

# COMPARATIVE

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## CONNECTIONS

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**JAPAN-SOUTHEAST ASIA**

### **JAPAN-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS: A DIPLOMATIC “NEW NORMAL” IN THE INDO- PACIFIC REGION?**

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Japan–Southeast Asia relations were relatively stable, despite COVID-19, as summarized by three trends: emphasizing multilateral actors; prioritizing enhancement of bilateral relations with two countries (Indonesia and Vietnam); and the synthesis of Japan’s Free and Open Indo Pacific “vision” (FOIP) and ASEAN’s ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). Japan and Southeast Asian states managed to achieve tangible cooperation, as illustrated by the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED). Yet, strategic dynamics among Southeast Asia, Japan, and the United States are shifting because of changes in Japanese and US political leadership. Japan, the most reliable partner for Southeast Asia in the Trump era, seemingly faced a relative decline in the importance attached by Southeast Asia because of the United States’ renewed commitment to the region. In the context of this new diplomatic reality, the foremost challenges that Japan and Southeast Asia will likely face in 2021–2022 are Myanmar and ASEAN Centrality in the Indo-Pacific.

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COVID-19 significantly and negatively impacted Japan–Southeast Asian diplomacy—official meetings were generally conducted online, at best in a hybrid setting. Even when the COVID-19 situation seemed to improve, new waves of infections prevented Japan and Southeast Asian states from conducting normal in-person diplomacy. ASEAN’s strength rests in its convening power to invite all regional great powers to ASEAN-led forums, but under COVID-19 this advantage could not be fully exercised. Consequently, some important security agendas, such as the [second reading](#) of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, have been put on the back burner. In August 2020, Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu [mentioned](#) that, while Japan had conducted foreign ministers’ meetings online more than 60 times since the pandemic began, it would be much better to meet in person, understand diplomatic positions, and deepen discussions on cooperation.

In addition, a significant change in Japan’s domestic politics occurred in August 2020 with Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s sudden resignation. Because of his strong diplomatic leadership from 2012, which shaped the regional strategic environment, the announcement brought an even greater sense of political and diplomatic uncertainty to the Indo-Pacific region, particularly regarding whether Japan would be able to maintain its strategic ambition—its “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) vision. New Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide emphasized [the importance of diplomatic continuity](#), including FOIP, yet it was [not entirely clear](#) the degree to which Suga would do so given his lack of diplomatic experience and many domestic agendas, including the economic recovery from COVID-19, the Tokyo Olympics, and what appears to be a general election in Fall 2021.

Furthermore, one of the most pivotal players in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States, held a presidential election in November 2020, in which Joseph Biden defeated Donald Trump and was expected to return to traditional US foreign policy emphasizing multilateralism and liberal democratic values. Given the Trump administration’s weak commitment to ASEAN, as illustrated by Trump’s absence in ASEAN-

related forums from 2018 to 2020, this created new hope in ASEAN that the United States would increase its diplomatic commitment to Southeast Asia. The ISEAS Yusof-Ishak Institute’s annual survey, “[State of Southeast Asia: 2021](#),” indicates that the United States is perceived as a more “reliable strategic partner” now than in 2020.

In this setting, strategic dynamics among Southeast Asia, Japan, and the United States began to change. Japan, which was once considered the most reliable partner for Southeast Asia in the Trump era, faced a relative decline in its importance to Southeast Asian states as the US renewed its commitment to the region. That said, overall, Japan and Southeast Asian states managed to facilitate cooperation despite a changing strategic environment.

### **The Japan–Southeast Asia Relationship in 2020–21**

Southeast Asia faced increasingly complex regional strategic dynamics. It became more difficult for states in the subregion to maintain unity because of differing socio-economic situations. Japan was not a decisive player in alleviating those strategic uncertainties because it faced a COVID wave of its own and it was able to provide vaccines. Nevertheless, Japan and Southeast Asian states managed their relations relatively well, emphasizing ASEAN-focused multilateralism, select bilateral cooperation, and a synthesis of Japan’s FOIP with AOIP ([ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific](#)).

#### *ASEAN-Focused Multilateralism*

First, Japan–Southeast Asian relations were based more on multilateralism than bilateralism. Given COVID-19, it is difficult for states to conduct in-person bilateral meetings. Their in-person bilateral ministerial- and summit-level meetings [fell](#) from 44 in 2019 to 18 in 2020. Although many of these were held online, multilateral institutions have become a more important diplomatic tool for dialogues and facilitating cooperation. Indeed, they are more efficient in terms of time management and decision-making and, if not the best overall, they can be used to share information regarding the COVID-19 situation, political-economic initiatives, and strategic postures toward

regional issues, like cyber security, digital economy, the “[Dialogue for Innovative and Sustainable Growth](#)” (DISG), and the South China Sea.

The most important initiative by ASEAN and supported by the Japanese government was the [feasibility study](#) on the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) in the mid-2020. [Japan’s financial support](#) to establish the ACPHEED through the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF), \$50 million, was in addition to its contribution of \$1 million to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund. When COVID-19 emerged in December 2019 and was recognized as a global pandemic in March 2020, ASEAN utilized existing institutions to counter emerging diseases, such as the ASEAN Emergency Operation Centre (ASEAN EOC) Network, and Japan and ASEAN member states cooperated through ASEAN-led institutions, particularly [ASEAN-Plus-Three](#) (APT). However, ACPHEED was proposed to enhance national and regional capacity in Southeast Asia to manage the COVID-19 and future infectious diseases more effectively and efficiently. In November 2020, when [the Japan-ASEAN Summit](#) was held virtually, ACPHEED was established, and Japan promised to assist in institutional sustainability and operationalization.



Figure 1 Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga teleconferences into the 23rd Japan-ASEAN Summit. Photo: Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Additionally, the Japan-Mekong meetings in 2020 were fruitful, as several initiatives were taken by Japan, such as the “[Five Points of Cooperation](#).” These five points are (1) “Promotion of loans and investment for the

private sector”; (2) “Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects that pervades through small communities”; (3) “Cooperation concerning the rule of law”; (4) “Cooperation concerning the ocean”; and, (5) “Cooperation concerning strengthening supply chains.” On the basis of these points, Japan announced the “[Mekong SDGs Investment Partnership](#),” utilizing overseas loans and investment from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to invest in Mekong states to reach SDG objectives. Additionally, Japan launched “[KUSANONE Mekong SDGs Initiative](#),” providing “Grant Assistance for Grass Roots Human Security Projects” to facilitate socio-economic development for five Mekong states. Japan also cooperated with the US and, on its first anniversary, reaffirmed the significance of the [Japan-US Mekong Power Partnership](#) (JUMPP) in September 2020. JUMPP is based on international development standards, like sustainable economic growth, transparency, economic viability, environmental protection, and community sustainability, and it has been [welcomed](#) by all Mekong states.

#### *Selected Bilateral Cooperation*

From May 2020 to March 2021, Japan prioritized two Southeast Asian states, Vietnam and Indonesia, for bilateral relations, engaging in more high-level official exchanges with [Indonesia](#) (nine) and with [Vietnam](#) (seven) than with other Southeast Asian states (all less than five). This prioritization was also evident when Prime Minister Suga made his first overseas trips to [Vietnam](#) and [Indonesia](#) in October 2020. Vietnam is strategically important not only because of its strategic partnership status, but also for role as 2020 ASEAN Chair. Indonesia was the major democratic power in Southeast Asia, playing a pivotal role in enhancing ASEAN’s diplomatic credibility. Moreover, both of the states share concerns regarding China’s assertive behavior in the maritime domain, particularly the South China Sea.

COVID-19 and resulting diplomatic cutbacks did not prevent Japan from enhancing defense relations with Indonesia and Vietnam. From September to October 2020, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) conducted [Indo-Pacific Deployment 2020](#) (IPD-20), a manifestation of its continued maritime

commitment in East Asia. Although the exercises JMSDF that were conducted in IPD-20 were relatively small when compared to the past, Japan dispatched a JS *Kaga* (DDH184), an *Ikazuchi* (DD107), and *O-shio* submarine with three carrier-based aircraft, which visited Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam for a bilateral exercise with Indonesia. Indonesia and Vietnam were the only two Southeast Asian states that the JMSDF interacted with in this exercise.



Figure 2 JS *Kaga* and *Ikazuchi* arrive at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. Photo: JMSDF

Moreover, Japan successfully advanced strategic coordination with Vietnam and Indonesia. Japan reached a [substantive agreement](#) on arms and technology transfer with Vietnam in October 2020. When Suga teleconferenced with President Nguyen Phu Trong, he expressed “[serious concerns](#)” about some regional issues, particularly China’s new [Coast Guard Law](#), enacted in February. Trong did not explicitly name and shame, but promised to closely cooperate with Japan on those issues. Additionally, recent Japan-Indonesia cooperation contributed to Indonesia’s military capabilities that serve as a deterrent in the maritime domain. Japan concluded the agreement concerning the [Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology with Indonesia](#) in March 2021, and they shared “[serious concerns](#)” over “continued and strengthened unilateral behavior” in the maritime domain at their 2<sup>nd</sup> Foreign and Defense Ministers Meeting. While there was a variance in how they expressed their concerns, Japan advanced practical cooperation with these two Southeast Asian states in 2020-21.

### Synthesis of FOIP and AOIP

Third, Japan emphasized the synthesis of FOIP and AOIP, rather than integrating the concepts. In every ASEAN-led multilateral meeting, including ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit, Japan expressed its explicit support for ASEAN Centrality and unity, as well as AOIP. The most important [political document](#) Japan and ASEAN issued in 2020 was the “Joint Statement of the 23<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-Japan Summit on Cooperation on ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.” In it, Japan and ASEAN both aim to promote a “rules-based Indo-Pacific region that is free and open, embrace key principles, such as ASEAN’s unity and centrality, inclusiveness, transparency, and [complement the] ASEAN community building process.” Because of the fear of entrapment in great power competition, ASEAN as a regional institution has been hesitant to openly express institutional support for major regional powers’ strategic visions, be it that of the United States, China, or Japan. However, the statement illustrates that Japan and ASEAN share the same principles in the Indo-Pacific region. This infers that Japan and ASEAN will focus on principles, rules, and norms that they can agree on and seek expansion of areas of cooperation, rather than having Japan simply request ASEAN support FOIP as an overall strategic concept.

Of course, this does not mean that Japan has given up winning political support for its FOIP vision from each ASEAN member state. Japan continued to explain its FOIP vision and related international activities to each ASEAN member. In addition to the [initial political support](#) that Japan gained from several member states, Foreign Minister Motegi [stated, in Aug. 2020](#), that by explaining Japan’s efforts to pursue FOIP, Japan could gain understanding and support for FOIP from three Mekong states: Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. While it is not clear the support each ASEAN member state provided, the fact is that Japan regularly informs them of its principles and activities for regional peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, Japan’s current political objective is to gain as many supporter states from Southeast Asia on the FOIP vision as possible.

The creation of a [cooperative activity map](#) is another area where Japan and ASEAN made progress in their synthesis of FOIP and AOIP.

This conceptual map is particularly useful in locating each ASEAN–Japan project in the four priority areas AOIP suggested: (1) maritime cooperation, (2) connectivity, (3) SDGs, and (4) economic/other possible areas of cooperation. For example, maritime cooperation includes capacity-building programs for marine plastic debris, as well as countering illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, in which JICA plays a central role in facilitating Japan–Southeast Asia cooperation; connectivity includes both hard and soft infrastructure, such as internet satellite project and the “JENESYS” program that encourages youth exchanges; SDGs include counter-COVID-19 cooperation, such as the establishment of ACPHEED; and, economic and other possible areas include digital economy and fourth industrial revolution, an example of which is the capacity building program for ASEAN’s cybersecurity through the ASEAN–Japan Cybersecurity Capacity Building Centre (AJCCBC). Those cooperative activities existed, yet by applying AOIP’s four priority areas to categorize them, each project assumes strategic meaning and it has a broader implication for maintaining and enhancing the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

#### *Other Functional Cooperation: Security, Trade, and Digital Infrastructure*

Japan and Southeast Asia also cooperated in other areas of cooperation. In the security area, they Asia began to discuss maritime security more explicitly, particularly the South China Sea issues. COVID-19 presented setbacks, such as the postponement of the second reading of the ASEAN–China Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, with the SCS being a sensitive issue where it is always difficult to reach consensus. However, several ASEAN member states openly shared concerns regarding unilateral moves, just as Japan expressed its concerns about China’s behavior in the South China Sea, and China’s new Coast Guard Law in particular, which allows the Chinese Coast Guard to use force in their “jurisdictional waters,” something hard to define in disputed waters in the [East and South China Seas](#). Although the bilateral discussion did not force ASEAN members to name China, some have already protested against the law formally or informally,

including [the Philippines](#), [Indonesia](#), and [Vietnam](#). Although it would be diplomatically difficult for ASEAN member states to explicitly align with Japan over South China Sea issues for fear of China’s retaliation, they are more aligned in sharing similar concerns now and closely cooperating in terms of maritime domain awareness and capacity-building programs.

Regarding trade, Japan, ASEAN, and other regional states concluded the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) in November 2020. Although India did not become a founding member because of its fear of a flood of imports from China and Australia, the door to RCEP membership remains open, as stipulated in the [RCEP Ministers’ Declaration](#). RCEP was considered to be significant regional agreement given the COVID-19 pandemic and international trend toward protectionism. Emphasizing the fact that the [initiative](#) was taken by ASEAN, this agreement aims to avoid being a political tool for great power competition and facilitate economic recovery, inclusive prosperity, job creation, and enhanced supply chains in East Asia. At the same time, the [first protocol](#) to amend the ASEAN–Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (AJCEPA), which focused on “Trade in Services, Movement of Natural Persons, and Investment,” would also enter into force in all ASEAN states by June 1, 2021, except Indonesia.



Figure 3 Leaders attend the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Summit online. Photo: Nhac Nguyen/AFP

Digital infrastructure and digital economy remain one of the most important agenda items for Japan and ASEAN member states because of the potential of the Fourth Industrial

Revolution. ASEAN-led institutions, including the [East Asia Summit](#), [APT](#), and [Japan-ASEAN frameworks](#), are discussing facilitating the digital economy. However, the rule-making process on data has not reached any concrete agreement. In the 2020 APT Summit, Japan pushed its principle, Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT), but, because of [disagreements](#) among various parties, there has been no consensus in ASEAN-led institutions.

At the same time, ASEAN member states have attempted to avoid the negative impact of great power competition over digital infrastructure, particularly between the US and China. While the US and Japan have decided to exclude Chinese telecommunication products in 5G networks, [Southeast Asian states](#) (except Vietnam and Singapore) still rely on them in their major digital systems, including Huawei's 5G devices. Although this does not hinder the facilitation of the digital economy between Japan and ASEAN, there is still a risk of a split. If Japan keeps a firm position in relation to DFFT and regards Chinese products as presenting a high risk for information leaks, it would be difficult for Japan to cooperate with Southeast Asian states who rely on Chinese devices. Therefore, rule-making discussions over digital infrastructure remain one of the most important issues shaping Japan-Southeast Asia relations.

### **Challenges in Evolving Indo-Pacific Strategic Dynamics amid COVID-19**

Despite COVID-19, there has been continuity in functional cooperation and political coordination between Japan and Southeast Asian states. Utilizing the hybrid meeting and ASEAN-led multilateralism helped them to engage with each other, albeit this is not the best option. That said, Japan and Southeast Asian states will likely face two main challenges in the near future: ASEAN Centrality in the Indo-Pacific and Myanmar.

First, there is no clear definition of "ASEAN Centrality" in the Indo-Pacific region. This is the institutional principle that ASEAN has pushed since the end of the Cold War, and many regional states strongly support it. Japan has been an enthusiastic supporter of this principle along with the 2019 AOIP. The most recent 2020 Japan-ASEAN [joint statement](#) acknowledges

"ASEAN's central and strategic role in developing and shaping an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture." As such, Japan's diplomatic stance toward ASEAN is clear. However, this may create a schism because member states of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), particularly the US under Biden, are now eager to institutionalize the Quad.

While all Quad members (Australia, India, Japan, and the US) [emphasize](#) "strong support for ASEAN's unity and centrality as well as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," it is not clear what relationship the Quad envisions with ASEAN. If ASEAN insists on its centrality in formulating a regional architecture and the Quad accepts it, the institutional arrangement in the Indo-Pacific would likely remain the status quo and not be as effective as Quad members hope. This is because ASEAN lacks material capabilities and diplomatic capacity to reach the entire Indo-Pacific region and confront challenges to the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. Even if the Quad focuses on the maintenance and enhancement of the existing regional order and attempts to deepen cooperation with ASEAN, ASEAN would be hesitant, because the Quad connotes a counter-China coalition for ASEAN, which contradicts the principles of AOIP—inclusivity and avoiding rivalry.

The key areas of cooperation between the two remain nontraditional security issues, including counter-COVID cooperation. Of course, cooperation over COVID-19 has been politicized internationally, as in the cases of [vaccine nationalism](#) and [vaccine diplomacy](#), disrupting smooth and effective inter-state cooperation. Additionally, the path for effective cooperation is not straightforward, even among like-minded states. For example, new variants of COVID-19—illustrated by India's surge of infections in April and May 2021—hinder plans to make India the core manufacturing center of the vaccine in [Quad cooperation](#). Still, the national interests of Japan, ASEAN, and regional states are highly congruent in terms of countering COVID-19. The key is an inter-organizational dialogue to diversify and enhance cooperative networks, focusing on COVID-19 for now and avoiding excessive politicization.

Second, managing the response to the Myanmar military coup in February 2021 has become a test to gauge the extent to which Japan and Southeast Asian states manage nondemocratic actions by regional states. Unlike the United States, Japan and Southeast Asian states were hesitant to impose sanctions, even “[smart sanctions](#),” against the Myanmar military, as they are not entirely convinced that sanctions would be effective in restoring democracy. Of course, they have been concerned about the Tatmadaw’s violence against its citizens. In fact, the Japanese foreign minister issued diplomatic protests regarding [the coup](#) and the [violence](#) in February and March. In April, ASEAN also held the leader’s meeting and produced the “[Five-Point Consensus](#),” including the immediate cessation of violence, constructive dialogues among parties concerning ASEAN’s mediation, and the provision of humanitarian assistance. However, there are questions as to whether these actions are sufficient.



Figure 4 Leaders of ASEAN meet in Jakarta, Indonesia on April 24, 2021 and produce the Five Point Consensus. Photo: Laily Rachev/Indonesian Presidential Palace via Reuters

Now that the United States has returned to emphasizing democratic values in the Indo-Pacific rules-based order, including human rights, Japan faces political pressure to follow suit. For the Biden administration, democratic values are imperative because this is [its distinguishing factor](#) regarding China’s political challenges to the international order. Although China’s model of development, which focuses on economic growth while maintaining an autocratic political system, is attractive to nondemocratic states, not criticizing such a modus operandi would likely defy the international order. Given China’s rising status

and increasing material capabilities, China would more easily garner political support from nondemocratic regional states when compared to the past. To prevent this, the United States would likely strengthen its political alignment with allies and partners and request the creation of a united front. If this occurs, Japan will face a diplomatic dilemma as it has traditionally taken a softer approach toward nondemocratic states. For its part, ASEAN would likely distance itself from the FOIP that Japan and the United States envision.

These two strategic issues need to be carefully handled because they will shape the strategic environment and regional order in the Indo-Pacific region, although Japan and Southeast Asian states overcame initial challenges that were posed by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to adjust to new situations in 2020 and 2021. Their past success does not guarantee future ones. In this sense, it is important for Japan and Southeast Asian states to keep engaging each other to promote information-sharing, policy coordination and enhancing functional cooperation, particularly to tackle emerging variants of the COVID-19 infection.

# CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

## MAY 2020 – APRIL 2021

**May 4, 2020:** Japan-Vietnam Summit (by telephone) is [held](#) between Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

**May 12, 2020:** Japan-Philippines Defense Ministers' [telephone call](#) between Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono and Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

**May 13, 2020:** Japan-Thailand Foreign Ministers' [telephone call](#) between Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu and Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai.

**May 19, 2020:** Japan-Indonesia defense ministers' teleconference [held](#) between Kono and Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto. Japan-Malaysia Foreign Ministers' telephone call between Motegi and Malaysia FM Hishammuddin bin Tun Hussein. Japan-Singapore defense ministers' teleconference [held](#) between Kono and Singaporean Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen.

**May 21, 2020:** Japan-Philippines foreign ministers' telephone [call](#) between Motegi and Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin.

**June 1, 2020:** Japan-Vietnam foreign ministers' telephone [call](#) between Motegi and Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh.

**June 18, 2020:** Japan-Thailand foreign ministers' telephone call between Motegi and Indonesian Foreign Minister Don.

**June 29, 2020:** Japan-Myanmar foreign ministers' telephone [call](#) between Motegi and Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

**July 9, 2020:** 13th Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting is [held](#) online.

**July 20, 2020:** Japan-Malaysia defense ministers' telephone [call](#) between Kono and Malaysian Defense Minister Sabri bin Yaakob.

**Aug. 4, 2020:** Japan-Vietnam Summit telephone [call](#) between Prime Minister Abe and Vietnamese Prime Minister Phuc.

**Aug. 12, 2020:** Japan-Indonesia defense ministers' [video teleconference](#) between Kono and Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo.

**Aug. 13, 2020:** Japan-Singapore Foreign Ministers' Meeting and a working lunch [held](#) in Singapore between Motegi and Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan. Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong receives a courtesy call by Motegi.

**Aug. 14, 2020:** Japan-Malaysia Foreign Ministers' Meeting [held](#) between Motegi and Malaysia Foreign Minister Hishammuddin. Motegi met Senior Minister and MITI Minister Mohamed Azmin Ali.

**Aug. 22, 2020:** Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen [receives](#) a courtesy call from Motegi and hosts a working lunch. Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' Meeting is [held](#) between Motegi and Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn.

**Aug. 23, 2020:** Japan-Laos Foreign Ministers' Meeting and working dinner [held](#) in Laos between Foreign Minister Motegi and Lao Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith. Laotian Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith receives a courtesy call by Motegi.

**Aug. 24, 2020:** Motegi [holds](#) meetings in Myanmar with State Counsellor and Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi and with Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing.

**Sept. 7-Oct. 17, 2020:** Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force's "Indo-Pacific Deployment 2020" (IPD20) is [held](#).

**Sept. 7, 2020:** Japan-Philippines Summit (by telephone) [held](#) between Abe and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.



**Sept. 9, 2020:** Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and ASEAN+3 Foreign Ministers Meeting are [held](#) online.

**Sept. 12, 2020:** 27<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum is [held](#) online.

**Oct. 12, 2020:** Japan-Vietnam Summit (by telephone) [conducted](#) between new Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

**Oct. 13, 2020:** Japan-Indonesia Summit (by telephone) [held](#) between PM Suga and Indonesia President Joko Widodo.

**Oct. 19, 2020:** Japan-Vietnam Summit [conducted](#) between PM Suga and Vietnamese PM Phuc. Suga meets Chairwoman of National Assembly Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan and Vietnamese General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong. Suga makes courtesy call to Chairman of the Vietnam-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Association Pham Minh Chinh. Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' telephone call between FM Motegi and Indonesian FM Retno Marsudi. Japan-Singapore foreign ministers' telephone call between Motegi and Singaporean Foreign Minister Balakrishnan.

**Oct. 20, 2020:** Japan-Indonesia Summit [held](#) in Indonesia between Suga and Indonesian President Widodo.

**Oct. 21, 2020:** Japan-Laos foreign ministers' telephone [call](#) between Motegi and Laotian Foreign Minister Kommasith. Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' telephone [call](#) between Motegi and Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn.

**Oct. 22, 2020:** Japan-Thailand foreign ministers' telephone call between Motegi and Thai Foreign Minister Don.

**Oct. 23, 2020:** Japan-Philippines Defense Ministers' video teleconference [held](#) between Japanese Defense Minister Kishi and Philippine Defense Minister Lorenzana.

**Oct. 28, 2020:** 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Japan-Philippines High Level Joint Committee on Infrastructure Development and Economic Cooperation is [held](#).

**Oct. 29, 2020:** Japan-Singapore [Summit](#) (by telephone) between Suga and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

**Nov. 2, 2020:** Japan-Indonesia defense ministers' [video teleconference](#) between Kishi and Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo.

**Nov. 12, 2020:** The 23<sup>rd</sup> Japan-ASEAN Summit Meeting is [held](#) online.

**Nov. 13, 2020:** The 12th Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting is [held](#) online.

**Nov. 14, 2020:** 23<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN+3 Summit Meeting and 15th East Asia Summit Meeting are [held](#) online.

**Nov. 16, 2020:** Japan-Vietnam defense ministers' video teleconference [conducted](#) between Defense Minister Kishi and Vietnamese Defense Minister Ngo Xuan Lich.

**Dec. 7, 2020:** Japan-Singapore defense ministers' video [teleconference](#) between Kishi and Singapore Defense Minister Ng.

**Dec. 14, 2020:** Japan-Philippines leaders telephone call [held](#) between Suga and Philippine President Duterte.

**Feb. 1-5, 2021:** Japanese Ministry of Defense/Self-Defense Force [holds](#) online capacity building assistance to Cambodian Military Engineers for UN Peacekeeping Operations (Civil Engineering).

**Feb. 10, 2021:** Japan-Indonesia foreign ministers' telephone [call](#) between Motegi and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi.

**Feb. 25, 2021:** Japan-Brunei foreign minister's telephone call [conducted](#) between Motegi and Bruneian Foreign Minister Erywan bin Pehin Datu Pekerma Jaya Haji Mohd Yusof.

**March 4, 2021:** Japan-Indonesia foreign minister's telephone call [held](#) between Motegi and Indonesian Foreign Minister Marsudi.

**March 8, 2021:** Japan-Thailand foreign minister's telephone call between Motegi and Thai Foreign Minister Don.

**March 22, 2021:** Japan-Vietnam leaders telephone call [held](#) between Suga and Vietnamese General Secretary Trong.

**March 29, 2021:** Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Japan [conducted](#) between Motegi and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi. Japan-Indonesia Defense Ministers' Meeting is held between Kishi and Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto.

**March 30, 2021:** Suga [receives](#) courtesy call by Indonesian Foreign Minister Marsudi and Defense Minister Prabowo. Second Japan-Indonesia Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (“2+2”) held in Japan.

**April 7, 2021:** Japan-Laos Summit telephone [call](#) between Suga and Laotian Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh.

**April 9, 2021:** Japan-Thailand Summit telephone call [held](#) between Suga and Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

**April 15, 2021:** Japan-Malaysia Defense Ministers' telephone [call](#) between DM Kishi and Malaysian DM Ismail Sabri.

**April 20, 2021:** Fourth Japan-ASEAN Seminar on HA/DR is [held](#) online as part of Japan's capacity building program under the Vientiane Vision 2.0.

**April 22, 2021:** Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' telephone [call](#) between FM Motegi and Indonesian FM Marsudi.

**April 27, 2021:** Japan-Vietnam Foreign Ministers' telephone [call](#) between FM Motegi and Vietnamese FM Bui Thanh Son.