

# THE RISING SUN IN INDIA-JAPAN RELATIONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Japan

Contrary to the expectations of many, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has turned out to be a true successor of his predecessor, Shinzo Abe, on the foreign policy front. His visit to the United States last month has set the agenda for the wider Indo-Pacific engagement of Tokyo and its evolving priorities.

Right at the outset, it was clear that the crux of the discussions during this first in-person meeting between the newly anointed President of the United States, Joe Biden, and Mr. Suga would revolve around China. To begin with, Tokyo and Washington drilled down to brass tacks on their joint security partnership given the need to address China's recent belligerence in territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas as well as in the Taiwan Strait. Both sides affirmed the centrality of their treaty alliance, for long a source of stability in East Asia, and pledged to stand up to China in key regional flashpoints such as the disputed Senkaku Islands and Taiwan. Reflecting the changed nature of conflict, both sides acknowledged the importance of extended deterrence *vis-à-vis* China through cooperation on cybersecurity and space technology.

Discussions also touched upon Chinese ambitions to dominate the development of new age technologies such as 5G and quantum computing. Given China's recent pledge to invest a mammoth \$1.4 trillion in emerging technologies, Washington and Tokyo scrambled to close the gap by announcing a Competitiveness and Resilience Partnership, or CoRe (<https://bit.ly/3eN6DIT>). The two allies earmarked billions in funding for the deployment of secure 5G networks, committed to building digital infrastructure in developing countries and promised to collaborate on setting global digital standards. Both sides have also signalled their intent to continue the Trump-era policy of pressure on China to reform economic practices such as "violations of intellectual property rights, forced technology transfer, excess capacity issues, and the use of trade distorting industrial subsidies" (<https://bit.ly/2Sbb81H>).

Tokyo and Washington also rallied around the standard of shared values. Both powers repeatedly emphasised their vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific that respects the rule of law, freedom of navigation, democratic norms and the use of peaceful means to settle disputes. In the aftermath of the successful Quad Summit (<https://bit.ly/2Rfcp7n>), both parties expressed their continued support for the four-nation grouping of the United States, India, Australia and Japan. China's human rights violations in Xinjiang, its heavy-handed suppression of protests in Hong Kong and military aggression towards Taiwan came in for heavy criticism.

Given that the Japanese premier plans to visit India as soon as the situation permits following the COVID-19 pandemic, his dealings with the U.S. are a preview of what New Delhi can expect from Tokyo.

First, one can expect a continuation of the balancing security policy against China that began with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe in 2014. During a phone call with the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Suga expressed concern over China's "unilateral" actions in the East and South China Seas, Xinjiang and Hong Kong. Crucially, India's clashes with China in Galwan have turned public opinion in favour of a more confrontational China policy.

In just a decade, New Delhi and Tokyo have expanded high-level ministerial and bureaucratic contacts, conducted joint military exercises and concluded military pacts such as the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) logistics agreement. Further, no meeting would be

complete without an affirmation of New Delhi and Tokyo's support for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and continued willingness to work with the Quad, which is fast emerging as a central pillar of the security strategies of both nations. A Modi-Suga meeting, accompanied by the planned 2+2 Ministerial meetings, will likely aim to take stock of the state of play in the security relationship while also pushing the envelope on the still nascent cooperation on defence technology and exports.

Second, the two powers will look to expand cooperation in sectors such as cybersecurity and emerging technologies. During the Shinzo Abe years, New Delhi and Tokyo put together a digital research and innovation partnership that ran the gamut of technologies from AI and 5G to the Internet of Things and space research. As with the U.S.-Japan summit, Mr. Suga and Mr. Modi may look to deepen cooperation between research institutes and expand funding in light of China's aforementioned technology investment programme. It is yet unclear whether Mr. Suga will attempt to stir the pot and bring up the disagreements over India's insistence on data localisation and continued reluctance to accede to global cybersecurity agreements such as the Budapest Convention.

Third, economic ties and infrastructure development are likely to be top drawer items on the agendas of New Delhi and Tokyo. While Japan has poured in around \$34 billion in investments into the Indian economy over the course of the last two decades, Japan is only India's 12th largest trading partner (<https://bit.ly/3xENISD>), and trade volumes between the two stand at just a fifth of the value of India-China bilateral trade. A Modi-Suga summit will likely reaffirm Japan's support for key manufacturing initiatives such as 'Make in India' and the Japan Industrial Townships. Further, India will be keen to secure continued infrastructure investments in the strategically vital connectivity projects currently under way in the Northeast and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Finally, a Suga-Modi Summit would undoubtedly devote much attention to evolving a joint strategy towards key third countries and multilateral bodies. In years past, New Delhi and Tokyo have collaborated to build infrastructure in Iran and Africa, provide vital aid to Myanmar and Sri Lanka and hammer out a common Association of Southeast Asian Nations outreach policy in an attempt to counter China's growing influence in these corners of the globe. However, unlike previous summits, the time has come for India and Japan to take a hard look at reports suggesting that joint infrastructure projects in Africa and Iran have stalled with substantial cost overruns. Tokyo will also likely continue its charm offensive on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in an attempt to get New Delhi to reverse its decision not to join the massive trade compact.

Writing in 2006, Shinzo Abe, in his book, *Utsukushii Kuni E* (Toward a Beautiful Country), expressed his hope that "it would not be a surprise if in another 10 years, Japan-India relations overtake Japan-U.S. and Japan-China relations". Thus far, New Delhi has every reason to believe that Japan's Yoshihide Suga is willing to make that dream a reality.

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

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