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The intensification of Japan's Indo-Pacific policy. The Chinese vector



During the summer of 2024, Japan sharply intensified its foreign policy in its most important aspects, particularly on China and Pacific states. In our opinion, this intensification and some improvements in Japanese relations with China are primarily related to balancing its military and political activities with Western countries. On the one hand, Japan is building up its own defence potential and strengthening various multilateral formats in the field of security; on the other hand, it is trying to reduce tension in relations with China.

China is also interested in negotiations primarily for economic reasons. The growth rate of the Chinese economy has now seriously slowed from 6-8% annually to 3-5% ([Japanese newspapers](#) say that it is in recession and even in crisis). Therefore, China attaches great importance to receiving investments from Japan, especially considering the fact that

Japanese companies are leaving China for other countries. For example, the Japanese Nippon Steel is [withdrawing](#) from a joint venture with the Chinese Baoshan Iron & Steel, which will reduce Nippon Steel's steel production capacity in China by 70% (according to Nippon Steel itself, the company will invest in the construction of enterprises in India and the US).

The negotiating track was most clearly manifested in July 2024, as evidenced by numerous visits and high-level meetings. Thus, on July 1-6, Yohei Kono, member of the House of Representatives, [visited](#) China as Chairman of the Japan Association for the Promotion of International Trade and met with Vice Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China He Lifeng. On July 17-19, Japanese Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare Keizo Takemi [visited](#) China and at a meeting with Beijing Mayor Yin Yong expressed the desire to strengthen cooperation with China in the development of vaccines. On July 22, Vice Speaker of the House of Representatives Banri Kaieda also arrived in China, where he held talks with Zhao Leji, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

In our opinion, however, the [meeting](#) on July 22 between Chairman of the General Council of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan Hiroshi Moriyama and Minister of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee of China Liu Jianchao is interesting. The purpose of the talks was to probe the situation for subsequent parliamentary diplomacy between the two countries. Interestingly, the next day Moriyama [held talks](#) with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, which also indicates the special nature of this visit.

At the same time, on July 22-23, a [meeting](#) of the 'strategic dialogue between Japan and China' at the level of deputy foreign ministers was held in Tokyo. This was the first meeting in 4 years, as consultations of this kind were interrupted due to the coronavirus pandemic. Thanks to this event, on the 26th in the Lao capital of Vientiane, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa [met](#) with Wang Yi. During the talks, the parties confirmed that they would hold a summit meeting in November this year.

China-Japan: strategic competitors or partner

At first glance, such an explosive development of events, even in beginning to discuss the summit, numerous statements and confirmations of the 'strategic nature of bilateral relations', 'deepening cooperation' etc. do not solve fundamental political issues in Japanese-Chinese relations. Thus, the [problems](#) of accelerating the process of lifting restrictions on imports of Japanese products, which were introduced by China in

connection with the discharge of purified water from the Fukushima-1 nuclear power plant, the promotion of China in the East and South China Seas and the setting of buoys by China off the Senkaku Islands remain unresolved. Japan has also repeatedly stated that it is concerned about the deepening military-political cooperation between China and Russia. In this regard, Japan is simultaneously developing a ‘defence track’ to strengthen relations with China’s neighbours (including Taiwan) and extend various formats of military-technical and military-political cooperation to them. In this article, we will only touch upon the countries of the Global South in the Indo-Pacific region, without taking into account the Tokyo-Washington-Seoul axis and Japan’s contacts with European allies, as this topic requires a separate study.

Tokyo’s strategy vis-à-vis building relations with neighbours on the continent

Firstly, Japan is actively conducting exercises with the countries of this vast region; their pace and scale has been sharply intensified this summer. Thus, on July 18, the first [joint exercises](#) since 1972 between the Japanese Coast Guard and Taiwan took place in the waters of the Japanese Chiba prefecture. This fact alone speaks volumes; after the severance of official relations with Taiwan, Japan refrained from openly interacting with it, especially in the defence sphere.

Secondly, Japan is actively working on multilateral military and political platforms. So, on July 16-18, Japan held the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM). It is curious to note that, during this event, for the first time the countries of the region [opposed](#) the actions of China, denouncing “any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo through force or coercion”. Japan is [developing](#) defence cooperation with these states through the Official Security Assistance Programme (OSA). Through this programme, Japan has [concluded](#) agreements on the supply of patrol boats to the Fijian and Bangladesh Navies in 2023. Interestingly, the Kingdom of Tonga and Papua New Guinea have also expressed a desire to join this programme. In addition, the Japanese government [will provide assistance](#) to Tuvalu in the field of cybersecurity by supplying the island state with the necessary equipment. All these measures are in some way or another directed against China, which, in turn, is also seriously [investing](#) in these countries.

Another important event in this regard was the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Japan, India, Australia and the United States on July 29 within the framework of the QUAD. In addition to publicly condemning the actions of China, the parties confirmed that they would organise a meeting of authorised persons on cybersecurity and hold a conference, as well as also agreeing to establish a negotiating format on maritime law.

Secondly, Japan has intensified bilateral defence contacts with the countries of the region, as evidenced by the visits of the country's Defence Minister Kihara Minoru to Singapore, the Philippines, Cambodia and Vietnam in June-August this year. In each case, issues of military-political and military-technical cooperation were discussed. Separately, it is necessary to mention the strengthening military-political cooperation between Japan and Mongolia. Japan is striving to connect this country to the aforementioned OSA programme. Moreover, in May of this year, the medical unit of the Japanese Self Defence Forces **assisted** in conducting exercises at the Central Military Hospital of the Mongolian Armed Forces. By increasing cooperation with Mongolia, Japan seeks to introduce a certain tension on the northern border with China (and on the southern borders of Russia), capturing China in a 'geographical semicircle'.

Thus, Japan has seriously increased the attention of its policy on the Indo-Pacific, trying to resume dialogue with China and at the same time involve as many states as possible on an anti-Chinese basis. These steps benefit the US as well, as they allow the US to strengthen the structure of trade and military-political agreements with the countries of the region and at the same time exert economic (and political) pressure on China. Moreover, if you look at the map where the countries of the region are located, another detail becomes clear: the US and Japan seek to 'capture China in a semicircle' (including Mongolia) and control the hubs of trade routes through which Chinese goods are shipped to Europe by sea.

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