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# Grand Strategies in Contested Zones: Japan's Indo-Pacific, China's BRI and Eastern Africa

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## Abstract

Japan's intention of creating a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy will potentially combine the strategic interests of four countries (Japan, India, the US and Australia), the political and economic potential of two continents (Asia and Africa), and two oceans (Indian and Pacific). This vision seeks to improve connectivity, promote stability and foster prosperity in the wider region while also attempting to counter the hegemony of any particular state. Should this nascent strategy be suitably defined and implemented by Japan and its lynchpin partners, it may prove revolutionary in reinforcing the current balance of power across much of the globe. This article looks at Japan's relationship with eastern Africa and attempts to define its policy alternatives vis-à-vis the region by locating them contextually. It argues that states of eastern Africa possess complex foreign policies and a web of connections to rising powers that are often ignored or misunderstood, thus making strategies pursued by large powers such as China, India or Japan potentially fraught with difficulty as they may become enmeshed in regional power squabbles.

## Keywords

Indo-Pacific, Japan, Horn of Africa, Geopolitics, East Africa, Belt and Road Initiative

## Generating an Indo-Pacific Strategy

The term Indo-Pacific is at least a decade old and has been frequently used by Japan since at least 2009. The term reflects a value-laden, normative approach to foreign policy that takes key commonalities between the major partners as a starting point and foundation. For example, according to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, "Both India and Japan place importance on the universal values and strategic interests that we commonly share. Both countries are major Asian democracies and global powers. ...and I'm determined that Japan and India will

lead the way towards peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and the world” (Bhattacharjee 2017).

While Japan’s and India’s interest in each other strategically may be relatively new, the Indo-Pacific idea simply expands the current conceptualization of the Asia-Pacific region to one that includes India and states bordering the Indian Ocean, to include those in eastern Africa and the Middle East. This may be a modest extension of logic given Asia’s breadth as a continent and the importance individual states place on access to maritime shipping lanes. As such, geopolitics throughout the Indo-Pacific can be said to be defined by bays, islands, rivers and oceans and the movement – impeded or unimpeded – of goods and services therefrom (Kaura 2016; Karim 2017). This, then, is at the heart of any Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy as demonstrated by the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) in Manila in November 2017 by Japan, the United States, Australia and India – even though the geographical reach of the Indo-Pacific theater may be understood differently by each state. The QSD was meant to begin translating a new and shared geopolitical understanding of the Indo-Pacific into concrete policy options that envisage “the two oceans as a single security space, which includes India and Japan, is bridged by Australia, and is undergirded by U.S. maritime dominance. The impetus for such a reconceptualization is simple: Japan and India, isolated as they are in their own oceans, want to balance against the Western Pacific’s rising power, China, by uniting under a single geopolitical sphere” (Stratfor 2017).

The repercussions of using the term Indo-Pacific are twofold: it emphasizes two interconnected oceans and demonstrates a primarily maritime focus that necessarily includes India and, to a lesser extent, Africa. As importantly, it links up with Japan and its strong ties with the United State and the West, thus emphasizing a shared, near-global focus as defined by Japan and its vision for the future (SCMP, 2017). An important third implication is that any Indo-Pacific Strategy should not be blithely dismissed. For as much as India, Japan, the United States and Australia differ in their approaches to China, they are certainly united in their concerns over China’s economic and political development strategy for the region. In other words, “Behind the Indo-Pacific you have Japan’s economic support, India’s development speed and Australia’s fears of China, these are all strategic realities.” (Shepherd & Miglani 2017). As such, the Indo-Pacific narrative will inevitably cause discomfort in China; Chinese officials and policymakers tend to bristle at any perceived attempt to contain a rising China (Malik 2014). According to Jia Wenshan at the Beijing-based Center for China and Globalization, “China needs to as soon as possible deal with the Indo-Pacific alliance, as it is absolutely in conflict with Belt and Road [Initiative],” a reference to China’s strategy to establish political, trade and infrastructure ties stretching from China through Central and

Southeast Asia to Africa (Shepherd & Miglani 2017).

### **Eastern Africa's Place in the Indo-Pacific Realm**

Eastern Africa and the western Indian Ocean should arguably form a key part of any strategy developed by Japan, India or others given its strategic geography as the western bookend of this nascent regional construct. While the lengthy coastline of eastern Africa – including the Horn of Africa – may be shown on maps produced by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA Japan 2017) and be an integral part of New Delhi's overall efforts to counter the rise of China in what it views as its "own" Indian Ocean, the importance of the continent to the others Quad members remains imprecise (Yang 2018). For example, Canberra understandably seems concerned about its relationship with China, Japan and other Pacific states to the north even though it also possesses a lengthy Indian Ocean coastline. Eastern Africa almost certainly does not figure in Washington's nascent strategy, which clearly delineates its Indo-Pacific realm as stretching from San Francisco westward to Mumbai on the west coast of India (Lal, 2018). However, this may simply be a way for Washington to delineate the newly-named Indo-Pacific Command's area of operation versus that of US Africa Command (AFRICOM), which is responsible for military operations and military relations with 53 African states and US Central Command (CENTCOM), with its bailiwick stretching across the Middle East to Pakistan's border with India.

### ***Seven States, Competing Interests and Multiple External Actors***

Complications of at least four partners (and likely more) attempting to craft a coherent strategy will certainly be fraught with difficulty. Additionally, the task will not be made any easier in the Quad members' potential engagement with eastern Africa given the sheer geographic size and scale of the region as well its vastly different topographies, political situations, economies and the interests of at least seven sovereign states (Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique) and two de-facto independent or largely autonomous states (Somaliland and Puntland). In addition, eastern Africa, particularly the Horn of Africa, is a contested space and one that is increasingly so. In Somalia alone, Turkey, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Italy, the United Kingdom (UK), the US, China, the United Nations (UN), Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) all have a stake in the political and economic direction Somalia takes. The fact that Somalia is ruled by a weak Somali Federal Government (SFG) whose writ of power barely extends throughout the capital city means influence and attempts to control the outcome of elections or relations with largely autonomous regions are that much more enticing and potentially lucrative to outside states (Cannon forthcoming). In addition, efforts at keeping the peace, security sector reform (SSR) and capacity building – watchwords of

the international community and sacred to multilateralists – often become instruments in the hands of state and non-state actors attempting to further influence political outcomes or extend influence and earn money in a part of the world that is written about often but rarely understood and even less visited, thus allowing for graft and corruption to flourish *ala* Afghanistan, Iraq and other stabilization zones (Fartaag 2014; Fartaag 2016; Cannon 2016a).

***Natural Resources and the Political Economy of Ports***

Eastern Africa, like much of the continent, contains a variety of natural resources, to include critically important carbon resources such as oil and natural gas (Purcell, 2014). While these resources are plentiful, if rather difficult to extract and export, natural deep-water ports and navigable rivers are in short supply. As such, critical infrastructure nodes such as ports are of increased value given the role they play as both entry and exit points to the continent.

**Map 1:** Eastern Africa with capital cities and important ports.



*Source: Wikimedia commons; Peter Fitzgerald, amendments by Burmesedays, East Africa regions map, Names of cities by authorship of the accompanying article, CC BY-SA 3.0.*

Mombasa in Kenya is by far the largest and most critically important port in eastern Africa. It is also the only natural deep-water port of significant size along the entire length of the eastern Africa coast until one reaches Djibouti, at the southern entrance of the Red Sea. Other ports, of course, do exist but these are generally much smaller and cannot accept the largest container vessels and other cargo ships (Gidado 2015).

Ports and port politics are an interesting field of research and offer a window on the interests and domestic political dynamics of host countries as well as those of external states (de Langen, 2007; Humphrey & Schmitz, 2002; 1018). For example, Mogadishu in Somalia is operated by a Turkish company, Albayrak, as part of a 20-year concession (Omar & Sheikh 2014). Berbera port in the de-facto independent but internationally unrecognized Republic of Somaliland is in the process of being refurbished and expanded by DP World of Dubai under a 30-year concessionary agreement signed between DP World, Somaliland and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Cannon & Rossiter, 2017). To the south, Chinese Harbour Engineering Company was contracted by the World Bank and the government of Tanzania to expand the port of Dar es Salaam, the closest rival to Kenya's Mombasa ("Tanzania announces \$421m project" 2017). Bagomoyo, a brown water port on the coast of Tanzania is now owned by China Merchants Holdings International (CMHI) after the Tanzanian government forfeited its share in the port project (Tairo 2017).

Djibouti offers the best example of states attempting to jockey for influence and real estate in the region (Stevis-Gridneff 2018). Strategically located, Djibouti sits astride major sea lanes and offers control to one of the world's major maritime choke holds. It hosts French, US, Chinese, Japanese and Italian military bases with German and Spanish troops hosted at the French base and may soon host a Saudi Arabian base (Mason, 2017; Aglionby & Kerr 2017).<sup>1</sup>

The various port infrastructure that forms the port of Djibouti is currently contested. DP World possessed a 30-year concession to operate Djibouti's most critical port infrastructure, the Doraleh Container Terminal (DCT), but was forcibly removed by the Djiboutian government in February 2018 (Reuters Staff 2018). Djibouti promptly signed a deal with Singapore-based Pacific International Lines (PIL) reportedly to boost traffic to the port (Fick 2018). Yet the previous August (2017), PIL had signed a memorandum of understanding with China Merchants Port Holdings which it described as a "strategic alliance" and "another result" of

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<sup>1</sup> Djibouti is reportedly one of the major connection points on Huawei's Pakistan East Africa Cable Express (PEACE) submarine cable, which aims to connect South Asia (and China) with Eastern Africa. Huawei began Desk Study and Marine Survey works in 2017 and the project linking the Chinese-built, Pakistani port of Gwadar with Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya is slated for completion in 2019 (Wamathai 2018)

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Bloomberg Staff 2018). As various states such as the US and France expressed concern, Djibouti announced that it would give DCT to the Chinese outright. At the time of writing, DCT reportedly remained in Djiboutian government hands, possibly on account of concerns raised by Washington and significant investment on the part of France and Saudi Arabia (Africa Intelligence 2018; Fick 2018). However, perhaps a formal handover to a Chinese company was unnecessary given the reported stake already held by the Chinese state-owned China Merchants in the DCT through Port de Djibouti, a holding company that owns a two-thirds stake in the container terminal (Bloomberg Staff 2017).

Ports are often the locus of military bases and the case of eastern Africa is no exception. Somalia now hosts a Turkish base just outside Mogadishu. More of a training facility than a proper base, the Turks plan to train 20,000 Somali officers and soldiers to form a Somali National Army (SNA). This means Somalia will have a truly national army capable of projecting force throughout the length and breadth of Somalia and perhaps outside Somalia (Rossiter & Cannon 2018). This has alarmed regional and international actors and has contributed to a small arms race and "scramble" for territory in the region. In Somaliland, the UAE has an agreement to build a military base and use an airport at Berbera, next to DP World's port concession. The UAE also maintains a naval facility at Assab in Eritrea and there have been rumors in Somaliland that Russia may build a base in Zeyla (Zaylac) on the Somaliland coast, marking a Russian return to the Indian Ocean for the first time since the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

Qatar has reportedly agreed to finance a deal signed by Turkey with Sudan to rebuild the port of Suakin on the Red Sea, angering both Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the process (Dorsey 2018). The US maintains a small naval presence at Lamu, in Kenya and is reportedly building a rather large military facility in the interior of Somalia at Baledogle (Goldbaum 2018; O'Connor 2018). In addition to this activity, an Indian naval vessel, *INS Sarkevshak*, visited Dar es Salaam in late 2017, where the ship and crew formed part of a survey mission and participated in joint exercises with the Tanzanian Navy (AT Editor 2017) and Tanzanian naval personnel have also been trained in India at the National Institute of Hydrography (Pruthi 2017). In mid-2017, a Chinese naval fleet comprised of a destroyer, guided-missile frigate and a supply vessel visited Dar es Salaam for a friendly visit including cultural events and sports competitions between the two naval forces (Xinhua 2017). Beyond the ports, military exercises and natural resource exploitation efforts, China is also reportedly interested in constructing a new port on the central Somalia coast at Hobyo (Halbeeg Staff 2018) and is one of a handful of

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<sup>2</sup> Author's interview with a Republic of Somaliland government official. May 12, 2018, Berbera, Somaliland.

countries that maintains an embassy in Mogadishu, thus signaling Somalia is now a target of Chinese investment as part of its BRI strategy.

### *China and Eastern Africa*

China has already built a standard gauge railroad connecting Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, to the port of Djibouti for a reported US\$3.6 billion (Kacungira 2017). Chinese companies are also prospecting for oil and gas in eastern Ethiopia close to the Somali border, the object of past and perhaps future Somali irredentism (Mayall 1978).<sup>3</sup> In late June 2018, Chinese firm Poly-GCL Petroleum Group Holdings Limited (Poly-GCL) and the government of Ethiopia began test production of the first barrel of Ethiopian crude oil - after striking oil in March 2018 (Xinhua Staff 2018). But China is not the only country building big infrastructure and investing in Ethiopia. Italy is constructing what will become Africa's largest dam on the Blue Nile, angering Egypt in the process ("Italy's Salini Impregilo to build" 2016). Ethiopia is also Turkey's biggest investment destination in Africa with over 160 investment projects owned by Turkish companies and US\$2.5 billion invested thus far (Derso 2018).

Further south, China recently completed the first and arguably most critical section of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) running from the port of Mombasa to Kenya's capital, Nairobi. This US\$3.4 billion railroad has reportedly revolutionized travel between Nairobi and the coast, bringing a domestic tourism boom to Kenya's north and south coast beaches (Kacungira 2017). But Kenya is also massively in debt to China - reportedly owing over US\$7 billion - thus raising concerns of possible meddling in internal Kenyan affairs (Kaiman 2017).

In Tanzania railroads are being built by China, Turkey and others. Tanzania will also host an oil pipeline stretching from Uganda's oil fields to the port of Tanga on the Indian Ocean. This route will bypass Kenya entirely and contradicts a previous feasibility study by Toyota Tsusho that advocated a northern route across Kenya to the new port that was supposed to be built by Japanese and Chinese companies and loans at Lamu (Musisi & Muhumuza 2016). France's Total, which has major stakes in Uganda's oil fields and also throughout the Rift Valley was opposed to the northern route and pushed with Uganda to fund the southern route through Tanga. However, China also has major oil interests in Uganda and was said to be unhappy with a pipeline connection through Kenya (Abdallah 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> Former Somalia president Mohamed Siad Barre (1969-1991), successfully fielded an invasion of Ethiopia during the Ogaden War (1977-1978). The advance of Somalia National Army (SNA) troops and those of the West Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) - composed of ethnic Somalis living in the Ogaden in eastern Ethiopia - were only repulsed after the Soviet Union and Cuba intervened on the side of the embattled Marxist regime in Addis Ababa. The memory of this near-defeat has informed Ethiopian foreign policy since then and Ethiopia can be said to have taken advantage of the disintegration of Somalia that has occurred as a result of the Somali Civil War.

Mozambique has massive gas reserves and is a contested zone of both Japan and China along with Portuguese companies and South Africa. But Mozambique, like much of the rest of eastern Africa offers an interesting perspective on Japan's strengths and staying power in the region as well as the complications of operating in such a contested region.

### **Exchanging Vision for Strategy and Japan's Role**

At present, no concrete policy or institutional body has emerged within the Indo-Pacific partnership that would take the lead on defining policy and strategy. While an articulation of such a broad and important strategy by Quad state leaders certainly makes sense, the challenge for Japan as well as its lynchpin partners will lie less in how it makes the case for an Indo-Pacific Strategy than in how it will concretely align this multi-regional vision with broader domestic and wider global considerations in the coming months and years. While there is a distinct possibility that the Indo-Pacific concept will rapidly develop by strengthening existing military and defense cooperation between the US, Australia and Japan, and proceed a bit slower with India, other strategic elements remain uncharted (Lohman et al 2015; Bej 2017; Weinrod 2018; Colby 2018). In essence, if the policies that support such a broad, multi-faceted and value-laden strategy remain uninformed and unguided by a strategic vision that seeks to define the Indo-Pacific world for the next 50-100 years the strategy will be a failure. In other words, a short-term, quick-fix solution is not a strategy.

Understanding what FOIP is to Japan is critical. First it must be understood that Tokyo's FOIP is currently version 2.0. Prime Minister Abe attempted to inaugurate version 1.0 of Japan's Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2006-2007 when he addressed the Indian Parliament in August 2007 and famously spoke of the "Confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans" (Kuo 2018).<sup>4</sup> However, Abe and his vision failed on two counts. One, the geopolitical climate at the time favored rapprochement with China (Madan 2017). This was the case not only for Japan but also for India and Australia and, to a lesser extent, the US (Cherian 2007; Kandamath 2016; McDonnell 2007; Hartcher 2007b; Burns 2007). Two, PM Abe stepped down from power before any significant policies were explicated and put in place (Onishi 2007).

One decade later, a broader, if reinvigorated FOIP Version 2.0 has emerged as a direct answer to China's BRI and shared concerns about China's "inconsiderate" actions as a great power.<sup>5</sup> Madan (2017) presciently noted some of the many

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<sup>4</sup> The origins of an Indo-Pacific Strategy emerged in 2006 when Japanese prime ministerial candidate Shinzo Abe argued for a values-based foreign policy that was limited as well as focused, and for closer ties with Australia and India. After Abe was elected Prime Minister, Taro Aso, his foreign minister renewed the call and acted as a driving force behind Japan's FOIP version 1.0.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating famously noted in 2007 response that China would be a



concerns: “In Australia, there’s the subject of Chinese influence in politics and universities. For India, there are face-offs at the border, the effect of One Belt, One Road and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on its strategic landscape, and China blocking its Nuclear Suppliers’ Group membership. For Japan, there is the dispute over the Senkaku Islands and the targeting of Japanese companies. In the United States, there is economic espionage, allegedly sponsored by Chinese government. If Beijing is wondering why the countries feel a [FOIP] might be necessary, it might want to look in the mirror.”

Given the importance and complexity associated with any negotiations leading to a defined Indo-Pacific Strategy, an attempt to locate policy alternatives for Japan that are vital as well as visionary was attempted. Accordingly, and based on this research<sup>6</sup> and the growing body of literature surrounding the strategy, the author assesses there are five major policy alternatives that could form the foundation of Japan’s Indo-Pacific Strategy:

1. Energy security: oil and gas
2. Economic security: trade relations with the Indo-Pacific region
3. Maritime security: free and open oceans
4. Strategic partnership: shared responsibility of Indo-Pacific Strategy for Japan, India, the United States and Australia
5. Strategic engagement with the Indian Ocean Basin: Japan’s relationship with eastern Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia

Japan’s FOIP strategy, in its nascent incarnation, is reportedly being defined and driven by PM Abe himself, the National Security Council (NSC) – itself a creation of PM Abe during his first tenure in office and reconstituted in 2013 - as well as National Security Advisor Shotaro Yachi and former Prime Minister and current Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Taro Aso. It is reportedly informed by three fundamental points.<sup>7</sup>

1. Any FOIP strategy and supporting policies must expand Japan’s relationships and partnerships with emerging powers such as India, not just strengthen Japan’s relationship with the US. Additionally, Tokyo must convince Washington as well as New Delhi and Canberra that it is *the* indispensable partner for peace and prosperity not just in northeast Asia but in the wider Indo-Pacific realm. It may also be wise to convince oth-

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“considerate” power (Hartcher 2007a)

<sup>6</sup> The author was a Visiting Research Scholar at Seikei University’s Center for Asian and Pacific Studies (CAPS) under the aegis of Professor Kei Hakata in mid-2018.

<sup>7</sup> Author’s interview with a Japanese Member of Parliament. June 20, 2018, Tokyo, Japan.

ers in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) of the same (Cabellero-Anthony 2014; Chongkittavorn 2018).

2. According to the policymakers currently in power in Tokyo, the time of engagement with China is over for the time being. Indeed, the drivers of the FOIP in Tokyo have concluded that China is naturally an outsider to the international order composed of democratic, liberal market states (Tatlow 2018). The view that China has different political and economic values that make its entry into that order inimical and counterproductive informs Japan's response and its desire to for a robust, multilateral FOIP (Bader 2005; Ryall 2018).
3. FOIP has a major domestic component in Japan: a revision of the post-War Japanese spirit with its emphasis on apology for the past. In contradistinction, FOIP seeks to imbue an equally powerful sense of pride and affirmation in Japan's past to complement what has perhaps been an undue emphasis on the culture of the sorry state (Lupton, 2015; Savić, 2013 p. 129; Seybolt 2018).

Of course, underscoring these fundamental points and their development as a bonafide strategy leads to a major question and a second, critical point: Are the FOIP policy options and vision of PM Abe and his ruling party politically feasible in Japan? The normative post-War consensus in Japan has been fundamental to shaping multi-generational views of Japan's role in the world (Smith 2015). Attempts to shift dialogue away from this consensus - let alone operationalize policies and strategies that would energize Japan's political role in the FOIP realm - are fraught with difficulty, considerably weighty and of such a magnitude that they cannot be discussed at any length here. Suffice to say that it is precisely because of these significant hurdles that Japan's FOIP, both version 1.0 and 2.0, emphasize shared values, economic development and commercial ties between the two continents of Asia and Africa. In other words, Japan's strategy, such as it currently is, will continue to rest on the twin pillars of business and development albeit perhaps more strategically. This is not only to avoid egregiously and irreparably antagonizing China but, equally importantly, to avoid antagonizing significant domestic opposition to any perceived attempts to change Japan's foreign policy options to something more proactively political and, indeed, even military (Hirata 2016; Kallender & Hughes 2018). It is also necessary to avoid alienating its own FOIP partners which may value, depending on the situation, a rapprochement with China or maintenance of the status quo (Miyake 2018; Swaine 2018).

Significantly, any attempts by the current Abe administration to further develop a viable FOIP strategy will reportedly be prosecuted in a multilateral setting with

as many partners as possible.<sup>8</sup> This is both a strength and weakness. For example, working with ASEAN is arguably crucial if Japan wishes to fully engage South-east Asia. Japan's view of China's rise and Chinese efforts associated with BRI and other foreign policy strategies are often shared by other members of ASEAN.<sup>9</sup> But the headache associated with pinning Japan's FOIP to ASEAN also means that the strategy may never become a strategy.

Third, Japan reportedly has plans to expand the FOIP "membership" to other strategic partners. Indeed, until flooding in Japan led him to remain in Tokyo, PM Abe was to have invited France to join the FOIP during a planned visit to Paris in July 2018 ('Japan Foreign Minister Kono' 2018). The same invitation will also reportedly be extended to the UK. Both states' territorial holdings, assets and significant interests in the Indian as well as Pacific Oceans indicate that Tokyo's policymakers and politicians are keen to ensure a strategic partnership also coalesces in the region that could potentially act against Chinese aggression (Hutt 2017).

This leads to a prescient question. What would this strategic partnership, perhaps even a more robust defense alignment protect? Or what would it stand for? Certainly, a Chinese attack against Taiwan would likely be answered. But what about an attack on the Senkaku Islands? Obviously, this is of extreme interest to Tokyo. But what about Canberra? Or Washington? The hypothetical scenarios become even less robust as one moves further afield from the western Pacific to the Indian Ocean. These questions are – or arguably should be – in the minds of FOIP's developers and supporters in Tokyo, Canberra and elsewhere.

### *Japan and Eastern Africa*

In the eastern Africa context, Tokyo's perspective is currently difficult to divine and will reportedly be forthcoming at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) VII in 2019 in Yokohama.<sup>10</sup><sup>11</sup> However, the political and economic diplomacy of the Abe administration vis-à-vis eastern Africa already shows some marked differences with those of its predecessors. There are reportedly efforts afoot to target certain countries as investment destinations and engage more fulsomely on the political front. Yes, certain countries figure more prominently in the foreign policies of states than others, and relations with those countries will accordingly be prioritized. In eastern Africa these include Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. Kenya is already the location of major Japanese in-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Author's interview with Professor Ken Jimbo, June 19, 2018. Canon Institute, Tokyo, Japan.

<sup>10</sup> Author's interview with Professor Sadaharu Kataoka, June 25, 2018. Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan.

<sup>11</sup> The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) is a conference held regularly with the objective "to promote high-level policy dialogue between African leaders and development partners." Japan is a co-host of these conferences.

vestment and commercial interest.<sup>12 13</sup> Japan Ports Consulting (JPC) is in the midst of a US\$247 million overhaul and expansion of the port of Mombasa (Wahome, 2015). Nippon Koei is reportedly responsible for the larger development and building of special economic zones (SEZs), berths, bridges and bypasses associated with the Dongo Kundu Port Area and maintains offices in Nairobi as well as Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Nippon Koei, 2018). Importantly, JPC and Nippon Koei are not shareholders in the port.<sup>14</sup> Nor do they have concessionary agreements with Kenya as the UAE does in Berbera and Turkey does in Mogadishu (Cannon & Rossiter 2018). In the case of JPC, it has been working in Mombasa since 2006 to this end, and the port expansion has now been extended to five phases, thus leading to work for potentially the next 40 years.

Japanese business delegations regularly accompany PM Abe on foreign trips. Additionally, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has reportedly developed a keen interest in supporting and expanding projects in eastern Africa such as those surrounding the port of Nacala in Mozambique, where Japanese financing and industry are building and expanding what is arguably the best natural harbor in southeastern Africa (JICA, 2012).<sup>15</sup> Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Sumitomo and Marubeni are Japanese multinationals which have offices and projects in major East African states.

### **Countering China's Rise and Enhancing International Norms**

Much has been written about Japan's historical role in eastern Africa (Morikawa 1997; Sato 2004; Cornelissen 2004; Morikawa 2005; Sato 2007; Lehman 2010; Endo 2013). More recently, scholars have focused on a perceived competition between China and Japan on the continent (Mensah 2015; Pigato & Tang 2015; Zhao 2017). The rise of China certainly does seem to pose obstacles for Japan and, indeed, any other state wishing to engage eastern African states (Ayodele & Sotola 2014; Cornelissen, Cheru & Shaw 2016; Rugumamu 2017). However, in the case of China and Japan, their strategic competition on a global level and sharp disagreements on international values and norms mean that the stakes are that much higher.

Chinese engagement in Africa is driven by the need to acquire resources, secure diplomatic support, access markets, and expand investment to sustain its rapid

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<sup>12</sup> Author's interview with a Japanese Member of Parliament, June 20, 2018. Tokyo, Japan.

<sup>13</sup> Author's interview with Professor Tsutomu Kikuchi, June 27, 2018. Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), Tokyo, Japan.

<sup>14</sup> Author's interview with representatives of JPC, July 3, 2018. Tokyo, Japan.

<sup>15</sup> Naturally blessed with a depth of 14 meters, Nacala Port is the best natural harbor in southeastern Africa and has a high potential. Currently, the port serves as a pivotal port for exports and imports in northern Mozambique. It is expected that the port will grow as the gateway to the Nacala Corridor, which has a population of approximately 45 million people.

economic growth and contain or eliminate competition from adversaries operating in the region (Onjala, 2008; Mlambo, Kushamba and Simawu 2016; Baseda & O'Bright, 2016; Mason, 2016). From this perspective, China differs little from Japan, many European Union states or medium powers such as Turkey (Cannon 2016b). Where China stands apart is in its aggressive acquisition of massive development projects (Eom, 2016). In doing so, China is filling a key gap in infrastructure, to include airports, ports, roads and railways that have often been neglected since colonial times (Brautigam, 2009). Additionally, these projects and aid reportedly comes with fewer strings attached than that of traditional Western partners as well as Japan (Zhao, 2014; Hackenesch, 2015). China seems to be little concerned with human rights, promoting transparency and good governance, instead emphasizing non-interference in domestic affairs and the promotion of a culturally relativist notion of human rights (Mlambo, Kushamba and Simawu, 2016; Cornelissen & Taylor, 2000). But Chinese projects also come with significant price tags and the percentage of interest on Chinese loans is often triple those of Japanese projects (Heubl 2017).<sup>16</sup>

Though the popular discourse may be more hyperbole than a reflection of the reality, China's initiatives and development, including its expanding interests and influence in Africa have reportedly been a priority for the Japanese public and government and attracted much media coverage (Rose 2012; Fukushima 2016; Nihon Keizai Shimbun 2012; Nihon Keizai Shimbun 2017). This has galvanized Japan's attempts to more vigorously engage Africa (Lehman 2010). This leads to a critical seventh point with four accompanying prescriptive suggestions for maintaining and strengthening Japan's relationship with eastern African states. The critical point is this: Japan cannot compete on the same scale as China in eastern Africa or anywhere else. Indeed, no country can compete with China in terms of scale. This means Japanese businesses must focus on critical strengths and exploit the weaknesses inherent in certain Chinese sectors.

Despite competition from China with concomitant reductions in the share of Japan's trade with Africa, there are some opportunities for Japan to turn the tables on China if only to increase its own business and profile there. First, Japan could capitalize on criticisms of Chinese investments and projects, including allegations of Chinese activities resulting in unfair trade and labor practices as well as harming the environment (Zezeza 2008 pp 183; Tan-Mullins 2015; Tan-Mullins, Urban & Mang, 2017). Second, China's growing involvement in Africa is not a zero-sum game. Chinese involvement does not necessarily mean or result in fewer contracts for Japan (Sim 2016), even though China's economic power may give it a diplomatic edge over Japan. Third, Japan could continue to distinguish itself from China by highlighting the quality of its work and products that offer a

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<sup>16</sup> Author's interview with representatives of JPC, July 3, 2018. Tokyo, Japan.

foundation for more sustainable and desirable development than China's emphasis on speed and cost (Aglionby 2016; Michira & Omondi 2016). At TICAD VI, Japan sought to emphasize precisely this - and to explain away the generally higher price tags by pointing to lower interest rates (Yu-Wen Chen & Hodzi 2016). Japanese minister Shinsuke Suematsu blatantly argued Japan offered high quality products at higher prices and that, unlike China, Japan was interested in transferring technology to Africans, particularly through the employment of locals. However, Japan will need to win over some East African skeptics and an elite who are attracted to cheap Chinese capital as well as the offer of bribes and laundered money available from the tendering process and construction projects (Michira & Omondi 2016). Fourth, Japan must realize it is jockeying for influence, projects and resources not only with China but a host of non-traditional and increasingly influential states (Stolte 2013; White 2013; Cannon 2016b). As such, it can shift focus from civil works and infrastructure to consulting and equipment supply, where its firms such as Toyota Tsusho, Mitsubishi and others have an edge over their Chinese competitors. Additionally, Japan could adopt a strategy used by China and issue loans in phases for larger projects (Eom, 2016). This, coupled with low interest rates could pave the way for further projects such as the Mombasa port.

Where Japanese firms are at a distinct disadvantage, however, is in the realm of direct business ventures in eastern Africa given the reported disconnect between government and business. Based on the author's research, it appears that Japanese government entities are so vigilant in avoiding even the whiff of favoritism that they tend to lean the opposite direction and fail to support Japanese business ventures in more risk-prone regions such as eastern Africa.

On the political front, the number of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and business deals signed during PM Abe's state visits appear most encouraging. But the reality is that many of these never materialize.<sup>17</sup> This occurs for three reasons. First, funding never becomes available from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), for example. Second, bids are not accepted either by the Japanese government or the host state government. Third, Japanese businesses often refuse to perform direct work for African governments because of the risks involved and fears of lack of payment for goods and services provided.

## **Conclusion**

Japan's FOIP strategy, as it develops, will almost certainly have an overt political component. This means Japan will become a truly political actor for the first time since 1945 - albeit without a traditional military component. As such, Japan's FOIP may prove revolutionary for Japan as well as the Indo-Pacific region. How-

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<sup>17</sup> Author's interview with a Japanese academic, June 19, 2018. Tokyo, Japan.

ever, Japan will continue to focus on three main areas of potential cooperation and capacity building in its FOIP engagement with eastern African states, likely downplaying its political role as much as possible. These will be pushed because they do not necessarily contain an overt political component, but do support Japan's overall goals as part of a nascent FOIP strategy. They also are politically feasible in the domestic setting in Japan. The first focus comes under the rubric of enhancing resiliency in the region. This includes putting a stop to illegal fishing and assistance in developing capacity to respond to natural and manmade disasters. A case in point would be Japan's work with the International Peace Support Training Centre in Nairobi where it assists in training as part of the UN Project for African Rapid Deployment of Engineering Capabilities (ARDEC) (MOFA Japan, 2016). Second, Japan will likely attempt to enhance connectivity within regions in Africa. This could be done under the rubric of existing regional bodies and agreements such as the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU). However, a note of caution is required. The initiatives and organizations reportedly attuned to fostering African connectivity are legion and yet regional integration in East Africa, for example, remains relatively low. Mistrust, popular stereotypes and post-independence grievances have conspired to limit connectivity. While initiatives and the funds associated therewith may be welcome in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Kampala, there must also be a realization that not much is likely to happen on this front even though it makes economic sense.

Enhancing the normative aspects of the post-WWII liberal/democratic order as part of Japan's FOIP strategy is the final point. Rule of law, access to markets as well as secure and open shipping lanes are cornerstones of this order. Japan not only wishes to protect these, but must do so in order to secure vital materials and maintain its preeminent politico-economic position.

Many of the normative aspects of Japan's FOIP are arguably shared by its strategic and economic partners in this endeavor. They are also, in general, shared by African states simply because the elite tend to benefit from increased competition between external partners. No place is this more apparent than in eastern Africa where Japan and China's rivalry, despite being depicted as a David vs. Goliath encounter in demographic terms is yielding benefits to African countries in general. This contradicts the Swahili saying *wapiganapo fahali warwili, ziuniazo ni nyasi* (when two bulls fight, the grass suffers). Significantly, certain African elites have taken notice of this rivalry and are capitalizing on it. In the run up to the 2016 TICAD VI summit in Nairobi, Kenyan Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary Amina Mohamed referring to Japan-China rivalry quipped that "there is competition between everybody. It is a small market place." It is therefore up to African businesspeople and politicians to take advantage of this competition for their

benefit. Japan should engage this contested and complicated region consistently on both bilateral and multilateral fronts with India, Australia, the US and other partners to include China where applicable. It should do so in order to achieve at least some of the nascent aims and vision of what could be a revolutionary FOIP strategy.

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