinet, the MOFA had already in mind the promotion

³⁹ Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. (2007).

Dai166kaikokkainiokeruabenaikakusouridaijinshiseihoushinezetsu [Policy speech by Prime Minister Abe at the 166th Session of the Diet]. Accessed 14th May 2020:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20080212001805/http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/abespeech/2007/01/26sisei.html>

⁴⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2005). *Japan-India Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of Japan-India Global Partnership*. Accessed 14th May 2020:

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/partner0504.html#eight>

of a framework in the shape of an Arc meant to follow the path of the previous Eurasian diplomacy. At that time, both leaders had acknowledged the need “for concerted efforts among Asian countries” to translate Asia’s growth into an “Arc of *Advantage and Prosperity*” [emphasis added]. It is worth noting that at this stage the much more contentious term of “freedom” was not evoked by either of these countries. On the other hand, the Foreign Affairs Minister of the time, also Tarō Asō, had already presented his own conception an “Asian Strategy” with Japan as the “Thought Leader” of Asia⁴¹. It can definitely be argued that the idea of a strategic arc where Japan was to marshal “prosperity” and something more was already in place. However, all of these ideas were decisively channeled only at the time of the ensuing Abe Cabinet.

In November 30th 2006, Taro Asō, gave a speech at the Japan Institute of International Affairs seminar to present his “value-oriented diplomacy” and the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”⁴². Thereafter, the Foreign Affairs Minister continued delineating the features of the abovementioned initiative in a number of speeches⁴³. All in all, the initiative saw Japan as the “escort runner” for the emerging democracies in Eurasia through the promotion of the “universal values” of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This was yet another example of Japan striving to be recognized as an international actor, while also looking towards the partnership with the West and NATO⁴⁴. One of the policy examples in Asia resulting from this framework was the articulation of the Japan-Mekong Partnership Program.

Japan-Mekong Partnership Program

In line with the promotion of universal values, Japan started to promote the Japan-Mekong Partnership Program. According to the MOFA, the initiative was announced to the public on January 16, 2007⁴⁵. After a quick glance to the three priority areas expounded in the informative slide presented by the MOFA⁴⁶, one can clearly see that the

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2005). *Asian Strategy as I see it: Japan as the “Thought Leader” of Asia*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0512.html>

⁴² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2006). *Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html>

⁴³ Other speeches include: The Government of Japan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2007). *On the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pillar/address0703.html>

⁴⁴ Len, C., Uyama, T. & Hirose, T. (2008). *Japan’s silk road diplomacy – paving the road ahead*, p. 53.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2008) *Chair’s statement Mekong-Japan foreign ministers’ meeting*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/mekong/meet0801.html>

⁴⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2008) *Japan-Mekong partnership program*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/mekong/goal.pdf>

pursuit of Universal Values (democracy, rule of law, etc.) is emphasized next to the so-called “Common Goals of the Region” (poverty reduction, etc.). From 2009 on, Japan and the Mekong region countries continued to hold yearly summit-level meetings. Moreover, as a result, Japanese ODA was renewed with 40 million USD⁴⁷. Likewise, Japan’s cooperation with the Mekong countries was backed by its support towards the East-West and Southern economic corridors⁴⁸.

It might be argued that with the diplomatic pillar of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, Tokyo was more explicit than usual in interweaving politics with economics for the promotion of a certain model of economic development. Promoting the idea that “only a free people can sustain both political stability and economic prosperity”⁴⁹ was indeed something likely to induce to a collision with different political and economic systems abroad, but also prone to create synergies with partners alike as we had seen in Tokyo’s relation with the West.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

In May 2007, the Australia-India-Japan-United States Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue was instituted at Abe’s initiative. The conceptual basis for this dialogue was the coming together of democracies that formed an “Arc of Democracy”. Strategically speaking, such move was identified as a balancing act to keep Chinese military modernization at check⁵⁰. Nonetheless, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was brought to a halt in 2008 when Kevin Rudd assumed the premiership of Australia⁵¹. Despite the fact, these countries continued to meet together on a trilateral basis as they had done it in the past. For instance, the fifth Japan-Australia-U.S. Trilateral Strategic Dialogue’s joint statement in 2013 extended concerns for the situation in East and South China Seas⁵².

⁴⁷ Kraisoraphong K. (2017). China, Japan and the Greater Mekong Basin: A Southeast Asian Perspective. In Lam, P. (Ed.). *China-japan relations in the 21st century: Antagonism despite interdependency*.

⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2010). *Summary of discussion The Mekong-Japan international conference on the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) and the Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) “Completing connectivity, creating economic prosperity”*. Accessed 14th May 2020: https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/mekong/ewec_sec_1009.html

⁴⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (n.d.) *Japan’s expanding diplomatic horizons. New pillar for Japan’s foreign policy*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pillar/horizons.pdf>

⁵⁰ See note 4

⁵¹ Ching, F. (2008). Asian Arc of Democracy. Opinion. *The Korea Times*. Accessed 14th May 2020: https://web.archive.org/web/20150610222015/http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2008/04/171_19480.html

⁵² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2013). *Fifth Japan-US-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue*. Accessed 14th May 2020: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/page3e_000126.html

Much the same as the sixth one in 2016⁵³. Finally in 2017, the missing member rejoined and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was officially reconvened⁵⁴. What all these statements had in common was the call for the respect of the “rule of law” in the seas in the name of the unimpeded freedom of navigation and trade. Over the years, the proclamation of these values would become a recurrent theme especially suitable for the promotion of a “Free and Open” Indo-Pacific region.

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific

In this chapter I am first going to talk about the Indo-Pacific region and the South and East China Seas before delving into the policies that set the tone for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative.

The Indo-Pacific region

First and foremost, the Indo-Pacific is a vast and strategic maritime region encompassing the African coasts of the Indian Ocean region all the way to the Pacific Ocean with Southeast Asia at its very core. The mention to the “Indo-Pacific” construct has been increasingly recurrent with the advent of an increasingly interconnected world economy. In fact, the strategic meaning of this region has been expanding to the point where Defence White Papers no longer speak in terms of Asia-Pacific, but Indo-Pacific⁵⁵. Also, on 30th May 2018, the biggest military force in the world, changed the name of its “Armed Forces Pacific Command” (USPACOM) to that of the “Indo-Pacific Command” (USINDOPACOM). It is a natural outcome that not only clearly reflects the strategic relevance of Asia, but also echoes the critical importance Indo-Pacific sea lanes bear in global trade and energy security in the 21st century.

Home to some of the most strategically decisive chokepoints and sea lines of communication (SLOC) in the world such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait, the Indo-Pacific’s strategic meaning cannot be neglected in international relations.

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2016). *Japan-United States-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue Joint Statement*. Accessed 14th May 2020: https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/ocn/page3e_000514.html

⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2017). *Australia-India-Japan-U.S. Consultations on the Indo-Pacific*. Accessed 14th May 2020: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001789.html

⁵⁵ For instance see: Department of Defence of Australia. (2013), Defence White Paper 2013. *Defending Australia and its National Interests*. Accessed April 27th 2020: https://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf. And: U.S. Department of Defense. (2019). *Indo-Pacific Strategic Report. Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*. Accessed April 27th 2020: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/department-of-defense-indo-pacific-strategy-report-2019.pdf>

Arguably, Asia's prosperity increasingly relies on its stability. According to Enerdata's 2019 Global Energy Statistical Yearbook, total energy consumption in energy-hungry Asia grew from 2,113 Mtoe in 1990 to 5,859 Mtoe in the year 2018⁵⁶. In the meanwhile, the Strait of Hormuz's daily oil flow in 2018 accounted for as much as 21 per cent of the global petroleum liquids consumption⁵⁷. On the other hand, the Strait of Malacca meant as much as nearly the 80 per cent of the world's second largest oil consumer⁵⁸. Lest we forget that maritime trade represents 90 per cent of total world trade⁵⁹.

For a country like Japan, that imports more than 90 per cent of its energy needs⁶⁰, the securing of a stable energy supply—and, therefore, a stable Indo-Pacific—is also a vital necessity for its economy. However, in the case of this island country, on top of the Malacca or Hormuz Straits, the Indo-Pacific region also contains two additional maritime flashpoints of strategical relevance. These are the South and East China Seas, where the main SLOCs for Japan transit, and their instability is one of the reasons Japan is promoting its Indo-Pacific vision.

East China Sea

Japan and the People's Republic of China have a longstanding dispute over the demarcation of their respective Exclusive Economic Zones and the exploiting rights of the East China Sea's natural resources. In fact, the U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that the ECS contains about 200 million barrels of proved and probable oil reserves and between 1 and 2 trillion cubic feet of proved and probable natural gas reserves⁶¹. But the most mediatized source of conflict between both countries revolves around the sovereignty over the Senkaku islands (Diaoyu for China). The 2010 incident involving the collision of a Chinese trawler with the Japanese Coast Guard revealed indeed how sensitive both nations are around this issue. Without reaching to the

⁵⁶ Enerdata. (2019). *Global Energy Statistical Yearbook 2019*. Accessed 28th April 2020: <https://yearbook.enerdata.net/total-energy/world-consumption-statistics.html>.

⁵⁷ U.S. Energy Information Administration. (2019). The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint. *Today in Energy*. Accessed 28th April 2020: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=39932>

⁵⁸ China Power Team. (2017). How much trade transits the South China Sea? *China Power*. Updated October 10, 2019. Accessed 13th May 2020: <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>

⁵⁹ International Chamber of Shipping. (n.d.). *Shipping and World Trade*. Accessed 15th May 2020: <https://www.ics-shipping.org/shipping-facts/shipping-and-world-trade>

⁶⁰ Knoema. (n.d). Japan – Net energy imports as share of energy use. *World Atlas*. Accessed 13th May 2020: <https://knoema.com/atlas/Japan/Energy-imports>

⁶¹ U.S. Energy Information Administration. (2014). *Unresolved territorial and maritime claims continue to hinder exploration and development in the East China Sea*. Accessed 13th May 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/ybxmol4e>

necessary agreement as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)⁶², it can be argued that the conflict over this part of the map is bound to escalate. Especially when undersea resources exploitation rights become ever more contentious as energy demands rise.

South China Sea

The UNCLOS also seems incapable of giving a solution to the South China Sea's dispute. When Japan renounced to the Spratly and Paracel Islands under article 2 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, no provision was allocated to address the future ownership of this compendium of islets. This has resulted in an international conflict involving Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and China voicing competing claims in the South China Sea. In 2009, China submitted to the UN the infamously known nine-dash line and, in 2016, the Philippines contested the legality of the aforementioned line by bringing the case over to the Permanent Court of Arbitration. In the end, the court ruled against the Chinese maritime claims over the SCS and China did not recognize the court's jurisdiction over this issue. Up to this day, the aforementioned Southeast Asian nations have been unable to apply a binding Code of Conduct and both Japan and the U.S. have been showing strong concerns over China's militarization in this region, especially against alleged Countering Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) and Gray Zone operations.

It can be argued that the joint U.S.-Japan initiatives, such as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision or the reconvening of the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue, were put forward as a response to China's presence in both seas. For instance, at the release conference for the presentation of the third Nye-Armitage report on U.S.-Japan relations and U.S. strategy in Asia⁶³, there were no doubts that "China is the backdrop to everything we are talking about policies, rebalance [...] (it's) the central theme, sort of threat".

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative is a multi-faceted framework that combines security considerations with an economic diplomacy. On top of this, as the name could suggest, the initiative resorts to a set of values stemming from the liberal tradition. Not only this appeal serves to legitimize the objectives of its proponent in the eyes of foreign countries and its own citizens, but also provides a common-ground for

⁶² UN General Assembly. (1982). *Convention on the Law of the Sea*. Accessed 13th May 2020: https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

⁶³ Video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXpHmupICN4>

democracies alike to join in—i.e. the Japan-India-Australia-U.S. “Quad”. The advancement of values, as I have explained, has also been remarkably present in the previous Abe administrations, prior to 2016, when the initiative was announced for the first time.

Before going into the details of the initiative, I am going to advance some policy reforms and statements that let us see that the body of this particular framework was already being put in place by Japan since at least 2013.

Shinzō Abe’s return to the executive

Even if during the rule of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) from September 2009 to December 2012, Japan continued to publicly extend concerns towards China’s lack of transparency in military and maritime affairs⁶⁴, the appeal to the values of freedom or democracy, as with Shinzō Abe and Tarō Asō, was far from being as recurrent as before. In fact, without both leaders, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Arc of Freedom and Democracy were abandoned. However, since Abe’s comeback one can identify a series of political measures and statements that point to the return of a values-based diplomacy with the liberal tenets of the rule of law, freedom and democracy at the center. What is more, these initiatives seem to point directly at the regional issues Japan has with China.

After all, when in 2012, Shinzō Abe, ready to assume his second term as Prime Minister, wrote a column named *Asia’s Security Diamond* for Project Syndicate, one could have expected that the MOFA was all set to resume with his previous initiatives⁶⁵. The same thing can be said for the Policy speech on 28th February, 2013 at the 183th Session of the diet where Abe made clear his will to resume with his “strategic diplomacy” (*senryakuteki gaikō*), a “diplomacy that puts emphasis on universal values” (*fuhentekikachi wo jūshisuru gaikō*)⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ For instance, the 2010 National Defense Program Outlines for FY 2011 and beyond stresses that: “[...] China’s military forces and its security policy, are of concern for the regional and global community.”

⁶⁵ In this article, among other things, Shinzō Abe warned that the South China Sea was increasingly becoming “Lake Beijing”, as the Sea of Okhotsk during the Cold War.

⁶⁶ Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. (2013).

Dai183kaikokkainiokeruabenaikakusouridaijinshiseihoushinenzetsu [Policy speech by Prime Minister Abe at the 183th Session of the Diet]. Accessed 14th May 2020:
https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement2/20130228siseuhousin.html

The Bounty of the Open Seas: Abe Doctrine

Shinzō Abe’s policy speech due for January 18th 2013, *The Bounty of the Open Seas: Five New Principles for Japanese Diplomacy*⁶⁷, clearly developed from the precedent *Confluence of the Two Seas*⁶⁸ speech Abe had delivered in 2007 at the Indian Parliament. In the speech, Abe aimed to clarify the contents of his own doctrine on international relations through five principles. While Abe alluded to the longstanding philosophy of the Fukuda Doctrine, the speech was particularly loaded with allusions to fundamental rights and values; a high-risk bet for a government surrounded by two authoritarian neighbors, but in consonance with Abe’s articulation of a value-laden diplomacy and its adherence to the U.S.-Japan Alliance.

The first pillar alluded to the protection of the “universal values” of “freedom of thought, expression, and speech”. The second pillar was destined to the promotion of a rules-based maritime order with the theme of “the rule of law” at its core. The third pillar spelled out Japan’s international economic policy on “pursuing free, open, interconnected economies”. Positioning itself as a fierce advocate of liberal internationalism, Japan appealed once again to the “universal values” as much as it did in the past with the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, calling for a partnership with other countries embracing “fundamental values”. This speech not only advanced the contents of the subsequent National Security Strategy that was already being concocted, but also made clear the direction that this cabinet was going to take.

The National Security Strategy

In 2013, Abe finally achieved to establish a National Security Council entrusted to tailor a National Security Strategy⁶⁹ à la United States. In identifying Japan’s national interests and objectives, the paper underscored the need to strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance and the cooperative relations with its partners. It also made a call to defend its core interest to “maintain and protect the international order based on universal values and rules”. The NSS reiterated the need to preserve “Open and Stable Seas” as the prerequisite for international peace and prosperity. Just after China’s unilateral declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone over the East China Sea, Tokyo

⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2013). *The Bounty of the Open Seas: Five New Principles for Japanese Diplomacy*. Accessed 14th May 2020:

https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/abe_0118e.html

⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2007). *Confluence of the Two Seas*. Accessed 15th May 2020:

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pm0708/speech-2.html>

⁶⁹ The Government of Japan. (2013). *National Security Strategy*. Accessed 14th May 2020:

https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2013/_icsFiles/afiedfile/2013/12/17/NSS.pdf

lamented the escalation of tensions in the South and East China Seas as well as the increasing vulnerability of the Indo-Pacific's SLOCs. In order to strengthen the rule of maritime law, the national strategy promised to "promote regional efforts and play a leading role in creating a shared recognition that reinforcement of the maritime order governed by law and rules and not by coercion is indispensable for peace and prosperity of the international community as a whole". The 2013 NSS not only anticipated the formulation and purpose of the FOIP years later, but also the subsequent security legislation reform and the rethinking of Tokyo's ODA framework.

2015 ODA reform

In 2015, the Government of Japan revised his ODA Charter for the first time since 2003 and rebranded the policy as Development Cooperation (*kokusai kaihatsu*)⁷⁰. Under the rationale of a "proactive contribution to peace", the charter highlighted the need to provide a "more focused cooperation in a strategic, effective and agile manner" in order to ensure worldwide "cooperation based on Universal Values to Resolve Global Issues". The priority policies were a) "Quality growth" and poverty eradication, b) sharing universal values and realizing a peaceful and secure society, c) building a sustainable and resilient international community. Furthermore, the charter notably identified Southeast Asia as a region to prioritize. This would later allow the cabinet to strategically manage the allocation of ODA, as shown in Japan's support for ASEAN in providing aid, training and equipment in order to enforce maritime laws in the region.

Quality Infrastructure Investment

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative's economic aspect is also substantially backed by Japan's wager for "quality" investment. In implying that there is an investment of poor quality, Japan might be trying to gain some leverage in respect to a competing investment model in the region. Precisely in a time when infrastructure investment is needed in Asia. In 2009, the Asian Development Bank Institute presented a flagship study called *Infrastructure for a Seamless Asia*⁷¹. The report lamented the lack of infrastructure in Asia as a "bottleneck to growth, a threat to competitiveness, and an obstacle to poverty reduction". Furthermore, the ADBI estimated that between 2010 and 2020 Asia needed to invest around 8 trillion USD only in this sector. In the meanwhile, in line with its *Going*

⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2015). *Development Cooperation Chapter*. Accessed 15th May 2020: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/page_000138.html

⁷¹ Asian Development Bank Institute. (2009). *Infrastructure for a Seamless Asia*. Accessed 15th May 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/y8ar5sb7>

Global 2.0 strategy and the *Belt and Road Initiative*, China announced its will to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) solely focused on this pressing matter. Responding to Chinese investment in Asia, on May 21st 2015 Abe announced⁷² the *Partnership for Quality Infrastructure: Investment for Asia's future*. The initiative promised to provide 100 billion USD for infrastructure development in Asia over the next 5 years. And, in less than two years, Japan set forth the *Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure*⁷³, pledging to invest 200 billion USD globally. Japan continued to promote these principles on high-quality and reliable infrastructure investment in connection with its Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy⁷⁴.

This set of initiatives, among others, laid the foundations for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Hereafter, I will explore the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative as such.

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy

Drawing from the legacy tenants present in their precedent servings as Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, Shinzō Abe and Taro Asō, reshuffled the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. This time with China's rise factor more dominant. Not only because of the consolidation of their dissenting stance as opposed claimants over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands' sovereignty, but also because of the Chinese construction of artificial islands in the Spratlys and the more outward looking Chinese policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative. We also have to bear in mind that, the AFP was promoted at a time when the size of the Japanese economy was bigger than that of China, Korea and Russia combined⁷⁵. Today, China's GDP is three times that of Japan's, and its defense spending is significantly bigger as well⁷⁶.

This chapter is dedicated to examine the origins and the articulation of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative, from its portrayal as a strategy to its rebranding as a

⁷² Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. (2015). "*The Future of Asia: Be Innovative*" – Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Banquet of the 21st International Conference on the Future of Asia. Accessed 15th May 2020: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201505/0521foaspeech.html

⁷³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2016). *The G7 Ise-Shima Summit "Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure"*. Accessed 15th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/000241007.pdf>

⁷⁴ Sonoura, K. (2017). *Japan's initiatives for promoting "Quality Infrastructure Investment"*. Accessed 15th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000291344.pdf>

⁷⁵ International Monetary Fund. (2020). IMF DataMapper. *World Economic Outlook*. Accessed 14th April 2020: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/CHN/JPN/KOR/RUS>

⁷⁶ International Institute for Strategic Studies (2019). *Defence Spending: top 15 in 2019 US\$bn*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/y8jtcxp3>

vision. Later, I am going to explain the main declared objectives for this initiative and why the Free and Open Indo-Pacific draws from some policies that Tokyo carried out in the past.

The MOFA traces the first instance of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific formulation back to Abe's intervention at the first TICAD ever held in Africa in 2016, just at the culmination point of his third term as PM⁷⁷. Nonetheless, at this occasion there was no direct allusion to the actual name of the initiative other than the combination of the concepts of "freedom" and "openness". Much the same can be said for the Japan-India Summit meeting celebrated on September 7th 2016⁷⁸. At this occasion, the initiative was called "Free and Open India and Pacific Strategy". The first explicit utterance of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy available on online public records belongs to the address from the Japanese ambassador to India at the occasion of the *India and Japan: Confluence of Maritime Democracies* seminar for the Delhi Policy Group Think-tank on November 7th 2016⁷⁹.

Some days after, during the visit of PM Shinzō Abe to India, Japan and India published a Joint Statement⁸⁰ echoing "the shared commitment to democracy, openness and the rule of law" to strengthen the rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. The document also underscored the potential opportunities for Indian and Japanese companies in Africa and some of the Indian development projects Japan was investing such as the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, the Chennai Bengaluru Industrial Corridor and the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor. Some months later, the Japanese ODA program *Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY2017*⁸¹ included the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" in line with the Japanese commitment to proactively contribute to peace abroad. In fact, as we can see in Figure 2, Japan's Free

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2017). Chapter 1: International Situation and Japan's Diplomacy in 2016. *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017*. Accessed 16th May 2020:

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1/c0102.html#sf03>

⁷⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2016). *Japan-India Summit Meeting*. Accessed 16th May 2020:

https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sw/in/page4e_000515.html

⁷⁹ Embassy of Japan in India. (2016). *Delhi Policy Group shusaiseminaaniokeruhiramatsutaishinokaikaikichoukouen*. Accessed 16th May 2020:

https://www.in.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/00_000123.html

⁸⁰ Government of India, Press information bureau. (2016). *India-Japan Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister to Japan*. Accessed 16th May 2020:

<https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=153534>

⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2017). *Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY2017*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000259285.pdf>

and Open Indo-Pacific strategy is substantially backed by Japan's development cooperation investments abroad⁸².

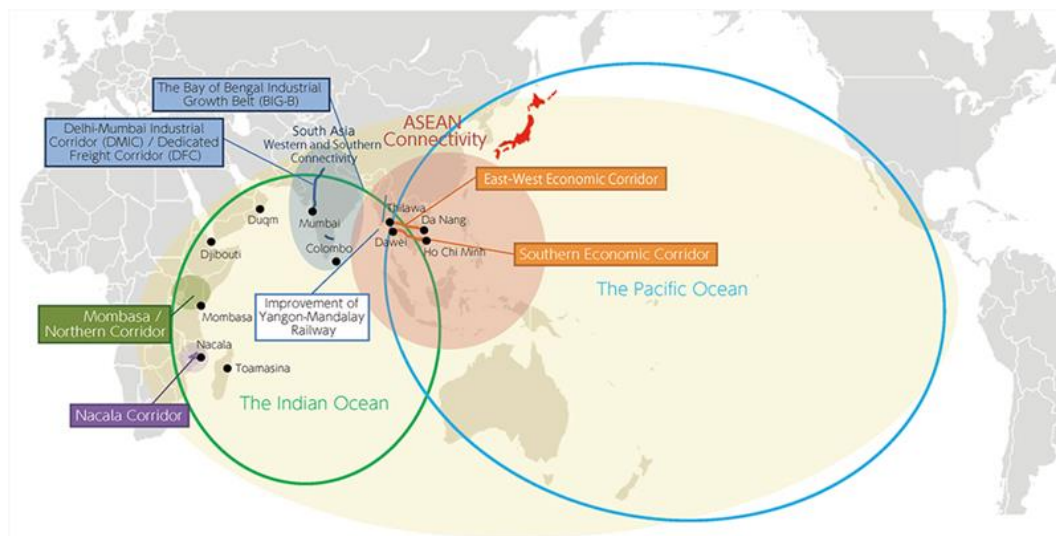


Figure 2

As the 2007 Bluebook would introduce the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, the 2017 Bluebook⁸³ announced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific as a “Special Feature” in the chapter devoted to the International situation with Abe’s speech at the occasion of the TICAD VI. Nonetheless, the 2018 Diplomatic Bluebook⁸⁴ manifested the joint support of the United States and India, but also modulated the strategy to an “initiative” and showed some restraint towards the direct proclamation of democracy for the Indo-Pacific.

In fact, the United States had already shown adherence to Japan’s Free and Open Strategy in previous bilateral summits⁸⁵. For instance, former secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, had already appealed to the initiative while advocating for closer cooperation with India⁸⁶. The strategic interest that India and the U.S. had in aligning with Japan around this initiative had already been demonstrated by that time. In the case of the 2018

⁸² Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2018). *Diplomatic Bluebook 2018*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2018/html/images/ph0105.jpg>

⁸³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2017). Chapter 1: International Situation and Japan’s Diplomacy in 2016. *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1/c0102.html>

⁸⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2018). Chapter 1: International Situation and Japan’s Diplomacy in 2017. *Diplomatic Bluebook 2018*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2018/html/chapter1/c0102.html#sf01>

⁸⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2017). *Japan-U.S. Working Lunch and Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting*. Accessed 16th May 2020: https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e_000699.html

⁸⁶ Center for Strategic and International Studies. (2017). *Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century: An Address by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/ybpxw9f4>

Bluebook, the FOIP pursued the promotion of “fundamental values (rule of law, freedom of navigation, *etc.* [emphasis added])”. Arguably, democracy had to be included somewhere in the unspecified list of values. However, as the United States embraced an increasingly confrontational tone in its Free and Indo-Pacific vision—i.e. the reports from the USDOS⁸⁷ and the USDOD⁸⁸ and some alarming⁸⁹ and Cold War-esque⁹⁰ speeches—Japan could have been forced to modulate its own initiative. At last, the 2019 Diplomatic Bluebook⁹¹ continued underscoring the essentiality of the FOIP for Tokyo’s international relations and announced the Australian approval for the initiative.

When summarized it can be stated that, at least according to the several MOFA documents, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific consists of three key points: 1) the promotion of the rule of law and freedom of trade and navigation, 2) the pursuit of economic prosperity by improving connectivity and economic partnerships, and 3) the commitment to institutional capacity building for peace and stability (namely, maritime law enforcement).

Under the latter objective, one can see the Partnership for Democratic Development’s commitments to the dispatching of government officials and experts to foster democracy and institutional governance abroad. It can be said that the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative springs out from the conceptual soil of previous value-laden Japanese initiatives—such as the Silk Road Diplomacy or the ODA charter reforms—that strived to get rid of the “checkbook diplomacy” reputation. This is also in line with the Abe’s intention to nurture an “Asian Democratic Security Diamond” and with the attitude of a cabinet that does not fail to show sympathy to Taiwan as an “important partner” with whom “Japan shares universal values”.

On the second axis, the ever-growing Japanese commitments to infrastructure investment in Asia could be included. We know that since 2015 Japan has stepped up his

⁸⁷ U.S. Department of State. (2019). *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Advancing a shared vision*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/ycuqrmrg>

⁸⁸ U.S. Department of Defense. (2019). *Indo-Pacific strategic report. Preparedness, partnerships, and promoting a networked region*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/yxtjkwao>

⁸⁹ White House. (2019). *Remarks by Vice President Pence at the West Point Graduation Ceremony*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/y8he7uz2>

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State. (2020). *The West Is Winning*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://www.state.gov/the-west-is-winning/>

⁹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2019). Chapter 1: International Situation and Japan’s Diplomacy in 2018. *Diplomatic Bluebook 2019*. Accessed 16th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2019/html/chapter1/c0102.html#sf01>

efforts on his “Quality infrastructure” model for Asian connectivity. Moreover, with the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, other initiatives like the Japan-Mekong Partnership Program had already promoted economic prosperity partnered with the advancement of democratic values. Japanese investments in India also seem to hold a significant share in this strategy, not to mention Asia-Africa Growth Corridor spearheaded by Japan and India⁹². Arguably Japan sees India as a democracy with many complementarities and the potential to balance “China’s rise”⁹³. In working with India, the Japanese vision for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific takes over from the “mutually-beneficial relationship” based on “shared values” Japan has nurtured with India since the beginning of the millennia. Figure 2 shows indeed that India and the Mekong region continue to be important partners in the advancement of values and economic investment as much as they were during the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. As Japan promotes its vision at the Tokyo International Conference for African Development⁹⁴, it can be stated that the MOFA is wagering for a broad diplomacy of the likes of the previous Silk Road Action Plan and the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity.

On the other hand, the first and third principles are consistent with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue’s objectives, the 2013 National Security Strategy and the reforms that followed and the Japanese cooperation on defense and maritime issues with ASEAN nations through the provision of defense equipment and law-enforcement training among others⁹⁵. Security wise, the decision to engage in a multilateral initiative is no strange thing to Tokyo. As we have witnessed over the last years, it is constant with the U.S. Indo-Pacific allies’ inclination for closer alignment as the bulwarks of democracy. It is in line with Japan’s historical inclination to involve the United States or its treaty ally, Australia, in the region’s security architecture as it happened with the East Asia Summit or the ASEAN Regional Forum. Moreover, it can be seen as an auxiliary conceptual justification to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue framework, and especially

⁹² Richter, F. (2018). The alternative to Chinese debt for Africa from Japan and India. *Nikkei Asian Review*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/The-alternative-to-Chinese-debt-for-Africa-from-Japan-and-India>

⁹³ Wikileaks. (2006). *Japanese pleased with visit of Indian Prime Minister*. Accessed 14th May 2020: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06TOKYO7067_a.html#efmEhkErt.

⁹⁴ See for example: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2019). *Statement by H.E. Mr. KONO Taro, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, at the Special Conference on Promotion Cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean on August 30, 2019 in Yokohama*. Accessed 15th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000512256.pdf>

⁹⁵ For instance see slide 5 from the MOFA’s spreadsheet on the policy: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000430632.pdf>

to the presence of the United States army in the region beyond the fact that America is a Pacific nation. In spite of this, the failure to secure the unequivocal adhesion of all the ASEAN members defeats the ultimate purpose to enmesh all the regional players in this “rules-based international order”. The final statement for the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*⁹⁶, released June 23rd 2019, underscored the importance of the “ASEAN Centrality” through his ASEAN-led mechanisms for security cooperation, namely the EAS.

Conclusion

As the prime example of a values-based diplomacy, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific operates as a self-legitimizing tool under the banner of a liberal doctrine (i.e., the unimpeded movement of goods and people across regions, the rule of law and the establishment democratic institutions as conditions for peace and stability). The Free and Open Indo-Pacific can be seen as a natural extension of the precedent values-based diplomacy. This time, however, it has been refurbished in order to cope with the emerging regional security issues on “the freedom of the (South and East China) seas”. In some ways, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific rhetoric also serves as an ideational cosmetic to Japanese diplomacy and the “Quad”. Japan has been liberating from its self-imposed limitations on the exercise of defense and, in consolidating the U.S.-Japan Alliance framework and proclaiming the respect of sovereignty and the freedom of navigation, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific has shown that these countries may be ready to impede the maritime expansion of any challenger to the status quo. Both factors are signs of Abe’s external and internal balancing to “an increasingly unpredictable Chinese military” as characterized in Japan’s National Defense Program Guidelines.

However, while scholars like Kliman and Twining argue that “The introduction of universal values into Japanese foreign policy in some respects began with the April 1996 U.S.-Japan Joint Security Declaration”⁹⁷, I have argued that the introduction of this kind of set of universal values might have been done before that date with even more outward looking and comprehensive policies such as the implementation of an ODA Charter, the Partnership for Democracy Development or the Silk Road Action Plan. The boldness of Shinzō Abe’s and Tarō Asō’s “assertive diplomacy” (*shuchō suru gaikō*) and

⁹⁶ ASEAN. (2019). *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*. Accessed 5th May 2020: https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf

⁹⁷ See p. 3 note 4

the latter “proactive contribution to peace”, however, confirm that Japan has embarked on an unprecedented promotion of democratic values abroad—leaving the Yoshida Doctrine behind to protect the “rules-based international order”. Moreover, the evoking of this set of values to carry out foreign policy seems to coincide in time with periods of higher perceived threat towards China, signaling that “ideas” might be an effective tool to rally allies alike in the region and balance “China’s rise”.

Finally, the continuity of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision remains unknown, especially after the election outcomes in the United States and the “post-Abe” Japan. However, new initiatives like the Blue Dot Network⁹⁸ and the 2020 Japanese Diplomatic Bluebook⁹⁹ suggest that the initiative is much likely to be present in the future.

⁹⁸ U.S. Embassy Japan. (2020). What is the Blue Dot Network for Infrastructure Financing? *American View*. Accessed 14th May 2020: <https://amview.japan.usembassy.gov/en/what-is-the-blue-dot-network-for-infrastructure-financing/>

⁹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2020). *2019nennokokusaiseijōtonihongaikōnotenkai* [International Situation and Japan’s Diplomacy in 2019]. Accessed 25th May 2020: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100055775.pdf>

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