

PACIFIC FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL OF BILATERAL
RELATIONS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

JAPAN-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

GREAT DISRUPTION: UNCERTAINTY OVER THE INDO-PACIFIC

KEI KOGA, NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Japan and Southeast Asia faced completely different situations in 2019 and 2020 because of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, Japan-Southeast Asia relations were continuously positive. One of the major developments among Southeast Asian states was the creation of the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” (AOIP) which resonated with the principles in Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) concept. As a result, Japan expressed explicit support for AOIP. Functionally, they made progress, particularly in the fields of defense, infrastructure development, and digital, as illustrated by various Japanese initiatives—“Vientiane Vision2.0,” “Initiative on Overseas Loan and Investment for ASEAN,” and “Data Free Flow with Trust.” As such, both Japan and Southeast Asian states began to synthesize their respective visions of the Indo-Pacific and to establish concrete cooperative mechanisms. Diplomatic momentum was put on halt in 2020 as COVID-19 spread. While Japan, Southeast Asian states, and ASEAN made efforts to coordinate counter-measures, share information and best practices, and provide mutual assistance through teleconferences such as the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 in April 2020, each state faces different social and political situations, making it difficult to cooperate. As such, great uncertainty looms over Japan-Southeast Asia cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal of Bilateral Relations in the Indo-Pacific*, Vol. 22, No. 1, May 2020. Preferred citation: Kei Koga, “Japan-Southeast Asia Relations: Great Disruption: Uncertainty over the Indo-Pacific,” *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp 137-148.

Japan and Southeast Asia faced completely different situations in 2019 and 2020 because of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, Japan-Southeast Asia relations were positive. One of the major developments among Southeast Asian states was the creation of the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” (AOIP), which resonated with the principles in Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) concept; as a result, Japan expressed explicit support for AOIP. Functionally, they made progress, particularly in defense, infrastructure development, and digital fields, as illustrated by various Japanese initiatives—“Vientiane Vision 2.0,” “Initiative on Overseas Loan and Investment for ASEAN,” and “Data Free Flow with Trust.” As such, Japan and Southeast Asian states began to synthesize their respective visions toward the Indo-Pacific and to establish concrete cooperative mechanisms. However, diplomatic momentum was put on halt in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. While Japan, Southeast Asian states, and ASEAN made efforts to coordinate counter-measures, share information and best practices, and provide mutual assistance through teleconferences such as the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 in April 2020, each state faces different social and political situations, making it difficult to cooperate. As such, great uncertainty looms over Japan-Southeast Asia cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

Furthering the Japan-Southeast Asia Relationship in 2019

Japan-Southeast Asia relations in 2019 were stable, and steadily strengthened their political, economic, military, and socio-cultural ties, which contributed to the creation of strategic options for Southeast Asia, while providing diplomatic leverage over Southeast Asia. In 2019, Japan constantly enhanced its [cooperation with ASEAN](#), particularly with Vietnam, which became the 2020 ASEAN Chair and the 2018-21 ASEAN Country Coordinator for Japan, so that Japan-ASEAN policy coordination in 2020 could move smoothly. Japan gradually reoriented its [“Free and Open Indo-Pacific” \(FOIP\) concept](#) to lay the groundwork for the Indo-Pacific regional order with [ASEAN’s support](#).

Because of these efforts, Japan’s image in Southeast Asia has been consistently positive. According to [ISEAS’s 2020 Survey Report](#), Japan is the most trustworthy state among major powers, including the United States and China,

which can provide global public goods. In addition, Japan is the most favorable “third choice” state for ASEAN in the context of US-China rivalry, although Japan’s political, strategic, and economic influence in Southeast Asia is considered to be much lower than that of China. This survey result is consistent with [another survey conducted in 2019](#) by Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It shows that 93% of respondents considered Japan to be a “reliable friend” and would contribute to “the peace and stability” of Southeast Asia.

Strategic Concept: Synergy between FOIP and AOIP

The most significant development for Japan and Southeast Asia in 2019 was the creation of the [“ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific”](#) (AOIP). The document was adopted at [the 34th ASEAN Summit](#) in June 2019, emphasizing “ASEAN centrality, inclusiveness, complementarities, a rules-based order anchored upon international law, and commitment to advancing economic engagement in the region.” The outlook essentially provides *guidelines* for ASEAN and its member states to engage the Indo-Pacific region, while asking for external partners to support ASEAN’s initiatives and cooperate in the areas that ASEAN indicates.

Indonesia has long taken the initiative to push a concept of the Indo-Pacific in ASEAN, while others displayed a somewhat lukewarm attitude toward such an initiative and were contentious in deciding what type of institutional documents and contents should be included. The outcome was a political compromise—the title of the document was [changed](#) from “ASEAN’s Indo-Pacific Outlook” to AOIP and ended up containing 14 principles, including ASEAN centrality, transparency, inclusivity, and a rules-based framework. In this sense, the document is similar to [the 1971 Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality \(ZOPFAN\)](#), which aspired to [regional neutrality in Southeast Asia](#) amid power shifts in East Asia caused by the retrenchment of the United States and the United Kingdom, while seeking a way to secure regional powers’ recognition of Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). As ASEAN sought regional autonomy in the 1970s, the AOIP also attempts to secure ASEAN’s independent political stance in the context of the Indo-Pacific strategic competition between China and the United States.

However, unlike ZOPFAN, the AOIP gained strong political support from major powers that advocated for the Indo-Pacific concept, namely [Australia](#), [India](#), [Japan](#), and [the United States](#). For those powers, including Japan, it was a political achievement because AOIP indicates that ASEAN has incorporated the “Indo-Pacific” concept into its own strategic calculations, by which they could discuss and work together to shape a regional vision and cooperative frameworks. Furthermore, some of the principles, particularly a rules-based framework and respect for international law, resonated with those major powers’ Indo-Pacific concepts and visions. Thus, AOIP was a favorable development for Japan.

ASEAN’s major strategic objective for AOIP is to neutralize great powers’ dominance in creating the Indo-Pacific concept, which could marginalize the association’s institutional role in the region. While a balanced great power competition would give ASEAN strategic leeway to locate itself in the middle, facilitating friendly relations with both sides, the intensification of rivalry would force ASEAN member states to choose sides. Given the increasingly firm US stance against China and the potential institutionalization of the Quad—an anti-China coalition—ASEAN emphasized [the importance of inclusivity](#) to mitigate China’s concern, although China [avoided explicit support for AOIP](#).

Among the various FOIP concepts, Japan’s FOIP vision was largely compatible with AOIP. Admittedly, when Japan launched the FOIP strategy in [2016](#), it implicitly featured Japan’s competitive strategy against China in broader Asia. Also, its principle—to maintain and enhance the existing international order in the Indo-Pacific, which was generally led by the United States—remains intact. However, given the vagueness of the strategy, its approach and tactics have [evolved](#), emphasizing economic connectivity and respect for principles such as non-exclusivity and ASEAN centrality. From 2017, Japan also improved its relations with China, expressing a possibility of [cooperating with China](#) in terms of infrastructure development in a third country under the condition that China comply with international standards, resulting in [52 memorandums of cooperation](#) at the 2018 Japan-China Summit. Such policy flexibility enabled Japan to strike a balance between cooperation with China and the United States and avoiding the creation of

strategic division, a welcome development for ASEAN as well.

Japan’s constant modification of the FOIP concept thus provides strategic choices for ASEAN member states and becomes highly compatible with AOIP. This created a greater possibility for Japan and ASEAN to further cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Functional Cooperation: Defense, Infrastructure, and Digital Infrastructure

Concrete cooperative actions between FOIP and AOIP are still underway, but Japan and Southeast Asian states made progress in three areas: defense diplomacy, infrastructure development, and digital infrastructure.

Defense Cooperation: Vientiane Vision 2.0

First, Japan has adapted “[Vientiane Vision 2.0](#)” at the [5th ASEAN-Japan Defense Ministers’ Meeting](#) on November 18, 2019. This is the updated version of the “[Vientiane Vision](#)” in 2016, which is “a guiding principle” for Japan’s bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation with ASEAN and has three objectives: to consolidate a rules-based international order; to ensure maritime security; and to facilitate capacity-building programs for ASEAN member states. Although the 2016 version was highly compatible with Japan’s FOIP concept, Vientiane Vision 2.0 incorporates “the concept of the ‘Indo-Pacific’” and defines ASEAN as a pivotal player in the region.

More specifically, Vientiane Vision 2.0 emphasizes the importance of ASEAN’s location, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, as well as the compatibility of Japan’s FOIP and ASEAN’s AOIP, citing openness, inclusivity, and a rules-based framework. Japan added three new principles of defense cooperation, namely “Heart-to-heart Cooperation” (e.g. respect for ASEAN’s principles); “Tailored and Lasting Cooperation” (e.g. pursuing sustainable and transparent engagement with ASEAN and member states); and “equal and open cooperation” (e.g. pursuing wider international collaboration on the basis of ASEAN centrality, unity, and resilience). By ensuring these principles and its FOIP vision, Japan recognizes ASEAN-led institutions as a center of multilateral cooperation in an important strategic location of the Indo-Pacific and expresses its intent to increase interoperability

among ASEAN member states through norm and practice-sharing.

ASEAN member states [welcomed](#) this initiative. Such a vision focuses mainly on non-controversial areas of defense cooperation and does not engage strategic competition to force ASEAN member states to choose sides between Japan and China. Indeed, most of the agendas that the vision raises, such as capacity-building, have long been discussed and implemented as part of Japan-ASEAN defense cooperation, such as defense dialogues, capacity building programs, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance /natural disaster (HA/DR).

Nevertheless, this initiative has a strategic implication. For instance, capacity-building programs such as cyber security and ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) capabilities in the maritime and air domains strengthen ASEAN and member states resilience to politically and militarily respond to threats coming from China, particularly over the South China Sea. Such cooperative initiatives can provide ASEAN and ASEAN member states more options to not only engage in the Indo-Pacific region, but also manage flashpoints in Southeast Asia.

Infrastructure Development Initiatives: Initiative on Overseas Loans and Investment for ASEAN

Second, Japan launched the “[Initiative on Overseas Loan and Investment for ASEAN](#)” in November 2019. The initiative is [Japan’s efforts](#) to synthesize FOIP and AOIP, emphasizing the improvement of “connectivity” between Japan and Southeast Asia as well as among Southeast Asian states. [The initiative](#) aims to mobilize \$3 billion in public and private funds from 2020 to 2022 and consists of three principles—facilitating “Quality Infrastructure” projects; empowering “women, low-income people, medium and small-size businesses”; and promoting green investment. To be sure, this effort is not new. Japan has facilitated its “[Partnership for Quality Infrastructure \(PQI\)](#)” since 2015, by which Japan would mobilize financial assets for Asia’s infrastructure development, approximately \$110 billion from 2015 to 2020 using the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), and through collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

However, the initiative subsequently expanded from Asia to the world. In 2016, the PQI was upgraded to the “[Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure](#),” increasing its financing to \$200 billion from 2016 to 2021, shifting its geographical scope from Asia to the world, widening the scope of infrastructure, including natural resources, and facilitating inter-agency collaboration with other domestic institutions, namely Japan’s Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI), Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment Corporation for Transport & Urban Development (JOIN), Japan’s ICT and Postal Services (JICT), and Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC). In June 2019, Japan proposed at the G20 summit the idea of quality infrastructure as a guiding principle for infrastructure development, resulting in the “[G20 Principles For Quality Infrastructure Investment](#).” These initiatives aim to consolidate and upgrade international standards for infrastructure development because China’s BRI has the potential to set alternatives to existing standards. Now that the G20 has set the principles and Japan’s original PQI ends in 2020, Japan’s new initiative will sustain diplomatic momentum for infrastructure development in Southeast Asia.

Japan’s development initiatives have become more visible in Southeast Asia subregions, particularly the Mekong region. On the basis of Japan’s “[Tokyo Strategy 2018 for Mekong-Japan Cooperation](#)” which deemed the region geographically significant to implement the FOIP vision, Japan and Mekong regional states—Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam—promoted the importance of quality infrastructure in enhancing connectivity in the region, particularly the East-West Economic Corridor. In this connection, Japan also decided to become an [ACMECS \(Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy\) development partner](#) in August 2019 to collaborate with ACMECS member states for infrastructure development and provide financial assistance. Japan also collaborated with external actors, including the US, to support development through new initiatives such as [Japan-United States Mekong Power Partnership \(JUMPP\)](#) from 2019. As such, Japan’s engagement in Southeast Asia for fostering PQI intensified.

Digital Connectivity: “Data Free Flow with Trust”

Digital connectivity was repeatedly emphasized in Japan and the ASEAN member states in 2019. While hard infrastructure for the digital economy, such as 5G, is imperative to operationalize Industry 4.0, soft infrastructure to set rules and principles for digital governance is also needed. In this connection, Japan launched the initiative, the “[Data Free Flow with Trust \(DFFT\)](#)” for digital economy, at the Osaka G20 meeting. Given that data is the imperative resource for Industry 4.0, there are economic and security issues by which states would pursue protectionist measures and refuse to share data. DFFT aims to facilitate the synthesizing of domestic and international legal frameworks through the use and reform of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In so doing, Japan aims to ensure open data in the world, although some states, including China, insist that the state has “[cyber sovereignty](#)”—a right to protect its data, usually through data localization.

ASEAN has been well aware of the social and economic impacts that digital connectivity would bring, and in principle its policy direction is compatible with Japan’s DFFT. In 2016, ASEAN issued the [Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity \(MPAC\) 2025](#), which put priority in the creation of both hard and soft digital infrastructure and the promotion of institutional arrangements for an ASEAN digital data governance framework and an ASEAN open data network. In November 2019, ASEAN issued the [ASEAN Declaration on Industrial Transformation to Industry 4.0](#), by which ASEAN envisions the enhancement of intra-ASEAN collaboration, such as policy coordination, human resource development, and joint research and innovations.

Still, challenges exist. Because of the large digital divides within each ASEAN member state, as well as among member states, it is difficult to coordinate soft infrastructure among them. External frameworks such as the “[Japan-US Strategic Digital Economy Partnership \(JUSDEP\)](#)” that aim to facilitate digital connectivity and economy in third countries through high-standard investment could help build ASEAN member states’ digital capacity. However, each member state’s perception differs, and some remain hesitant to cooperate. For example, when Japan issued [the Osaka Declaration on Digital Economy](#), the so-called

“Osaka Track,” to create a coalition for rule-making in digital economy outside the WTO, which included some Southeast Asian states, namely Thailand, Singapore, Laos, Malaysia, and Myanmar, other states, including Indonesia, [refused to sign](#) the declaration because the Osaka Track might undermine the WTO process and cyber sovereignty. Further coordination and consultation will be required to advance multilateral collaboration between Japan and Southeast Asian states for digital connectivity rule making.

In sum, Japan’s 2019 initiatives on defense, infrastructure development, and digital connectivity are generally positive for Southeast Asian states as they generate strategic options in the context of intensifying great power rivalry between the United States and China. This trend has characterized Japan-Southeast Asia relations and nurtured a constructive relationship between them.

Great Disruption: Rising Uncertainty in 2020

Despite these positive trends, the COVID-19 pandemic has created great disruption in Japan-Southeast Asia relations. Emerging from Wuhan in Hubei province, China, in December 2019, the virus spread to countries which have intensive interaction with China, including Japan and Southeast Asian states. Its impacts were not immediately evident, partly because of lack of information about the virus. The World Health Organization (WHO) was also uncertain about the situation given the lack of data, and after publishing its first [disease outbreak news](#) on January 5, it took 29 days to issue a “[Public Health Emergency of International Concern \(PHEIC\)](#)” on January 30. In Southeast Asia and Japan, the number of confirmed cases in each country was less than 100 until the mid-February (figure 1), and Japan [offered protective equipment](#) stockpiled in the Asia-Europe Foundation (AEF), which it financed, to Southeast Asian states, namely Cambodia, the Philippines, and Laos, as well as Mongolia.

Given the initial optimistic assessments of COVID-19 and its lower fatality rate than other deadly viruses (such as Ebola) a mixture of positive and negative responses ensued. For instance, while cautious approaches were recommended, Malaysia allowed a large [religious meeting](#) to be held at the Sri Petaling mosque near Kuala Lumpur from February 27 to March 1, attracting more than 16,000 people,

and Thailand let a [Muay Thai match](#) take place at the Lumpinee Boxing Stadium on March 6, where around 10,000 attended. These events created large clusters, and more pessimistic views began to prevail in March, when the surge of confirmed cases rose and WHO declared COVID-19 a [pandemic](#). From mid-March, almost all Southeast Asian states, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam faced a rapid rise in confirmed cases, and so did Japan.

At the early stage, many states conducted travel bans and closed borders, but from mid to late March, Southeast Asian states and Japan began to take partial and full “lockdown” measures to contain the spread of COVID-19—Brunei’s border closed from March 24; Cambodia’s lockdown began April 10 and a “state of emergency” commenced April 29; Indonesia’s partial lockdown started April 10; Laos’s lockdown was from March 30; Malaysia’s “movement control order” started March 18; Myanmar’s partial lockdown began April 10 to 21; Singapore’s “circuit breaker” initiated April 7; Thailand’s “state of emergency” was from March 26; the Philippines’s “national emergency” began March 24; and Vietnam’s lockdown started April 1-22 (with measures easing thereafter). Japan declared a long-awaited state of emergency on April 7. As all Southeast Asian states and Japan took counter-COVID-19 measures restricting the movement of people, social, economic, and diplomatic exchanges have been significantly reduced between Japan and ASEAN member states since April.

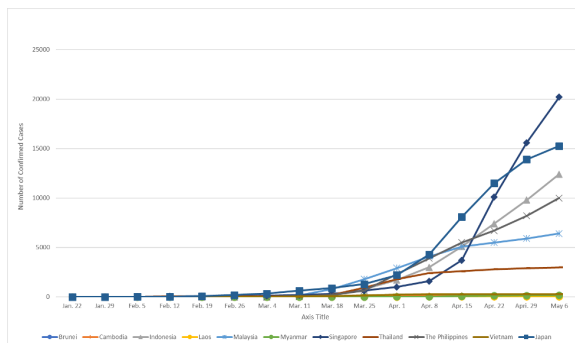


Figure 1 COVID-19 Confirmed Cases in Southeast Asia and Japan (As of April 28, 2020). Source: Johns Hopkins University

This does not mean that diplomatic relations between Japan and Southeast Asian states were put on hold. Japan and ASEAN, along with China and South Korea proactively organized ASEAN+3

(APT) meetings to coordinate policies among them. On February 3, the APT Senior Official Meeting on Health Development and the APT Health Ministers’ meeting were held on February 3 and April 7, respectively, through teleconferencing. Consequently, on April 14, Japan and ASEAN, together with China and South Korea, organized the Special APT Summit on COVID-19 and issued a [joint statement](#) which aimed to strengthen counter-COVID-19 cooperation on (1) an early warning system; (2) national and regional capacity building; (3) the APT reserve of essential medical supplies; (4) scientific cooperation; (5) mutual assistance between ASEAN, Japan, China, and South Korea; (6) funding; (7) public communication; (8) open economy; and (9) financial stability.

The APT decided to establish the “COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund for public health emergencies” to ensure medical equipment and supplies. Financial resources for this fund are supposed to come from the ASEAN Development Fund and the [APT Cooperation Fund](#), by which Japan contributed under the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF).

The COVID-19 death toll in Southeast Asia and Japan remains relatively low despite the rapidly increasing number of confirmed cases (Figure 2). This might derive from a lack of testing capacity and cluster tracking capability. Trends in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Japan are alarming because they indicate the possibility of overwhelming hospitals which requires immediate measures, such as ensuring a sufficient number of hospital beds. However, the COVID-19 overshoot—exponential growth of confirmed cases—which is similar to Europe and the United States, has yet to occur and can still be prevented by taking proactive policies.

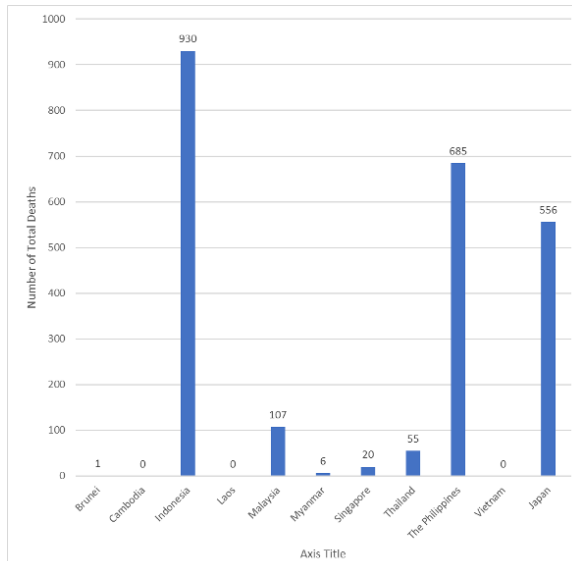


Figure 2 The Number of Total Deaths by COVID-19 in Southeast Asia and Japan (As of May 6, 2020). Source: Johns Hopkins University

Still, challenges and uncertainty remain. First, there are gaps in perceptions regarding COVID-19 among Japan and each Southeast Asian state. On the one hand, and although much depends on the number of available tests that each country can conduct, Brunei, Laos, and Myanmar have relatively small numbers of cases, and other states, such as Cambodia and Vietnam, have stabilized them. On the other hand, Japan and others, such as Singapore and Indonesia, are not in a position to ease their measures. Unless well-coordinated, the gap caused by different national circumstances could create policy divergences. Second, the current trend does not mean that there will be no second or third waves of COVID-19 in East Asia and Southeast Asia. As [past pandemic trends](#) show, it is quite possible for new waves to emerge. Third, it is unclear how long quarantines or lockdowns will continue. The impact of such measures, while necessary, is significant, as they make Japan-ASEAN cooperation difficult to organize: an example is the Maritime Self-Defense Force's [naval visit to Southeast Asia](#) that has been an important element of Japan's FOIP vision. Policymakers face policy dilemmas between ensuring security and economy. While lifting the quarantine can reactivate the economy, there is a risk of resurgence. While maintaining a quarantine can ensure health security, it would impact state economy. These choices are hard because both have security implications.

Another important factor in Japan-Southeast Asia relations is COVID-19's impact on geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific. While China has stabilized its situation, the United States faces a COVID-19 crisis, given the rapid increase in the number of confirmed cases and deaths, and it must concentrate on domestic stability. Economically, every state has been affected, but the impact differs. If the United States delays its economic recovery, and if China recovers quickly, their commitments to the region will be significantly affected, and China would gain the upper-hand in regional politics. Since President Trump's [no-show](#) at the 2019 East Asia Summit and the [postponement](#) of Trump's 2020 invitation of ASEAN leaders to the United States, Southeast Asian perceptions of US commitment have become more pessimistic. These great power dynamics matter in Japan-ASEAN relations because Japan can make the most of its strategic position under US-China competition by giving ASEAN an alternative political and economic choice. As such, COVID-19 makes the regional power shift in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific increasingly uncertain.

It is also true that even if the US maintains its retains its power advantages, the temporary disruption caused by COVID-19 would create an opportunity for political and diplomatic realignment among regional states, which also has long-term strategic implications for the regional balance of power. In this sense, the speed of social and economic recovery will be a critical factor in shaping the strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific.

Given the increased numbers of variables shaping the strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific, it is too early to tell how that regional strategic environment will look in the post-COVID-19 world. However, the relationship between Japan and Southeast Asian states is mutually beneficial not only economically but also strategically. To prevent Japan-Southeast Asia relations from being marginalized, it is necessary to follow through on existing Japan-Southeast Asia/ASEAN cooperative initiatives and enhance policy coordination mechanisms for COVID-19.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

MAY 2019 – APRIL 2020

April 30-July 10, 2019: Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) holds Indo-Pacific Deployment 2019 (IPD19), conducting joint exercises in the Indo-Pacific region.

May 2, 2019: Japan-Vietnam Defense Ministerial Meeting is held in Vietnam between Japanese Defense Minister Iwaya Takeshi and Vietnam's Defense Minister Ngo Xuan Lich.

May 13, 2019: Japan-Thailand Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held in Japan between Japanese Foreign Minister Kono Taro and Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai on the occasion of the 20th Thai Festival Tokyo 2019.

May 22, 2019: Japan-Indonesia Summit Telephone Talk between Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

Japan-Singapore Defense Ministerial Meeting is held between Japanese DM Iwaya and Singapore's Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen.

May 28, 2019: Japan Ministry of Defense (JMOD) provides humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) capacity-building program for the Malaysian Armed Forces.

May 29, 2019: Japan-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held in Japan between Kono and Philippines Foreign Secretary Teodoro Lopez Locsin Jr.

May 30, 2019: Abe meets Singaporean Deputy Prime Minister/Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in Japan.

Japan-Laos Leaders' Working Lunch held in Japan between Abe and Laos' prime minister, attending signing of the "Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship."

Japan-Vietnam Foreign Ministers' Working Lunch is held in Japan between Kono and Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh.

Eleventh Meeting of the Japan-Vietnam Cooperation Committee is held in Japan.

May 31, 2019: Japan-Philippines Summit Meeting is held in Japan between Abe and Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte.

Japan-Cambodia Leaders' Working Lunch is held in Japan between PM Abe and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, attending the signing of the Exchange of Notes on grant aid projects, "The Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship" and "The Construction Support of Container Freight Station in Sihanoukville Autonomous Port Special Economic Zone (The Economic and Social Development Programme).

Japan-Malaysia Summit Meeting is held in Japan between PM Abe and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and issues "Japan-Malaysian Cooperation—Look East Policy Revisited in the New Era."

Japan-Laos Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held between Kono and Laotian Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommaith.

Kono meets Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister/Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in Japan.

Kono meets Myanmar's Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor Kyaw Tint Swe.

June 18, 2019: Eighth Meeting of Japan-Philippines Joint Committee on Infrastructure Development and Economic Cooperation is held.

June 23-July 24, 2019: JMOD and Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) provide capacity building assistance (engineering training) to the Cambodian Military.

June 27, 2019: Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held in Japan between FM Kono and Indonesian counterpart Retno Marsudi on the occasion of G20 Osaka Summit.

June 28-29, 2019: Japan holds 2019 G20 Osaka summit.

June 28, 2019: Japan-Thailand Summit Meeting is held between Abe and Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha at the G20 Osaka Summit.

Japan-Singapore Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held in Japan between FM Kono and Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan at the G20 Osaka Summit.

July 1, 2019: Japan-Viet Nam Leaders' Working Lunch held in Japan between PM Abe and Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

Japan and Vietnam (1) exchange Memorandum of Cooperation on a Basic Framework for Proper Operation of the System pertaining to Foreign Human Resources with the Status of Residence of "Specified Skilled Worker" and (2) sign "the Treaty between Japan and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons."

July 2, 2019: JMOD and GSDF provide HA/DR capacity-building program for Philippines defense officers.

July 8-11, 2020: JMOD holds first Professional Airmanship Program with military officers from ASEAN member states.

July 9, 2019: Kono meets Myanmar's Union Minister for the Office of the Union Government Min Thu.

July 31, 2019: Kono meets Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

Japan-Viet Nam Foreign Ministers' Working Dinner held in Thailand between Kono and Vietnam's DPM/FM Pham Binh Minh at the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings.

Aug. 1, 2019: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting held in Thailand.

Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Thailand between Kono and Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn.

Kono meets Thai Foreign Minister Pramudwinai at the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers Meetings.

Japan-Malaysia Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Thailand between Kono and Malaysia's Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abudullah at the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers Meetings.

JMOD holds cyber security seminar as part of capacity building program for Vietnam People's Armed Forces.

Aug. 2, 2019: Japan-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Meeting held between Kono and Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Lopez Locsin Jr.

Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' Meeting held between Kono and Brunei Foreign Minister II Dato Erywan.

Aug. 6, 2019: Tenth Japan-Cambodia Human Rights Dialogue is held.

Sept. 24-27, 2019: JMOD holds Aviation Meteorology Seminar as its capacity building program for the Myanmar Air Force (MAF).

Oct. 9, 2019: Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu meets Myanmar's Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

Oct. 20-24, 2019: JMOD provides HA/DR capacity-building program to the Lao People's Army.

Oct. 21, 2019: Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers Meeting held between Motegi and Foreign Minister Dato Erywan.

Abe meets Aung San Suu Kyi.

Oct. 22, 2019: Japan holds Ceremonies of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty the Emperor, while PM Abe meets HM Preah Bat Samdech Preah Boromneath NORODOM Sihamoni, King of Cambodia; and His Majesty Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah Ibni Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Al-Musta'in Billah, The Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia XVI.

Oct. 23, 2019: Abe meets H.E. Halimah Yacob, president of the Republic of Singapore; and His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkhiah of Brunei Darussalam.

Japan-Thailand Summit Meeting held in Japan between Abe and Prayut Chan-o-cha.

Nov 4, 2019: Eleventh Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting held in Thailand.

ASEAN Plus Three held in Thailand and issues Leaders' Statement on Connecting the Connectivities Initiative. Bilateral summits between Japan and Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, and Vietnam are also held.

Nov. 7-15, 2019: JMOD provides a HA/DR training program to the Lao People's Army.

Nov. 14, 2019: The 22nd Japan-ASEAN Summit Meeting is held in Thailand.

Abe meets Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte.

Nov. 17, 2019: Bilateral Defense Ministerial Meeting is held in Thailand between Japan and Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

Nov. 18, 2019: Japan-Indonesia Defense Ministerial Meeting is held in Thailand between DM Taro Kono and Indonesia's Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto.

Nov. 20, 2019: JMOD provides HA/DR capacity-building program for Indonesian defense officers.

Nov. 22, 2019: Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held in Japan between FM Motegi and Indonesian Foreign Minister Marsudi at the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting.

Japan-Singapore Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held between FM Motegi and FM Balakrishnan at the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting.

Dec. 13, 2019: JMOD/JMSDF hold a workshop on Undersea Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Clearance to Vietnam People Navy officers.

Dec. 14, 2019: Japan-Malaysia Defense Ministerial Meeting is held in Qatar between DM Kono and Malaysia Defense Minister Mohamad bin Sabu.

Dec. 15, 2019: Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held at the ASEM Foreign

Ministers' Meeting in Spain between FM Motegi and DPM/FM Sokhonn.

Dec. 20, 2019: Japan-Indonesia Defense Ministerial Meeting is held in Japan between DM Kono and DM Prabowo Subianto.

Jan. 6, 2020: Japan-Vietnam Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Working Lunch is held in Vietnam between Motegi and Vietnam's DPM/FM Pham Binh Minh.

Jan. 7, 2020: Japan-Thailand Foreign Ministers' Meeting is held in Thailand between Motegi and FM Pramudwinai.

Jan. 9, 2020: Motegi meets Philippines FM Teodoro Lopez Locsin, Jr. Both sign and exchange notes on a yen loan for "Metro Manila Priority Bridges Seismic Improvement Project (Second Term)."

Japan and Vietnam exchange notes concerning provision of Japan's grant to Vietnam on "the Economic and Social Development Programme."

Jan. 9-17, 2020: JMOD holds a Cyber Security Seminar as part of capacity building program to the Vietnam People's Armed Forces.

Jan. 10, 2020: Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' Meeting (Japan-Indonesia Ministerial-Level Strategic Dialogue) held in Indonesia between FM Motegi and FM Marusdi.

The third Japan-Indonesia Maritime Forum is held in Indonesia.

Jan. 14-17, 2020: JMOD/JMSDF hold a capacity building program on Underwater Medicine to the Armed Force of Myanmar.

Jan. 20, 2020: Motegi meets with Thai FM Paramudwinai in Thailand.

Jan. 22, 2020: Japan appreciates submission of the Final Report by the Independent Commission of Enquiry about human rights violations in the northern part of Rakhine State.

Jan. 28, 2020: JMOD/JSDF holds Underwater Medicine Seminar in Myanmar for doctors and divers from Myanmar military.

Jan. 28-30, 2020: JMOD holds Aviation Meteorology Seminar as part of capacity building for the Myanmar Air Force (MAF).

Jan. 30, 2020: World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern.”

Feb. 14, 2020: Japan decides to provide Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines approximately 220,000 counter-COVID-19 items, such as isolation gowns through the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) via financial contributions.

Feb. 17-26, 2020: JMOD holds HA/DR Engineering Equipment program for the Lao People’s Army.

Feb. 18-23, 2020: JMOD/JSDF conducts 3rd Japan-ASEAN Invitation Program on HA/DR with ASEAN member states militaries.

Feb. 19-22, 2020: JMOD and JSDF provide HA/DR capacity-building program for Indonesian defense officers.

March 10, 2020: JMOD holds 4th Seminar for Air Rescue to the Vietnam Air Defense and Air Force officers.

March 11, 2020: World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a “pandemic.”

March 13, 2020: Japan and Laos sign and exchange notes concerning “The Project for Flood and Drought Management in the Mekong River Basin (2020-2023)” in Laos.

March 23, 2020: Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers’ Telephone Talk held between Motegi and Marsudi.

March 31, 2020: Motegi and Vietnam’s Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh hold a telephone talk.

April 2, 2020: Japan-Singapore Foreign Ministers’ Telephone Talk held between FM Motegi and FM Balakrishnan.

April 14, 2020: Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is held as a teleconference.

April 23, 2020: Japan-Indonesia Leaders Telephone Talk is held between Abe and President Joko Widodo.

