



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



POLICY BRIEF

Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP): Origins, Evolution and Outcomes

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1. Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe addressing the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI), Nairobi, Kenya, on August 27, 2016. Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#)
2. Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida delivering his policy speech at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi, on March 20, 2023. Source: [Government of Japan](#)
3. Prime Minister of Japan Sanae Takaichi delivering a foreign policy speech at Vietnam National University, Hanoi, on May 2, 2026. Source: [X/@MoFaJapan_en](#)

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Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP): Origins, Evolution and Outcomes

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Precursors to FOIP: A Lifelong Conviction of Shinzo Abe

As a strategic concept, Japan's FOIP did not emerge in 2016. It was the culmination of a worldview Shinzo Abe carried for most of his political life, a conviction that democracy and maritime geography bound India and Japan together as natural partners. By all accounts, Abe was Japan's most committed Indophile leader, one recognising India's strategic importance even before he held office. His engagement with India was never transactional.

In 2005, Abe delivered a relatively low-key lecture at the Constitution Club of India, well before he became the Prime Minister of Japan. In retrospect, he was already developing his future themes – India and Japan as democracies, rule-of-law states, and maritime nations - ideas that found progressively fuller expression in the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (2006), the Confluence of the Two Seas speech to the Indian Parliament (2007), the Democratic Security Diamond (2012), and eventually FOIP (2016).

The clearest early articulation of FOIP came in his August 2007 address to the Indian Parliament, “Confluence of the Two Seas¹”, borrowing its title from a 17th century Mughal classic by Prince Dara Shikoh. Abe declared that the Pacific and Indian Oceans were fusing into a single strategic space, and envisioned a “broader Asia” network drawing in the US and Australia (an early version of the Quad), framing the sea lanes both nations depended on as critical to the world economy – implicitly pointing to choke points like Hormuz, Malacca, and Bab-el-Mandeb, that would later anchor FOIP's connectivity agenda. When Abe resigned shortly after his India visit, successor Fukuda promptly discarded the Arc as possibly being anti-China, but even he could not discard the idea behind it.

While in opposition, Abe held the same line. His speech of September 2011 at ICWA, “Two Democracies Meet at Sea,” repeated the case for democratic maritime partnership - evidence that these were personal convictions, not bureaucratic talking points. On the very day he returned to power in December 2012, his essay

¹ “Confluence of the Two Seas”, Speech by PM Shinzo Abe at the Indian Parliament; 22 Aug 2007; <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

“Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond” proposed a four-nation maritime framework (Japan, Australia, India, US) to safeguard the Indo-Pacific commons, in substance, the “commitment for peace and stability” that MoFA would later list as one of FOIP's three pillars, four years before the concept was launched.

On the Indian side, a parallel convergence was underway. In March 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) from Mauritius - India's own rules-based maritime doctrine, emphasising freedom of navigation and respect for international maritime norms. By the time FOIP was formally announced in 2016, it represented the convergence of a philosophy Abe had refined since over a decade, and a vision that India was already meeting halfway through SAGAR.

What is FOIP in Plain Words

At its core, FOIP is a conviction-based philosophy – Abe’s answer to a simple question: what kind of neighbourhood should Asia be?

Think of it as traffic rules for the seas. Without rules, the biggest vehicles push smaller ones aside, and chaos follows; with rules, even small vehicles have rights and goods move safely. FOIP applies this logic internationally - the waters from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, and on to Africa, should remain free, open, and governed by agreed rules (chiefly UNCLOS), rather than by the will of the strongest power. “Free” means freedom of navigation and trade, and respect for sovereignty and international law, without coercion. “Open” means sea lanes and markets stay accessible, infrastructure is built transparently, and any country willing to play by the rules can participate with no exclusive zones.

This is not something abstract for Japan, which depends overwhelmingly on energy imports transiting the Strait of Hormuz, with no pipeline alternative and with limited reserves as a buffer. The 2026 Hormuz crisis, when strikes on Iran stranded a large number of tankers in the Persian Gulf, was precisely the scenario this vision was meant to guard against.

The unspoken backdrop is China’s expanding footprint: artificial islands in the South China Sea, and BRI port debt that has trapped countries from Sri Lanka to Djibouti. Japan’s official line is that FOIP is inclusive, not aimed at any one country; critics see it as balancing China without saying so. The truth likely sits in between.

In One sentence: FOIP is Japan's vision for keeping the Indo-Pacific as a region where every country, large or small, can trade and navigate freely under common rules, without being dominated by force, coercion, or debt traps.

Abe's FOIP – the Formal Launch and Early Years

FOIP combines “Two Continents”, Asia and Africa, with “Two Oceans” - a free and open Pacific and Indian Ocean - into one overarching framework for Japanese foreign policy.² Its goal is to make the Indo-Pacific a “free and open” region serving as “international public goods”, upheld by a rules-based order applied in a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent manner, with Japan open to cooperating with any country that supports this idea.

This rests on three pillars:

- 1) Rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade: This is FOIP's foundational principle. No country may impose its will on sea lanes by force. Freedom of navigation, including through the South China Sea, Strait of Malacca, and implicitly the Strait of Hormuz, must be guaranteed by international law, primarily UNCLOS. This pillar was seen as aimed directly at China's island-building and territorial claims, without naming China explicitly.
- 2) Economic prosperity through improved connectivity and partnerships (EPA/FTAs, investment treaties): Quality infrastructure investment in ports, roads, digital networks and energy grids, connecting Asia and Africa as a transparent, debt-free alternative delivered through JBIC and JICA, the “Partnership for Quality Infrastructure” framework, and later the Blue Dot Network (with US and Australia).
- 3) Peace and stability through capacity-building: Helping smaller nations build their own coast guards, maritime law enforcement, and naval capacities to protect their own waters and resist coercion through vessel donations, training, institutional development and HA/DR cooperation, extended to countries from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to Kenya, Djibouti, and Vietnam.

This FOIP vision was formally unveiled on August 27, 2016, when at TICAD VI in Nairobi, Abe declared: “Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous.” The choice of Nairobi was deliberate. It extended the 2007 “Confluence of the Two Seas” speech to formally include Africa, completing the two-oceans, two-continents architecture that remains FOIP's defining frame.

² *Towards FOIP* [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>] and *Diplomatic Bluebook(s)*

Kishida's New FOIP: Continuity and Expansion³

On March 20, 2023, speaking at ICWA in New Delhi, Kishida laid out Japan's expanded FOIP vision – “The Future of the Indo-Pacific: Japan’s New Plan for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, with India as an “Indispensable Partner”. He noted that India was “the place where FOIP came into being,” recalling his own Sapru House Lecture in 2015⁴, a year before Abe formally unveiled FOIP in Nairobi.

Kishida framed the moment as “history's turning point”, with power shifting toward emerging and developing countries, a “compound crisis” of climate, technology, and geopolitical competition, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine exposing how fragile the existing international order had become. In that vacuum, FOIP, now acknowledged well beyond the US and Europe, was becoming a shared way of looking at the world.

The core concept stayed the same: a free and open, rules-based Indo-Pacific, prosperous and free from coercion. What Kishida added was emphasis, on “diversity, inclusiveness and openness”, and on rulemaking through dialogue and equal partnership. He called this “our FOIP”, a vision expected to be co-owned by the international community rather than Japan's alone.

On this foundation, Kishida’s new FOIP set out four new pillars of cooperation:

- 1) Principles for Peace and Rules for Prosperity - carrying forward respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and dispute resolution through dialogue, now adding a ‘Women, Peace and Security’ lens; deeper trade liberalization through the CPTPP and IPEF, including an EPA with Bangladesh; and transparent development finance, including Sri Lanka's debt restructuring.
- 2) Addressing Challenges in an Indo-Pacific Way - a new pillar covering climate and energy security, food security, global health, disaster resilience, and cyber. This pillar marked FOIP's first expansion into the ‘global commons’.
- 3) Multi-layered Connectivity - elevated to a standalone pillar, covering Southeast Asia, South Asia (notably the Bay of Bengal -Northeast India corridor), and the Pacific Islands, plus knowledge connectivity (youth exchange, education, start-ups) and digital connectivity.

³ New Plan for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)”, MoFA, March 2023; <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100484990.pdf>

⁴ Fifteenth Sapru House Lecture by FM Fumio Kishida, on “Special Partnership for the Era of the Indo-Pacific”, Sapru House, Jan 2015; <https://www.icwa.in/WriteReadData/RTF1984/1955389862.pdf>

- 4) Extending Security and Safe Use of the “Sea” to the “Air” – Abe's maritime-security pillar broadened to the entire “public domain”, deepening security pacts (RAA with Australia and the UK, Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services (RPSS; also called ACSA) with India), and extending maritime domain awareness into airspace via radar and satellite cooperation.

Overall, Kishida's New FOIP broadened and softened the original. The anti-China edge was blunted, the security-diamond framing gave way to inclusive dialogue. Critics see elements, such as OSA and inclusiveness, as a genuine evolution, but with the shift toward “a free and open international order based on the rule of law”, Kishida’s phrasing in a subsequent Diet speech, was a dilution of the original FOIP.

The shift was driven by converging shocks: COVID-19’s exposure of supply-chain fragility, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the Global South’s demand that FOIP look beyond sea lanes and infrastructure. To fund the expansion, Japan committed to mobilizing more than 75 billion US dollars in public and private funds for Indo-Pacific infrastructure by 2030, largely a consolidation of pipeline projects under the FOIP umbrella, backed by a revised Development Cooperation Charter, new ‘offer-type’ ODA⁵, and an amended JBIC Law enabling greater private capital mobilization.

Kishida closed by noting that both Japan and India bore “a great responsibility for maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law”, with Japan holding the G7 presidency and India the G20 presidency that same year.

FOIP Under Takaichi: Resilience as the New Watchword⁶

In May 2026, PM Takaichi unveiled the “Updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific - to be more resilient and prosperous together”, in her Foreign Policy speech in Vietnam⁷, which marked FOIP’s first major reframing since Kishida. The update retained FOIP’s 2016 core principles - freedom, openness, diversity, inclusiveness, and the rule of law – while responding to a world reshaped by accelerating technological innovation, including AI, the rise of Global South, and intensifying geopolitical competition.

⁵ Summary of the Revised Development Cooperation Charter, MoFA, June 2023; <https://www.mofa.go.jp/>

⁶ The Updated “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)”, MoFA, May 2026; <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/101022859.pdf>

⁷ Foreign Policy Speech by Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae in Vietnam; 02 May 2026; <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/speech/202605/02fpspeech.html>

The animating idea of this latest version of FOIP is resilience as self-determination: countries in the Indo-Pacific must be able “to determine their own future while recognising the complexities of interdependence”. Tellingly, Japan now applies this language to itself as much as to partners, a marked shift from earlier FOIP iterations that framed Japan primarily as the provider of resilience to others.

Three priority areas replaced Kishida's four pillars:

- 1) Economic infrastructure for the AI and data age - supply-chain resilience for energy and critical materials, and hard and soft infrastructure (data centres, AI ecosystems) built on security, safety, trust and sharing.
- 2) Co-creation of economic growth - public-private collaboration and rule-sharing to address Global South challenges through joint commercial projects, strengthened connectivity, and free trade and investment.
- 3) Security cooperation for regional peace and stability - drawing on the full range of policy tools, including ODA, OSA, and defense equipment transfers, to deepen multi-layered security cooperation.

OSA, launched by Kishida in 2023, is being institutionalized as a co-equal pillar alongside ODA, with 16 projects across 11 countries, including coastal radar to the Philippines and Djibouti; patrol boats to Bangladesh, Fiji, and Indonesia; and drones to Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Tonga. Japan is set to establish a new Coast Guard capacity-building unit and has reviewed its defense equipment transfer policy. Critical minerals and rare earths, barely mentioned under Kishida, are now expected to sit alongside energy as core resilience concerns, with Japan planning rare earth projects in Malaysia with Australia.

Technology now becomes a frontline domain for FOIP, wherein submarine cables in the Pacific Islands, 5G Open RAN pilots in the Philippines and Indonesia, AI data centres in India and Bhutan, and local-language AI development in Cambodia, are framed as Japan's strategic overseas expansion of its AI capabilities.

The immediate recent driver is the Hormuz crisis, which Takaichi's Hanoi speech treated as FOIP's live test case: “The ongoing crisis in the Strait of Hormuz is a direct test of Japan's resolve to realize FOIP.” In response, Japan launched the Partnership On Wide Energy and Resource Resilience Asia (POWER Asia), with a Japan-Vietnam agreement via NEXI to support crude oil procurement for the Nghi Son Refinery, and medium-term plans for regional oil stockpiling and alternative energy sources.

A Brief Comparison: Three FOIPs, One Evolving Framework

Abe's FOIP (2016, rooted in 2005-07) was Japan's framework, offered to the world: three pillars built on rule of law, connectivity, and capacity-building, delivered through named institutions (JBIC, JICA). Simple enough to state in one sentence, it was tied closely to Abe's own relationships and credibility, and translation from vision to deliverables remained slow. India's role was that of strategic partner and Quad cornerstone.

Kishida's New FOIP (2023) carried the three pillars forward but added a fourth - the "global commons" (climate, health, food, cyber), with no precedent in 2016. It reframed ownership from "Japan's vision that others may join" to "our FOIP", made inclusivity and equal partnership explicit, and extended outreach decisively toward the Global South. In effect, it consolidated a decade of pipeline ODA and connectivity projects under one expanded banner - politically safe, but institutionally diluting - a brand under which Japan files everything it was already doing. India's role shifted subtly to "indispensable partner".

Takaichi's FOIP (2026) condenses Kishida's four pillars into three priority areas, folding OSA and defense-equipment transfers in alongside ODA as co-equal security tools - institutionalizing a dimension that didn't exist for Abe and was only nascent under Kishida. Technology and critical minerals emerge as new domains, and the Hormuz crisis gives the framework an immediate, testable focus in POWER Asia, though largely at the stage of announced plans rather than delivered outcomes. The tone is more explicitly security-forward, with harder edges, even as Kishida's 'inclusive' vocabulary survives intact. In this sense, "revival" reads as much as repackaging, with the political need to look tougher outpacing the institutional ability to simplify an apparatus that has grown for a decade.

Across all three, the pattern is layering, not replacement - each leader re-narrates and re-prioritises within an accumulating architecture, rather than discarding what came before.

Conclusion

FOIP began as one man's conviction and became Japan's most durable potential diplomatic export, outliving its author because each successor built on it rather than around it. What looks like reinvention at each stage is mostly re-emphasis: Kishida widened the umbrella to make FOIP collectively ownable; Takaichi has narrowed the spotlight back onto hard resilience without dismantling anything

underneath. The throughline - free seas, rules over coercion, and genuine choice for smaller nations - has not moved in a decade, even as the toolkit beneath it has grown heavier with each handover. The 2026 Hormuz crisis is now the sharpest test yet of whether that toolkit can deliver real resilience, not just rhetorical continuity.

On closer examination, Takaichi's update turns out to be less a return to the 2016 FOIP than a careful, pragmatic merger of the original framing and Kishida's later additions, while also opening space for Japan's newer, future-facing priorities. She revives the hard-edged, security-forward register of Abe's original - OSA and defence-equipment transfers as named tools - without unwinding any of Kishida's additions: the global commons, the people-focused framing, and the inclusive "our FOIP" vocabulary all survive intact.

Equally telling is what goes untouched: the politically guided bureaucratic architecture built up over a decade - JBIC, JICA, OSA, the Development Cooperation Charter - is folded into the three new priorities rather than reorganised, a signal of continuity to the ministries and agencies that will actually implement FOIP. The practical effect is that almost any project Japan is already running, or might want to run, can be filed under one of the three broad headings - making planning, budget justification, and cross-agency implementation considerably smoother than juggling four pillars or three.

India's own maritime doctrine - evolved from SAGAR (2015) to MAHASAGAR (2025) - shares FOIP's emphasis on rules-based seas, transparent financing, and Global South inclusion, arrived at independently, on India's own timeline. India has acknowledged FOIP as a Japanese vision, with mutual endorsement of principles in Joint Statements, most notably in 2022. What continues to exist is strategic convergence at the level of principle, on respective terms. Concrete projects that Japan files under its FOIP ledger, from the Bay of Bengal-Northeast India corridor to data-centre cooperation and ACSA, remain bilateral arrangements, with both countries moving toward a similar horizon with a much wider scope of cooperation.



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