

JAPAN'S DIPLOMATIC BLUE BOOK 2024- KEY TAKEAWAYS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



On April 16, 2024 the Foreign Ministry of Japan released its Diplomatic Bluebook for the year 2024. The book gives a roundup of Japan's diplomatic profile in the past year and it also puts forth the Japanese perspective regarding the international developments and its own policy direction. The Bluebook describes the international situation as being "a major turning point in the history" particularly in the context of war in Gaza and the Russia-Ukraine conflict.¹ Additionally, through the book, Tokyo focuses on the notions like "human dignity", "rule of law", and efforts for promoting a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).² Although the policy document covers a lot of areas like the Japan-U.S. alliance, the security environment in the region, and special initiatives for human development by Japan, one of the major highlights of this document is Japan's willingness and acceptance of the need for cooperation with China. For the first time in five years, while referring to China, it has used the phrase "mutually

1 The Japan Times, "Diplomatic Bluebook: Japan Must Actively Work for International Cooperation", Published on April 25, 2024
<https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/editorial/yomiuri-editorial/20240425-182364/>

2 "Diplomatic Bluebook 2024," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100653233.pdf>

beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests” which indicates that the two states are making efforts to break the ice. ³

The 2024 Diplomatic Bluebook- Key Takeaways

Some of the core themes and essential takeaways from the Bluebook are outlined below:

- The world at large is in a state of crises and huge transformational changes could be witnessed in the international order. The Russia-Ukraine war and Israel’s war in Gaza reflect a highly volatile global atmosphere. In such difficult times, there is a need to advocate principles of fairness, transparency and predictability in international relations. On the brighter side, in the current order, a growing trend for international cooperation can be seen. International cooperation among developing and developed states can increase interdependence which in turn can bring a certain level of stability and economic growth to the international community. In order to ensure global development and peace, there is a need to peacefully resolve the conflicts and work towards tackling the issues which pose a threat to the global community.

- While the international order faces serious challenges, it is the “Global South” which faces very serious threats both of traditional and non-traditional nature which pose existential threats. Under such conditions, multilateralism centred around the United Nations is encountering a lot of problems. In order to ensure peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region, all the states in the region should collectively work towards achieving stability in the region.⁴ Japan has consistently followed the path of a peaceful nation since the end of the war and has been playing its part to maintain and strengthen the International Order. Japan, while respecting the diversity of each country, supports the idea of a ‘fair economic order’ and will provide support to and cooperate with other countries from the region for free and fair trade. Japan fully advocates for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) for trade. This is the cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy and achieving it is a top priority. Unquestionably, Japan will make efforts to firmly protect its national interests; existence; listen to the voices of the people; and work for the welfare of the people.

³ The Japan Times, “Diplomatic Bluebook: Japan Must Actively Work for International Cooperation”, Published on April 25, 2024

<https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/editorial/yomiuri-editorial/20240425-182364/>

⁴ Ibid

- At present, Japan faces a very complex security situation since the World War II. The world today is witnessing deep-seated polarization which is leading to territorial disputes and economic fallouts, which is resulting in further instability. In the midst of this current global crisis, Japan's National Security Strategy lays down the framework to strengthen itself internally and externally by protecting its seas, airspace and the lives and the property of its people. Moreover, Tokyo will actively continue to further strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance as this alliance is the linchpin of its foreign policy and security.
- In the modern times of interconnectedness and interdependence, Japan is trying to display itself on the global stage as an economic-centric nation that is flexible and cooperative. Tokyo wants to work with its immediate and extended neighbourhood through frameworks like Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and Pacific Economic Framework (PEF). The year 2024 marks the 60th anniversary of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).⁵ Japan will have the presidency of the OECD Ministerial Council this year and it wishes to work closely with like-minded countries and allies for regional progress and will make efforts to promote a free and fair rule-based economy.
- In order to maintain peace and stability in Japan and within the region, there is a need to have stable relations with the immediate and extended neighbours. To achieve this, there is a need for a complete revival of Japan-China relations. Both countries should work together to resolve the conflicts in the South China Sea, specifically the Senkaku Islands dispute. Both Japan and China are major powers in the region and therefore hold the responsibility of ensuring peace and prosperity in the region. Both the countries should continue to have a dialogue on various issues of mutual concern and need to work together in a constructive manner.
- With Republic of Korea (ROK), Japan has good ties. The two countries have joint cooperation in various fields and will be further expanding their cooperation in trade, education, science and technology. Japan and ROK will enter into a new era of joint development and prosperity together. Additionally, there is a need to form an extensive cooperation framework between Japan-China, and ROK. This will contribute in regional peace and stability.

⁵ The Japan Times, "Diplomatic Bluebook: Japan Must Actively Work for International Cooperation", Published on April 25, 2024
<https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/editorial/yomiuri-editorial/20240425-182364/>

- With regards to Russia, the two states share a difficult relationship particularly after the Russia-Ukraine war. However, Japan wishes to resume its projects with Russia and work together to resolve Kuril Islands dispute.
- Japan wants to expand relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and wants to undertake the Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative (CCI) to expand cooperation with the region and explore different avenues for collaboration. In this connection, Japan-ASEAN Special Summit was held in December 2023 in which a framework was drawn for future cooperation. Furthermore, Japan wants to have a comprehensive strategic partnership for peace and prosperity with all the ASEAN states in the region and beyond.
- In order to ensure global peace and progress, it is crucial to work collectively to deal with climate-related issues, over-population, and global health issues. The United Nations can play an effective role in bringing the countries together achieving the goals of peace and prosperity. In this context, the United Nations “Future Summit” will be held in September 2024, in which all these challenges will be deliberated upon. Japan will actively play its part to achieve the goal of “people-centred international cooperation”. It will work for human rights, diplomacy, peace-building, counter-terrorism, nuclear disarmament, etc. Furthermore, Japan will actively work towards achieving the goal of “Women, Peace and Security (WPS)”. This is one of the major principles of Japanese foreign policy and it will continue to make efforts to exert and re-exert its importance.
- The people of a state are its key to diplomacy. Therefore, in order to have effective and constructive diplomacy, there is a need to have comprehensive diplomatic and consular reforms which should be implemented on timely basis. It is important to ensure the safety of Japanese nationals in case of emergencies, and for this efforts should be made to strengthen overseas diplomatic establishments.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Bluebook puts forth Japan's world view and its diplomatic and political approach in dealing with other countries. Although Tokyo maintains its diplomatic and political position regarding its allies, neighbours and disputes, the use of the phrase “mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests” with reference to China is noteworthy. This term was initially coined by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2006,

who used it to describe his vision for Japan-China relationship.⁶ This illustrates that Japan unquestionably wants to have a stable and cooperative relationship with China. Furthermore, the report also draws out the comprehensive and evolving diplomatic frameworks of Japan and how they have proved to be important and useful when it comes to its relations with allies and like-minded states.

Although some of the key points from the Bluebook were well-received, there were a lot of reservations regarding Japan's positions on different islands in China, ROK and Russia; for instance, Senkaku, Dokdo/Takeshima and Kuril. In order to further enhance the stability and productivity of its relations with China, South Korea, and Russia, and to foster forward-looking engagements, Japan may assume a stance of 'reciprocal flexibility' in its diplomatic approach, rather than solely emphasizing the shortcomings of its counterparts. This would require a nuanced adjustment in Japan's policies and positions, which may be duly reflected in its Diplomatic Bluebook for the year 2025. Such a strategic readjustment will underscore Japan's commitment to fostering constructive engagements and promoting mutual understanding in the region.

⁶ Shimpei Kawakami, "Japan reboots 'mutually beneficial' China ties in new Diplomatic Bluebook", Published on April 17, 2024
<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-reboots-mutually-beneficial-China-ties-in-new-Diplomatic-Bluebook>