

Japan Takes the Lead in Western Pacific Maritime Security

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article demonstrates that Japan has become the unassuming leader of multilateral security cooperation in the western Pacific and the local partner of choice for extraregional powers seeking to expand their role in maritime affairs within the second island chain.

MAIN ARGUMENT

After a 50-year history of delivering carefully balanced initiatives aimed at improving the maritime safety and security of Southeast Asian states, Japan has earned the region's trust as a maritime partner. From this position, it has steadily supported multilateral cooperation throughout the region and emerged as the western Pacific's most important maritime leader. Now, as extraregional powers seek to expand their roles in the western Pacific, they are generally turning to Japan as their partner of choice. Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision offers a common strategic umbrella that provides attractive utility for these states. An analysis of these trajectories shows that Japan has become the key regional maritime partner for Australia, the United Kingdom, India, Canada, and France.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Japan's proactive, balanced, and unassuming approach to security partnerships has earned it favor as the most trusted security partner among Southeast Asian states.
- Japan leads by example by quietly facilitating multinational arrangements and lending reliable support to states and multilateral groups in the region.
- The FOIP concept has become a common element of extraregional powers' policy approaches toward the western Pacific. The varied FOIP conceptualizations employed by these states are generally more akin to Japan's approach than to the U.S. Indo-Pacific posture, which is regarded as more focused on military aspects.
- Japan's expanded efforts to build its bilateral security partnerships have been favorably received by powers outside the region, making it their partner of choice in the western Pacific.

Geopolitically, Japan is the most important maritime state in the western Pacific, providing the geographic northern fulcrum of the Pacific’s first and second island chains. From the country’s four home islands, a string of smaller Japanese islands stretches to Taiwan marking the eastern side of the East China Sea and composing the northern section of the western Pacific’s first island chain, which then hooks clockwise to delineate the South China Sea. The second island chain begins at the Izu Peninsula near Tokyo and forms a line of Japanese islands that stretches south to U.S. territory in the Northern Mariana Islands and on to eastern Indonesia (see **Figure 1**). In this article, “western Pacific” is employed as shorthand to refer to the strategic maritime space within the second island chain.

From its key geographic location, Japan operates one of the world’s most capable navies, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), and arguably the globe’s top coast guard, the Japan Coast Guard (JCG).¹ While the enormous economy and rapidly growing fleet of the People’s Republic

FIGURE 1

First and Second Island Chains

¹ If measured by hull count, the JCG is about twice the size of the U.S. Coast Guard and over three times as large as the China Coast Guard. However, China and the United States have more personnel in their coast guards.

of China (PRC) have already surpassed Japan's in size, Japan employs world-class technology throughout its force and the professionalism of its sailors is unmatched. Japan is an archipelagic nation, while China's maritime outlook is ultimately constrained by its status as a nation with land borders, a seacoast boxed in by the aforementioned island chains, and responsibility for managing far less maritime territory.²

A more significant contrast between the two nations is Japan's position as the western Pacific's maritime leader. The region generally views China's naval and coast guard power with suspicion and concern, but Japan has a proven track record as a positive partner at sea.³ It has earned a reputation as a leader in regional multilateral security cooperation and has developed as the local partner of choice for powers beyond the second island chain seeking to expand their role in the maritime affairs of the western Pacific. In the early Cold War, Japan emerged from Allied occupation and settled into its role as the United States' key ally in the region. Under the basic arrangements of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, Japan provides the United States with bases from which U.S. forces support "the defense of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East."⁴ This enablement of U.S. forces is regularly described as the cornerstone of regional stability.⁵ Throughout the alliance's 60-year history, Japan has stepped up the roles, missions, and capabilities it contributes to and taken on more responsibility within the partnership. The years 2014 and 2015 were pivotal inflection points when a revised interpretation of the Japanese constitution, an update to the implementing guidelines for the alliance, and a package of new Japanese security laws enabled Japan to provide collective self-defense in support of U.S. forces and lifted geographic limitations on alliance operations.⁶

Today, coordinated alliance activities, such as combined exercises, mutual access facilitation, and cooperative capacity building, are directly

² Toshi Yoshihara, "China as a Composite Land-Sea Power: A Geostrategic Concept Revisited," Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC), January 6, 2021 ~ <http://cimsec.org/china-as-a-composite-land-sea-power-a-geostrategic-concept-revisited/47156>.

³ Brad Glosserman, "In the Competition for Southeast Asia Influence, Japan Is the Sleeper," *Japan Times*, January 22, 2020 ~ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/01/22/commentary/japan-commentary/competition-southeast-asia-influence-japan-sleeper/>; and Malcom Cook and Ian Storey, "Unfavourable Views: Southeast Asia's Perceptions of China and the U.S. Worsen amid Covid-19," ThinkChina, May 5, 2020 ~ <https://www.thinkchina.sg/unfavourable-views-southeast-asias-perceptions-china-and-us-worsen-amid-covid-19>.

⁴ Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between the United States and Japan, art. VI.

⁵ See, for example, "Joint Statement from President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Abe," U.S. Embassy and Consulate in the Republic of Korea, February 10, 2017 ~ <https://kr.usembassy.gov/021017-joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-prime-minister-shinzo-abe>.

⁶ Bhuhindar Singh, *Reconstructing Japan's Security Policy: The Role of Military Crises* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 131.

contributing to regional maritime security throughout the Indo-Pacific. The alliance also allows Japan to expand security cooperation with other partners. In some cases, the United States plays the role of direct facilitator. For example, the U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral Security Dialogue, which began in 2001, laid the groundwork for expanded Japan-Australia relations; and the U.S.-Australia Talisman Sabre exercise provided the initial venue for Japanese forces to train on Australian soil. In other cases, the U.S.-Japan alliance has played a less direct, but still important, role when bilateral ties with the United States are a commonality that Japan and its emerging partner share.

For more than 50 years, Japan has also worked independently from the United States to deliver a carefully balanced and steadily growing package of initiatives aimed at improving the maritime safety and security capacity of Southeast Asian states. These were initially focused on infrastructure development and technical programs to support navigation safety.⁷ In the last decade, however, capacity building has been matched with more direct security contributions that mark Southeast Asia as a new nexus of Japan's maritime strategy.⁸ Southeast Asian states have generally supported this increased activity while appreciating that Japan continues to demonstrate restraint in military operations.⁹

Japan has also emerged as a key facilitator for extraregional powers seeking to expand their roles in the western Pacific. Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, and the United Kingdom are all increasing their involvement in the region's maritime affairs and are generally turning to Japan as their regional partner of choice. Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision offers a common strategic umbrella that provides attractive utility for extraregional partners.¹⁰ Partnering with Japan can also demonstrate concern regarding PRC maritime behavior while offering some diplomatic isolation against being fully pulled into U.S.-China great-power competition. These factors are driving extraregional powers to develop bilateral security partnerships with Japan, which facilitate diplomatic leverage in and military access to the western Pacific.

⁷ John Bradford, "Japanese Naval Activities in Southeast Asian Waters: Building on 50 Years of Maritime Security Capacity Building," *Asian Security* 17, no. 1 (2021): 79–104.

⁸ John Bradford, "Southeast Asia: A New Strategic Nexus for Japan's Maritime Strategy," CIMSEC, September 21, 2020 ~ <http://cimsec.org/southeast-asia-a-new-strategic-nexus-for-japans-maritime-strategy/45718>.

⁹ Catharin Dalpino, "Both Push and Pull: Japan Steps Up in Southeast Asia," *Comparative Connections* 19, no. 1 (2017): 123–30.

¹⁰ Yuichi Hosoya, "FOIP 2.0: The Evolution of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Asia-Pacific Review* 26, no. 1 (2019): 18–20.

Referring to Japan as the western Pacific's key maritime leader might seem contrary to conventional wisdom, given the United States' permanent military presence and investment in the area as a central theater of its "great-power competition" with the PRC. However, maritime power and maritime leadership are mutually supporting concepts, not the same thing.¹¹ Strategic distraction, primarily by issues in Europe and the Middle East, and domestic challenges have restrained senior U.S. policymakers from providing the decades of steady support for regional multilateralism that Japan has provided.¹² For many watchers within the region, the United States is broadly seen as being in relative decline, hamstrung by domestic political division and unable to match China's rate of geoeconomic expansion. Still, the United States remains an important—often the most important—military and security partner for most states in the region. Similarly, it remains the leading global security partner of all the extraregional powers reviewed in this study.¹³

This article demonstrates that Japan is the extraregional powers' local partner of choice for the western Pacific and is divided into four sections:

- ≈ pp. 87–88 examine Japan's emergence as a leader in multilateral maritime forums, particularly in organizations related to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- ≈ pp. 89–91 address Tokyo's FOIP vision as a platform for encouraging greater Japanese engagement within and outside the western Pacific region.
- ≈ pp. 91–101 analyze the growing security and diplomatic relationships between Japan and key extraregional states, focusing on Australia, India, the UK, France, and Canada.
- ≈ p. 102 concludes with a discussion of how by strengthening its partnerships with extraregional powers, Japan is creating a global web of relationships that complements its long-standing alliance with the United States.

¹¹ See the discussion in Mercy A. Kuo, "Sea Power: U.S. Maritime Leadership in Asia: Insights from Admiral James Stavridis," *Diplomat*, July 19, 2017 ≈ <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/sea-power-us-maritime-leadership-in-asia>.

¹² Paul Midford, *Overcoming Isolationism: Japan's Leadership in East Asia Security Multilateralism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); See Seng Tan, "Asian Multilateralism in the Age of Japan's 'New Normal': Perils and Prospects," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 3 (2015): 296–314; Alice Ba, "Systematic Neglect? A Reconsideration of U.S.–Southeast Asia Policy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 3, no. 3 (2009): 369–98; and Yves Tiberghien, "With the U.S. Still Absent, Asia and Europe Double Down on Multilateralism," East Asia Forum, November 16, 2020 ≈ <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/11/16/with-the-us-still-absent-asia-and-europe-double-down-on-multilateralism>.

¹³ Michael J. Green, Amy Searight, and Patrick Gerard Buchan, "Powers, Norms, and Institutions: The Future of the Indo-Pacific from a Southeast Asia Perspective," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), June 9, 2020 ≈ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/powers-norms-and-institutions-future-indo-pacific-southeast-asia-perspective>.

JAPAN'S MULTILATERAL MARITIME LEADERSHIP

Japanese leadership is visible in the country's history of sustained support for international cooperation in western Pacific maritime affairs. The following discussion provides examples.

At the December 1999 ASEAN +3 summit,¹⁴ Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo initiated a diplomatic process to improve regional antipiracy coordination that ultimately led to Japan hosting the inaugural Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies meeting in 2005 and the creation of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) in 2006.¹⁵ Japanese funding was essential in establishing the ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre in Singapore, and its executive director has consistently been Japanese.

Japan has also been among the strongest and most steadfast supporters of maritime cooperation through multilateral organizations such as the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus).¹⁶ For example, since 2001 the JMSDF Staff College has hosted the annual WPNS Seminar for Officers of the Next Generation (WPNS SONG). No other WPNS member has so consistently provided such a service for the organization. Since these multilateral organizations began hosting maritime exercises (WPNS in 2005, ARF in 2007, and ADMM-Plus in 2013), the JMSDF has routinely participated by sending the largest force contribution of any member.¹⁷

A similar level of Japanese commitment is seen in multinational exercises hosted by Southeast Asian states, such as Indonesia's Komodo series. In 2017 Japan partnered with the Philippines to host the first multinational coast guard exercise in Southeast Asia, which included coast guards from both ASEAN

¹⁴ ASEAN +3 comprises Japan, China, South Korea, and the ten member states of ASEAN.

¹⁵ Nyan Chanda, "Foot in the Water," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 9, 2000; Ngyuen Hung Son, "ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership in Southeast Asia: Maritime Security and Cooperation," in *Beyond 2015: ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for Democracy, Peace, and Prosperity in Southeast Asia*, ed. Rizal Sukma and Yoshihide Soeya (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2013), 224; John Bradford, "Japanese Anti-Piracy Initiatives in Southeast Asia: Policy Formulation and the Coastal State Responses," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 26, no. 3 (2004): 480–505; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Ajia kaizoku taisaku chiiki kyoryoku kyotei" [Regional Cooperation on Combat Countermeasures in Asia], March 22, 2019 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/kaiyo/kaizoku_gai.html.

¹⁶ Tomotaka Shoji, "Japan's Security Cooperation with ASEAN: Pursuit of a Status as a 'Relevant Partner,'" *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security*, no. 16 (2015): 102.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

member states and outside the region.¹⁸ When quietly facilitating these arrangements and lending reliable support to Southeast Asian hosts, Japan leads by example in an unassuming manner by placing minimal demands on the more political aspects of these exercises such as scenario design, geographic location, or command-and-control structure. This proactive and balanced approach to security partnerships has made Japan the region's most trusted security partner. Expert commentators have labeled this approach "leading from behind," "ninja diplomacy," "courteous power," and "stealth superpower."¹⁹ According to the ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute's 2020 "State of Southeast Asia Survey Report," 61% of the Southeast Asian policymakers surveyed were confident that Japan will "do the right thing" and provide global public goods. The corresponding trust in the United States was only at 30%, while China and India were both at around 16%.²⁰

Among extraregional powers, the United States seemed to be in relative decline even before the Trump administration began retreating from international organizations.²¹ The administration's transactional approach to managing alliances and building partnerships further undercut confidence in U.S. leadership, even as many regional leaders appreciated what they perceived as a stronger stance against China.²² In contrast, Japan has sought to compensate for its stagnant economy, rising security challenges, and looming demographic troubles by becoming the region's foremost proponent of rules-based cooperation.²³ For example, after the 2016 U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Japan rallied the other ten members to sign the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2018.

¹⁸ Prashanth Parameswaran, "ASEAN-Japan Coast Guard Cooperation in the Spotlight With Philippines Exercise," *Diplomat*, November 25, 2017 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/asean-japan-coast-guard-cooperation-in-the-spotlight-with-philippines-exercise>.

¹⁹ Tan, "Asian Multilateralism in the Age of Japan's 'New Normal,'" 301; James Schoff "U.S. Political Decline Means More 'Ninja Diplomacy,'" East Asia Forum, September 22, 2020 ~ <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/09/22/us-political-decline-means-more-ninja-diplomacy>; John Ciorciari and Kiyoteru Tsutsui, *The Courteous Power: Japan and Southeast Asia in the Indo-Pacific Era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021); and Sebastian Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow: Southeast Asia in the Chinese Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 82.

²⁰ Tang Siew Mun et al., "The State of Southeast Asia: 2020 Survey Report," ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, January 16, 2020, 2, 17.

²¹ John Hemmings, "Global Britain in the Indo-Pacific," Henry Jackson Society, Research Paper, no. 2, May 2018, 18.

²² Joseph S. Nye, "Trump's Transactional Myopia," Project Syndicate, February 4, 2020 ~ <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-renounces-key-ingredients-of-american-global-leadership-by-joseph-s-nye-2020-02?barrier=accesspaylog>.

²³ Michael J. Green and Nicholas Szechenyi, "Shinzo Abe Rolls On," CSIS, September 20, 2018 ~ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/shinzo-abe-rolls>; and Hemmings, "Global Britain in the Indo-Pacific," 18–19.

JAPAN'S FREE AND OPEN INDO-PACIFIC VISION

The first articulation of Japan's FOIP vision is typically credited to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in August 2016.²⁴ However, few of the underlying concepts were particularly new. The term "Indo-Pacific" had been used by Track 2 leaders from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand as an organizing concept for tackling threats to maritime security in the oceans stretching from the Americas to East Africa since the early years of the 21st century. In 2005, Commodore Roger Girouard, Canadian Fleet Pacific commander, used the term Indo-Pacific to frame a more inclusive strategy than that associated with "Asia-Pacific," the term in vogue at the time.²⁵ A few years later, senior officials in the Obama administration began using Indo-Pacific occasionally, especially with ASEAN, India, Australia and Indonesia, though more as a geographic area than a conceptual framework.²⁶ Australia's *Defence White Paper 2013* used the term, as did then foreign minister of Indonesia Marty Natalegawa. In 2015, Abe and Indian prime minister Narendra Modi also used the term in the subtitle of their joint statement "Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership: Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World."²⁷ After these instances, and with Abe as its standout champion, the Indo-Pacific concept firmly took hold among extraregional powers.²⁸ Since 2016, Canada, France, Germany, the UK, and the United States have all incorporated the term into their core policy lexicons.

Japan's FOIP vision inherited conceptual foundations beyond the geographic label. During Abe's first term as prime minister in 2006–7, he used a similar concept, the "arc of freedom and prosperity." This approach sought to connect an arc of nations running from Japan through Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe that promote democracy, stability, and

²⁴ Raymond Yamamoto, "Understanding Abe's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision through Japan's Development Assistance," in "Maritime Issues in the Indo-Pacific: Building a Shared Vision of 'Free and Open,'" ed. Nicholas Millward, Caitlin Doornbos, and John Bradford, Pacific Forum, Issues and Insights, March 2020, 7–8.

²⁵ Roger Girouard (keynote address at the "Maritime Security Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region in the Post-9/11 Era" conference, Victoria, Canada), May 5, 2005.

²⁶ See, for example, Hillary Clinton, "America's Engagement in the Asia-Pacific" (remarks, Honolulu, October 28, 2010) ~ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/10/150141.htm>.

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership," December 12, 2015 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/sa/sw/in/page3e_000432.html.

²⁸ John Hemmings, "Measuring Shinzo Abe's Impact on the Indo-Pacific," East-West Center, Asia-Pacific Bulletin, no. 536, October 21, 2020; and Yamamoto, "Understanding Abe's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision through Japan's Development Assistance," 7–8.

freedom of navigation.²⁹ In 2007, Abe addressed the Indian parliament with a speech entitled “The Confluence of the Two Seas” that aligned his vision for cooperative development to foster freedom and prosperity in a broad geographic region coupled by the Indian and Pacific Oceans.³⁰ Subsequent Japanese prime ministers between Abe’s first and second term sought similar outcomes with different branding.³¹ After resuming leadership in 2012, Abe published an essay that opened with a call for a “strategic diamond” formed by Japan, Australia, India, and the United States (a grouping now referred to as the Quad) to do more in promoting peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the “inseparable Pacific and Indian Oceans.”³² Announced in 2016, Abe’s FOIP vision successfully merged the geographic framework of the Indo-Pacific with the value-based notions of “free” and “open” to create a diplomatically flexible, yet rules-based, approach to regional engagement. Japan’s FOIP vision seeks to be ambiguous toward new security initiatives while reinforcing long-standing Japanese security policies based on a strong U.S.-Japan alliance; economic integration of Japan into the region through trade, development support, and infrastructure assistance; pragmatic engagement with the full range of regime types; and a commitment to multilateralism.³³

It is not a coincidence that in recent years the long-standing concepts associated with Japan’s FOIP vision emerged as a common element within the policy approaches of key states outside the region. A growing consensus that states must improve coordination to counter behavior by China that was perceived to undermine international norms and freedom of navigation while simultaneously hedging against U.S. entrapment certainly propelled policy adjustments. Still, the selection of “Indo-Pacific” as the common conceptual language of extraregional powers reflects Japan’s leadership. Many first used the term in their interactions with Abe, a voracious traveler and assertive diplomat. The first clear demonstration of the United States’ embrace of the FOIP concept was in a 2017 speech by then secretary of state

²⁹ Hemmings, “Measuring Shinzo Abe’s Impact on the Indo-Pacific.”

³⁰ Shinzo Abe, “Confluence of the Two Seas” (speech, New Delhi, August 22, 2007) ~ <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

³¹ Tomohiko Taniguchi, “Beyond ‘The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity’: Debating Universal Value in Japanese Grand Strategy,” German Marshall Fund of the United States, Asia Papers Series, October 2010, 8 ~ <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/beyond-arc-freedom-and-prosperity-debating-universal-values-japanese-grand-strategy>.

³² Shinzo Abe, “Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond,” Project Syndicate, December 27, 2012 ~ <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>.

³³ Stephen Nagy, “Accommodation versus Alliance: Japan’s Prospective Grand Strategy and the Sino-U.S. Competition,” Asan Forum, August 27, 2020 ~ <http://www.theasanforum.org/accommodation-versus-alliance-japans-prospective-grand-strategy-in-the-sino-us-competition>.

Rex Tillerson that reflected Abe's goals for the region while sharpening the description of China as an enemy of international order.³⁴ While the 2019 U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy is focused on strengthening U.S. military power and enhancing relations with regional partners at a cost to the PRC, the varied conceptualizations employed by other outside powers are generally closer to Japan's more balanced approach, which favors building relationships and de-emphasizing competition.³⁵ In fact, the 2019 ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific can be seen as an effort by ASEAN to center itself in an Indo-Pacific debate that had been mostly dominated by major powers, including Japan.³⁶

JAPAN'S BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXTRAREGIONAL PARTNERS

As regional security challenges have become more severe and overall confidence in the United States has declined, Japan has expanded its efforts to build bilateral security partnerships with extraregional powers. As these partners all connect to Japan via long sea lanes that are under some level of threat from state and nonstate actors, it is unsurprising that outcomes of these relationships often manifest as contributions to Indo-Pacific maritime security. Defense diplomacy and navy-to-navy interactions have often been at the forefront of these developments. Australia, India, the UK, France, and Canada all have strong defense relationships with Japan. Other extraregional states, such as Germany and New Zealand, have growing interests in the Indo-Pacific but have not yet developed similarly significant security partnerships with the same level of geopolitical heft. Though hull count is not a definitive measure of a state's maritime power, it is illustrative. New Zealand's total blue water force comprises two frigates and an amphibious sealift vessel, for example. In 2020, Japan invited Germany to deploy a ship to the region for its first exercise with the JMSDF.³⁷

³⁴ Nicholas Szechenyi and Yuichi Hosoya, "Working toward a Free and Open Indo-Pacific," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 10, 2019 ~ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/10/working-toward-free-and-open-indo-pacific-pub-80023>.

³⁵ Ben Dolven and Bruce Vaughn, "Indo-Pacific Strategies of U.S. Allies and Partners: Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, R46217, January 30, 2020.

³⁶ Bhubhinder Singh and Tsjung Zhizhao Henrick, "ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific: Seizing the Narrative?" S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, RSIS Commentary, January 23, 2020 ~ <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/asean-outlook-on-indo-pacific-seizing-the-narrative/#.X5511Yg4eUk>.

³⁷ Julian Ryall, "Japan Calls On Germany to Send Warship to East Asia," DW, December 18, 2020 ~ <https://www.dw.com/en/japan-germany-china-defense-challenges/a-55985940>.

Australia

Whereas Japan's relationships with partners such as South Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan have amplified importance due to these countries' geographic proximity to Japan and its critical sea lanes, Australia is certainly Japan's closest partner from beyond the second island chain. In fact, Australia is quite arguably Japan's closest security partner after the United States. Similarly, Japan is generally counted as Australia's most important partner after the United States. Their long-standing alliances with the United States and converging strategic interests have been important drivers bringing them together. The two nations signed the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2007, upgraded the relationship to a comprehensive partnership in 2008, and then announced a special strategic partnership in 2014. In the realm of maritime security, the relationship involves military exercises, information sharing, and technological cooperation.

Two new thresholds were crossed in late 2020, both linked to Prime Minister Scott Morrison's visit to Japan, which was the first foreign leader visit hosted by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.³⁸ First, in October 2020, the two partners commenced the necessary coordination to create a framework that would allow Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) personnel to protect Australian Defence Force assets.³⁹ This collective self-defense authorization was made possible by Japan's 2015 security legislation and has never been extended to a partner other than the United States.⁴⁰ Then, in November 2020 the two reached an agreement in principle on a reciprocal access agreement.⁴¹ According to a statement from Prime Minister Morrison, the agreement "will facilitate greater and more complex practical engagement between the Australian Defence Force and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, and enhance...inter-operability and cooperation. It means Australia and Japan will have a clear framework for how our defence forces operate in

³⁸ Shiro Armstrong, "Japan Visit Cements Strategic Ties for Prime Minister Morrison," East Asia Forum, November 17, 2020 ~ <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/11/17/japan-visit-cements-strategic-ties-for-prime-minister-morrison>.

³⁹ Nobuo Kishi and Linda Reynolds, "2020 Japan-Australia Defense Ministers Kishi/Reynolds Joint Statement on Advancing Defence Cooperation," Department of Defence (Australia), October 19, 2020 ~ <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/lreynolds/statements/2020-japan-australia-defence-ministers-kishireynolds-joint-statement>.

⁴⁰ Michael Bosack, "Five Takeaways from the Australia-Japan Defense Ministers' Joint Statement," *Japan Times*, October 22, 2020 ~ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/10/22/commentary/japan-commentary/five-takeaways-australia-japan-defence-ministers-joint-statement>.

⁴¹ Stephen Nagy, "Japan-Australia Defense Treaty: U.S. Allies Adapting to New Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific," *Geopolitical Monitor*, November 24, 2020 ~ <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/japan-australia-defence-treaty-us-allies-adapt-to-new-geopolitics-of-the-indo-pacific>.

each other's countries."⁴² Japan does not currently have a similarly reciprocal arrangement with any other nation—it hosts U.S. forces, and Djibouti hosts units from the JSDF under nonreciprocal status of forces agreements.

At the operational level, bilateral security cooperation can most clearly be seen in military exercises. In 2015, Japan started sending a small Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) detachment to Talisman Sabre, the U.S.-Australia joint exercise held every other year.⁴³ In 2019 the JMSDF joined the exercise for the first time. The 1st Helicopter Brigade and 330 personnel from the JGSDF's Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade deployed from the flat-deck helicopter carrier *Ise* and tank landing ship *Kunisaki* in support of the exercise's amphibious training events.⁴⁴ In 2019, Tokyo and Canberra also decided that Japan would host Australian fighters in a recurring exercise dubbed Bushido Guardian, and Japan would become a regular participant in the Royal Australian Air Force's biennial exercise Pitch Black.⁴⁵

Japan and Australia have also exercised together in Southeast Asian waters. Perhaps the earliest example was a June 2011 Japan-Australia-U.S. trilateral exercise in the South China Sea. Since then, these events have become more common. In 2016, *Ise* conducted a trilateral passing exercise with ships from Australia and the United States with a cadre of midshipmen from other WPNS navies aboard. The event took place after *Ise* had been the largest ship in Indonesia's multilateral exercise Komodo, as well as shortly after it arrived in Brunei to participate as the largest vessel in the Maritime Security and Counterterrorism Working Group Field Training Exercise sponsored by the ADMM-Plus. The following year, Australia's *Ballarat* joined Japan's *Izumo* and ships from the United States and Canada for two days of exercises in the

⁴² Scott Morrison, "Reciprocal Access Agreement," Prime Minister of Australia, November 17, 2020 ~ <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/reciprocal-access-agreement>.

⁴³ "Japan Joins U.S.-Australian Military Exercise in July for First Time," *Guardian*, May 26, 2015 ~ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/26/japan-joins-us-australian-military-exercise-in-july-for-first-time>.

⁴⁴ "Talisman Sabre 2019," *Japan Defense Focus*, no. 115, September 2019 ~ <https://www.mod.go.jp/e/jdf/no115/topics.html>; and Jesse Johnson, "MSDF Joins Exercises with U.S. and Australia on Doorstep of South China Sea," *Japan Times*, July 21, 2020 ~ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/21/national/msdf-military-exercises-us-australia-south-china-sea>.

⁴⁵ Taro Kono and Linda Reynolds, "2019 Japan-Australia Defence Ministers Kono/Reynolds Joint Statement on Advancing Defence Cooperation," Department of Defence (Australia), November 20, 2019 ~ <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/lreynolds/statements/2019-japan-australia-defence-ministers-konoreynolds-joint-statement>.

South China Sea.⁴⁶ In 2020, Japan and Australia joined the United States for at least two trilateral South China Sea exercises.⁴⁷

Japan's security cooperation with Australia has progressed, though less quickly, in other areas as well. In 2010 the partners signed an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA), Japan's second ACSA after the United States. Had Australia selected Japanese industry to supply its next-generation submarine force, the arrangement would have drawn the two much closer together in terms of logistics and technology cooperation. However, Australia selected France's Shortfin Barracuda design, in part due to concerns regarding Japan's inexperience with defense system exports. No noteworthy technology transfers appear to be in the works as of early 2021.⁴⁸ There are also ambitions for greater bilateral coordination on regional infrastructure investment, but the firmest development thus far is a commitment to join the United States to finance the construction of an undersea fiber-optic cable to Palau.⁴⁹

India

Japan seeks to leverage its growing bilateral security relationship with India to address their common global challenges and ballast multilateral arrangements that counterbalance China. In 2000 the two partners launched the "Global Partnership between Japan and India." Five years later, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro visited Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi, and they agreed to hold annual summits and strengthen the bilateral relationship through the "Eight-Fold Initiative."⁵⁰ The third of the eight points, "enhanced security dialogue and cooperation," was particularly focused on maritime outcomes, such as strengthening effective coast guard and navy cooperation, antipiracy projects, information sharing, and technical exchange.⁵¹ In 2006 the

⁴⁶ Department of Defence (Australia), "HMAS Ballarat Completes Passage Exercise," June 10, 2017 ~ <https://news.defence.gov.au/media/media-releases/hmas-ballarat-completes-passage-exercise>.

⁴⁷ Diana Stancy Correll, "U.S., Japan, Australia Team Up for Naval Exercises in South China Sea," *Navy Times*, October 21, 2020 ~ <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2020/10/21/us-japan-australia-team-up-for-naval-exercises-in-south-china-sea>.

⁴⁸ Franz-Stefan Gady, "Why Japan Lost the Bid to Build Australia's New Subs," *Diplomat*, April 27, 2016 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2016/04/why-japan-lost-the-bid-to-build-australias-new-subs>.

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, "The United States Partners with Australia and Japan to Expand Reliable and Secure Digital Connectivity in Palau," Fact Sheet, October 29, 2020 ~ <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-united-states-partners-with-australia-and-japan-to-expand-reliable-and-secure-digital-connectivity-in-palau/index.html>.

⁵⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Japan-India Relations (Basic Data)," January 4, 2021 ~ <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/data.html>.

⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Japan-India Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of Japan-India Global Partnership," April 29, 2005 ~ <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/partner0504.html>.

relationship was elevated to a “global and strategic partnership,” and in 2014 to a “special strategic and global partnership.”⁵² After Prime Minister Modi brought the Act East policy into effect at the 2014 ASEAN-India Summit, it became clear that India was looking to coordinate with and complement the activities of Japan in the region.

In 2015 the two committed to the “Japan and India Vision 2025” to “realize a peaceful, open, equitable, stable, and rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.” Specific to maritime security, the statement affirmed commitments to freedom of navigation, enhanced cooperation in defense equipment and technology, and the inclusion of Japan as a permanent partner in the Malabar exercise series, the most sophisticated naval exercise involving India and other extraregional partners. In October 2020, Japan forged ahead with hosting a ministerial-level Quad meeting despite the Covid-19 pandemic. Notably, this was the first time the Quad had gathered for a standalone meeting rather than on the sidelines of an ASEAN-sponsored event.⁵³ Shortly thereafter, India announced that Australia would once again participate in Malabar along with Japan and the United States.⁵⁴ The Quad members exercised together in a two-phase event held in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Going forward, many see Malabar as the natural venue for the Quad to operationalize naval cooperation, though signals remain mixed regarding the limits of the forum and its appropriate rate of advance.⁵⁵

Also in 2015, India and Japan finalized agreements concerning the transfer of defense equipment and technology and the sharing of classified information. These agreements were important steps toward enabling the transfer of technology related to Japan’s US-2 short takeoff and landing amphibious aircraft. Interest in the transfer began shortly after Japan relaxed its rules pertaining to the export of military equipment in 2014, but preliminary discussions dragged on for several years. In 2018 the Mahindra Group signed a memorandum of understanding with ShinMaywa Industries to manufacture and assemble the aircraft in India, representing one of the biggest Japanese defense system sales to date. India and Japan are exploring further options to collaborate in areas of defense technology and logistics. In 2018, they signed an ACSA—Japan’s fourth and India’s sixth such agreement.

⁵² Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), “Japan-India Relations (Basic Data).”

⁵³ Sarah Teo, “What the Quad Meeting Means for ASEAN,” *Diplomat*, October 9, 2020 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/what-the-quad-meeting-means-for-asean>.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Defence (India), “Malabar 2020 Naval Exercise,” Press Release, October 19, 2020, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1665830>.

⁵⁵ Blake Herzinger, “Malabar 2020: The Return of the Quad,” 9Dashline, December 22, 2020 ~ <https://www.9dashline.com/article/malabar-2020-the-return-of-the-quad>.

United Kingdom

In recent years, Japan and the UK have been rapidly expanding their security relationship. Japan is already the UK's closest security partner in Asia, and the UK is likewise Japan's closest European partner. In 2014, they announced their "dynamic strategic partnership" and followed with "2+2" meetings (of foreign and defense ministers) in 2015 and 2016.⁵⁶ These set the stage for a security partnership that now includes military exchanges, joint exercises, mutual support for deployed forces, information sharing, and joint development and production of defense equipment. This strategic partnership is globally postured and includes a shared commitment to "the principles of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and freedom and safety of navigation."⁵⁷ The 2016 Japan-UK 2+2 statement detailed both states' common concerns regarding China's coercive and unilateral actions in the East and South China Seas that are raising tensions and could change the status quo. The 2016 joint document also noted that Japan-UK cooperation would support Southeast Asia in building capabilities for maritime security, maritime safety, marine conservation, and cybersecurity.⁵⁸

The importance that the UK places on Japan is all the more remarkable considering its long-standing defense relationships in Southeast Asia. Since 1971, it has been linked to Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand by the Five Powers Defence Arrangements, which constitute a relatively low-profile, nonbinding, and yet important defense multilateral.⁵⁹ The UK garrison in Brunei includes a battalion of Gurkha infantry and an Army Air Corps flight of helicopters that support jungle warfare training for the British Army and Royal Marine Corps.⁶⁰ The Royal Navy also has a small permanent detachment of personnel in Singapore to facilitate ship visits, voyage repairs, and logistics support to deployed forces.⁶¹ Although these arrangements are significant, the wider scope, shared values, and common strategic interests

⁵⁶ "UK-Japan Joint Statement: A Dynamic Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century," May 1, 2014, available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000037456.pdf>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Second Japan-UK Foreign and Defence Ministers' Meeting (2+2)," Press Release, January 8, 2016 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001000.html.

⁵⁹ Tim Huxley, "Developing the Five Power Defence Arrangements," International Institute for Strategic Studies, June 1, 2017 ~ <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2017/06/fpda>.

⁶⁰ British Army, "The British Army in Brunei" ~ <https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/brunei>.

⁶¹ Royal Navy, "HMS Montrose Visits Singapore," February 20, 2019 ~ <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2019/february/20/190230-hms-montrose-visits-singapore>.

shared with Tokyo make Japan, according to official documents, the UK's "closest security partner in Asia."⁶²

Some of the early achievements of the growing security relationship manifested in first-ever visits by UK military forces to Japan. In 2015 a Royal Air Force aircraft visited Miho airbase in Tottori Prefecture, and in 2016 the UK deployed Typhoon Fighters to Misawa airbase where they exercised with Japanese and U.S. aircraft.⁶³ Royal Navy ships also began regularly visiting Japan. These ships generally operate in support of the UK's commitment to enforcing UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) sanctioning North Korea, but they also support other regional activities. For example, in August 2018, after making a visit to Yokosuka for maintenance and crew rest and then hosting a diplomatic reception in Tokyo, HMS *Albion* conducted a freedom of navigation operation near the Paracel Islands. After the operation, the *Albion* and its embarked Royal Marines practiced joint amphibious operations with the Brunei military.⁶⁴ In 2018, two other Royal Navy ships, HMS *Argyll* and HMS *Sutherland*, visited Yokosuka and later conducted operations in the South China Sea.⁶⁵ In February 2020 the British ambassador to Tokyo explained that the "historic relationship between the Royal Navy and the Maritime Self-Defense Force is flourishing to levels not seen since the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902." He also counted that "six British naval ships have joined Japanese vessels for exercises, including enforcing United Nations sanctions on North Korea."⁶⁶

⁶² Government of the United Kingdom, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015* (London, November 2015), 57 ~ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/555607/2015_Strategic_Defence_and_Security_Review.pdf; and Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK), *UK's International Defence Engagement Strategy* (London, February 2017), 5 ~ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596968/06032017_Def_Engag_Strat_2017DaSCREEN.pdf.

⁶³ Government of the United Kingdom, "Red Arrows Return to UK after Historic Tour," December 2, 2016 ~ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/red-arrows-return-to-uk-after-historic-tour>.

⁶⁴ Tyler Hlavac, "British Warship Arrives at Yokosuka to Enforce N. Korea Sanctions, Support Free Trade," *Stars and Stripes*, April 11, 2018 ~ <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/british-warship-arrives-at-yokosuka-to-enforce-n-korea-sanctions-support-free-trade-1.521460>; and Royal Navy, "HMS Albion's Royal Marines Exercise with Brunei Forces," September 13, 2018 ~ <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2018/september/13/180913-hms-albion-royal-marines-exercise-with-brunei-forces>.

⁶⁵ "HMS Sutherland Makes a Triumphant Return to Devonport," Defense Contracts International, August 14, 2018 ~ <https://www.dcicontracts.com/hms-sutherland-makes-a-triumphant-return-to-devonport>; and "A Continuous Royal Navy Presence in the Pacific Region This Year," Navy Outlook, April 11, 2018 ~ <https://www.savetheroyalnavy.org/a-continuous-royal-navy-presence-in-the-pacific-region-this-year>.

⁶⁶ Paul Madden, "Japan-UK Ties Will Go from Strength to Strength as Britain Leaves the EU," *Japan Times*, February 6, 2020 ~ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/02/06/commentary/japan-commentary/japan-u-k-ties-will-go-strength-strength-britain-leaves-eu>.

The two countries have also been expanding defense technology cooperation, and the UK is now Japan's top defense technology partner after the United States. Their new air-to-air missile project seeks to jointly develop a long-range air-to-air missile combining the Japanese AAM-4B's active electronically scanned array seeker with the body of the European Meteor missile. By 2017, the project had proceeded from a feasibility study to the prototype stage, and Japan's Ministry of Defense had requested funding for trial production.⁶⁷ The missile is expected to be operational in 2021, with a maximum range of over one hundred kilometers and the capability to be deployed on the F-35 stealth fighter.⁶⁸

In Southeast Asia, the Japan-UK partnership has delivered on its capacity-building pledge by jointly developing training seminars. In January 2016, these efforts kicked off with a disaster-response seminar for ASEAN representatives held in the Philippines. In November 2016 the UK and Japan worked with Vietnam to organize a joint workshop—"Navigating Towards the Free and Open Seas of Asia: The Rule of Law and International Cooperation"—involving 90 participants in Hanoi.

The Japan-UK relationship is expected to continue growing. Both states are looking to diversify global partners in response to degrading relationships with their immediate neighbors. Furthermore, the UK is looking to radically expand its naval presence in Asia, and the Royal Navy appears to be focused on leveraging its relations with Japan to facilitate these deployments. This expanded presence is expected to include the deployment of a strike group centered on the new F-35 carrier *Queen Elizabeth* in 2021 and, possibly, a regular or persistent naval presence starting in 2022. If the UK were to decide to forward-deploy ships to the region, Japan would be a leading option it might approach to host.⁶⁹

France

France has sovereign territories in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans. However, these territories and their military forces all reside outside the second island chain. Therefore, although France is an Indo-Pacific power, it is extraregional to the western Pacific. In 1995, France named Japan its first strategic

⁶⁷ Franz-Stefan Gady, "UK, Japan Push Ahead with Joint Air-to-Air Missile Project," *Diplomat*, November 29, 2017. ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/uk-japan-push-ahead-with-joint-air-to-air-missile-project>.

⁶⁸ Deagal, JNAAM ~ <https://www.deagal.com/Defensive%20Weapons/JNAAM/a003397>.

⁶⁹ Ian Storey, "Can the UK Achieve Its Naval Ambitions in the Indo-Pacific?" *Diplomat*, November 7, 2020. ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/can-the-uk-achieve-its-naval-ambitions-in-the-indo-pacific>.

partner in Asia and upgraded the partnership to a ministerial relationship in 2012.⁷⁰ The 2013 *French White Paper on Defense and National Security* named the Pacific as a “major strategic area” and used the term “Asia-Pacific” without clearly defining its scope.⁷¹ From this starting point, the relationship with Japan has quickly matured.

In 2014 Japan became France’s first 2+2 dialogue partner in Asia. At the first meeting, the ministers established committees to work together on defense equipment acquisitions, enhance cooperation in the Pacific, share information on Africa, fight maritime piracy, and collaborate on capacity building in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.⁷² In 2015, the two signed an agreement concerning the transfer of defense equipment and technology. By the fifth 2+2 in January 2019, the ministers had discussed the partners’ first cooperative defense equipment and technology project: joint research on next-generation mine-countermeasure technology. Later that year, Prime Minister Abe and President Emmanuel Macron pledged to open new horizons and implement concrete Franco-Japanese projects in an “exceptional partnership.”⁷³ In September 2019 the inaugural Japan-France Comprehensive Maritime Dialogue was held in New Caledonia. Topics discussed included collaboration to combat marine plastic litter as well as commitments to expand naval and coast guard joint activities and cooperative capacity-building projects in Indo-Pacific coastal states that could have near-term impacts on the western Pacific.⁷⁴

In this same period, French ships have visited Japan more frequently, and the two navies have exercised together more often. In 2015 the Mistral-class landing ship *Dixmude* and the frigate *Aconit* joined U.S. and Japanese forces in the East China Sea for their first-ever trilateral amphibious exercise.⁷⁵ In 2017 the FS *Mistral* visited Sasebo and went on to conduct amphibious exercises

⁷⁰ Ministry of Armed Forces (France), “France and Security in the Asia-Pacific,” April 2014, 2.

⁷¹ Jérémy Bachelier, “Vers une région Indo-Pacifique” [Toward an Indo-Pacific Region], *Revue Défense Nationale*, Tribune 977, February 23, 2018 ~ <https://www.defnat.com/e-RDN/vue-tribune.php?ctribune=1061>.

⁷² Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), “Second Japan-France Foreign and Defense Ministers’ Meeting,” March 15, 2015 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/fr/page4e_000216.html.

⁷³ “Feuille de route sur la coopération Franco-Japonaise pour ouvrir de nouveaux horizons entre la France et le Japon dans le cadre du partenariat d’exception (2019–2023)” [Roadmap on Franco-Japanese Cooperation to Open New Horizons between France and Japan within the Framework of Exceptional Partnership (2019–2023)], Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), 2019 ~ <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000492473.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), “1st Japan-France Comprehensive Maritime Dialogue,” September 25, 2019 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/fr/page22e_000927.html.

⁷⁵ “Japan, France and the United States Conducted a Joint Amphibious Exercise for the 1st Time,” DefesaNet, June 1, 2015 ~ <https://www.defesanet.com.br/en/geopolitics/noticia/19306/Japan--France-and-the-United-States-Conducted-A-Joint-Amphibious-Exercise-For-the-1st-Time>.

in the Northern Marianas that involved personnel from Japan, the United States, and the UK. In 2018 the frigate *Vendémiaire* exercised with the JMSDF during a port visit in Japan. In May 2019 the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* and helicopter carrier *Izumo* were the flagships of the La Perouse exercise in the Bay of Bengal. The exercise also included four additional French Navy ships, a Royal Australian Navy frigate and submarine, an additional JMSDF destroyer, and a U.S. Navy destroyer. The ships conducted communications drills, formation steaming, live-fire weapons drills, and search and rescue training.⁷⁶ In 2019, France joined the United States, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand as a force contributor to maritime operations enforcing UNSCR sanctions against North Korea. FS *Vendémiaire* spent much of the spring operating from Japan, and a Falcon 200 operated from Okinawa for three weeks in March.⁷⁷

Although this growing partnership with Japan is remarkable, it should be noted that France's approach to the western Pacific is less reliant on the bilateral relationship with Japan than some of Japan's other extraregional partners. French territories in the South Pacific and Indian Oceans are used as staging points for unilateral French operations within the first and second island chains, and France also invests in strong enabling security relationships with Australia, India, Singapore, Malaysia, and others.⁷⁸ While French ships are the most frequent European naval visitors to Japan, some French ships deploy to the western Pacific without stopping in Japan, or only call in provincial Sasebo without making their way to Tokyo, where they could conduct more prominent defense diplomacy. For example, in 2018, *Dixmude* and a supporting combatant sailed close to China-claimed features in the South China Sea without first visiting Japanese bases as the UK's HMS *Albion* did.⁷⁹

Canada

The Japan-Canada partnership has been characterized as underdeveloped despite both states possessing democratic institutions and sharing close but

⁷⁶ Steven Stashwick, "French, U.S., Australian, Japanese Warships Drill in Bay of Bengal," *Diplomat*, May 20, 2019 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/french-us-australian-japanese-warships-drill-in-bay-of-bengal>.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan) "Monitoring and Surveillance Activities by France against Illicit Maritime Activities Including Ship-to-Ship Transfers," Press Release, March 8, 2019 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002363.html.

⁷⁸ Céline Pajon, "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Quad Plus," in "Quad Plus: Form versus Substance," ed. Jagannath P. Panda, *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 3, no. 5 (2020): 170–73.

⁷⁹ "France Challenges Beijing in South China Sea," *Straits Times*, June 12, 2018 ~ <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/france-challenges-beijing-in-south-china-sea>.

complicated relationships with the United States and China.⁸⁰ Even so, Japan has emerged as Canada's bilateral security partner of choice in the western Pacific. The basis for their security partnership is the 2010 Canada-Japan Joint Declaration on Political, Peace and Security Cooperation. The declaration commits both states to regular bilateral consultations, including a biennial 2+2 dialogue. At the most recent 2+2 meeting in December 2018, the partners agreed to advance concrete cooperation to realize the vision of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" and work toward an ACSA, which was eventually signed in 2019.

Since 2018, Canada has regularly deployed ships and aircraft to Japan to conduct monitoring and surveillance activities against illicit maritime activities, including violations of UNSCR sanctions against North Korea.⁸¹ While the operations are primarily conducted in the East China Sea and waters to the west of Japan, the ships have also carried out other activities while in the region. For example, in 2018 the frigate HMCS *Calgary* conducted sanctions enforcement operations, performed presence operations in the South China Sea, became the first Canadian naval vessel to visit Vietnam, and participated in the exercise Keen Sword with the United States and Japan.⁸² This inaugural Canadian participation in Keen Sword represented a significant milestone since the biennial training exercise serves as the most advanced live training venue for the U.S. Navy and JMSDF. *Calgary* was accompanied by *Asterix*, a merchant vessel converted to a refueling and resupply ship that restored the Royal Canadian Navy's expeditionary capabilities after the loss of the HMCS *Protecteur* due to fire in 2014. In 2020, HMCS *Winnipeg* was Canada's fourth ship deployment to Japan in support of UNSCR sanctions enforcement and also joined Keen Sword. In the same two-year period, five Canadian aircraft deployments were made to Kadena airbase in Okinawa to support UNSCR sanctions enforcement.⁸³

⁸⁰ Jonathan Berkshire Miller and Stephen Nagy, "Post-Abe, Japan Matters Even More for Canada," *Japan Times*, September 24, 2020 ~ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/09/24/commentary/japan-commentary/post-abe-japan-matters-even-canada>.

⁸¹ Stephen Nagy, "Quad Plus? Carving Out Canada's Middle-Power Role," in "Quad Plus: Form versus Substance," ed. Jagannath P. Panda, *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 3, no. 5 (2020): 189–99.

⁸² Richard Watts, "HMCS Calgary Charts a Series of Firsts at Sea," *Times Colonist*, December 11, 2018 ~ <https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/hmcs-calgary-charts-a-series-of-firsts-at-sea-1.23530401>.

⁸³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Monitoring and Surveillance Activities by Canada against Illicit Maritime Activities Including Ship-to-Ship Transfers," Press Release, October 13, 2020 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002934.html.

CONCLUSION

Japan has clearly stepped up as the western Pacific's most important maritime leader. Over the course of several decades, it has built trust with its partners in Southeast Asia by being a steady and reliable bilateral partner. In multilateral settings, it leads by example and facilitates cooperation with little bravado. In more recent years, extraregional powers looking to increase their involvement in the Indo-Pacific have turned to Japan as their regional partner of choice. Engagement between Japanese senior political leaders and their extraregional partners have created closer and expanding security relationships focused on military exchanges, naval exercises, and defense technology cooperation. Particularly under the leadership of former prime minister Abe, Japan has both opened the door for these partners and actively encouraged their increased activities and cooperation. The FOIP concept creates both a strategic umbrella for these activities and diplomatic apparatuses to link cooperative actions. As the ships of extraregional navies become more common in Southeast Asian waters, it is safe to assume that at some point in their deployment they will sail alongside the JMSDF.

While the analysis in this article focused on maritime security affairs in the western Pacific, Japan's influence is spreading beyond the immediate region. Indeed, the partnership initiatives captured under Tokyo's FOIP vision extend east into the Pacific, south to Australia, and west across the Indian Ocean. By strengthening its partnerships with extraregional powers, Japan is creating a global web of relationships that complements its long-standing alliance with the United States. Thus, FOIP provides the sinews of a multilateral network strengthening Japan's position as a global leader. The United States should welcome this rising, proactive Japan. ◆