

Japan's Foreign Policy Priorities during the Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga Period: "Restoring Diplomacy and Security"

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Abstract. The article analyzes Japan's foreign policy during the period of Yoshihide Suga's activity as Prime Minister (2020-2021): the specifics of diplomacy and security activities, the common interests of Japan with other countries, the specifics of rapprochement and forms of interaction with different countries. The results of Japan's foreign policy in Northeast Asia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan's military cooperation within the quadrilateral alliance "Quad" are presented.

Keywords: foreign policy, diplomacy, Russian-Japanese relations, Suga Yoshihide, Japan, Vietnam, China, USA, Russia

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Introduction

Yoshihide Suga came to power after the resignation of S. Abe, who headed Japan from December 2012 to September 2020, and he continued the course of his predecessor's foreign policy, presenting himself as a follower of Shinzo Abe¹. He stated his priorities concerning foreign policy at the press-conference right after taking office:

In the field of diplomacy and security, given the significant complication of Japan's international standing, it is necessary to develop a policy based on the functioning of the alliance between Japan and the United States. In order to protect national interests and build sustainable relations with neighbouring countries, including China and Russia, we will contribute to the implementation of the strategy of free and open Indo-Pacific region. Striving for a full settlement of post-war diplomatic disputes, we will do everything in our power to resolve the problem of abductions (of Japanese citizens by the DPRK special services)².

Yoshihide Suga became the first leader of the country in almost eight years to form the cabinet of people he was personally acquainted with, hoping to follow the course set by his predecessor Shinzo Abe. His reputation as a "die-hard lieutenant" who managed bureaucrats and promoted politics prompted observers to describe him as a "problem solver", "Sugalin" and "warming the perch"³. Professor of the Keio University (Policy Management Faculty) Ichiro Shimizu noted that it was during the 2020 elections in Japan that Yoshihide Suga's image as a "commoner" spread widely. Yoshihide Suga was a clerk who supported the Prime Minister Abe's administration for a long time, while his opponents, Fumio Kishida and Shigeru Ishiba, unlike him, were hereditary legislators [17:87].

During his premiership, Yoshihide Suga faced both traditional problems such as a low birth rate in the country, and unusual ones, such as the restoration of the economy affected by COVID-19, hosting the Olympic Games in the pandemic time, as well as solving problems related to geopolitical tensions and rivalry between the United States and China. Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong expressed his concern that the countries in Southeast Asia, including Singapore, being at the intersection of the interests of major powers, may find themselves caught in the middle and be forced to make difficult choices [7:157].

¹ Rich M. Japan's Next Prime Minister Emerges from Behind the Curtain. *The New York Times*. 09.04.2023. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/14/world/asia/japan-prime-minister-yoshihide-suga-bio.html?searchResultPosition=1>

² Taisuke Abiru. Yoshihide Suga's Foreign Policy Track: Between the US and China. Available from: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/vneshnepoliticheskii-trek-yesikhide-sugi/>

³ Japan PM Suga gets a new nickname mocking his Stalin-like authoritarian manner. Daisuke Nohara, Political News Department, January 8, 2021 (Mainichi, Japan) 04.04.2023. Available from: <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20210108/p2a/00m/0na/021000c#:~:text=This%20image%20obtained%20in%20October,dictator%20of%20the%20Soviet%20Union>

The article presents the analysis of the materials on the stated issue published in Russian, Japanese, and English, which identified the research discourse available on the scientific problem. The investigation made valuable additions to the scientific research which has already been carried out on the issue adding to them the elements of its scientific novelty and also helped to identify the format of Japan's interaction with other countries, the features and areas of Yoshihide Suga's foreign policy activities as the Prime Minister of Japan.

For this purpose, the authors of this research turned to works on similar issues, and rely on the conclusions drawn in those works. Thus, the article by D.A.Rozevich "Challenges and Opportunities: Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Japan which he will have to manage" [9] presents the reasons for Shinzo Abe's departure from the post of Prime Minister, examines the activities of Yoshihide Suga before the assumption of the post of Prime Minister, and also describes the problems that he is certain to face with as the new Prime Minister within the framework of his new position. The article considers the perceived expectations from the work of Yoshihide Suga, but due to the fact that the results of new Prime Minister's work were not known at that time yet, it is quite problematic to evaluate Yoshihide Suga's work in full at the moment. The article by A.A.Kireeva "Strategic Partnership between Japan and Vietnam: interests and constraints" [6] examines the relations between Japan and Vietnam, describes key trends in relations between the countries, identifies areas of convergence of interests and limitations in the processes of rapprochement between Japan and Vietnam. The article by A.S.Berdova "A strong hawk hides its claws: substantiating the vectors of Japan's foreign policy course development" examines the change in the understanding of Japan's geopolitics during the premiership of Yoshihide Suga and whether this understanding was going to be implemented in practice. Much attention is given to the relationship between Japan and the United States, comparing the foreign policy course under Shinzo Abe and the expected results of the foreign policy he conducted. We should also note D.V.Streltsov's article "Russian-Japanese relations after Abe: a new stress test?" [10], devoted to the analysis of qualitative changes in Russian-Japanese relations after Shinzo Abe in connection with the transformation of the international political environment and domestic political developments of both countries. With Yoshihide Suga's determination and his statements about the need to solve the problem who the northern territories belong to, unwillingness to pass the problem along to the next generation, we must admit that certain expectations were formed with his coming to power.

The conducted research, based on the conclusions already made by political analysts and other researchers, allowed us to obtain scientific results in accordance with the stated goal: to answer the question: "Does the determination of the new Prime Minister really correlate with the results of his work, is it possible to achieve the stated goals in relation to Russia?" Considerable attention is paid to the responses of Yoshihide Suga's government to the challenges he had to face. The authors have also raised the question: did Japan succeed, under the leadership of Yoshihide Suga, in changing qualitatively its approach to the implementation of foreign policy and is there a possibility that the country will move to a completely new understanding of its geopolitics?

Materials and methods

The texts of Yoshihide Suga's speeches and reports as the Prime Minister published on the website of the Office of the Prime Minister of Japan, including the political speech of Prime Minister Suga during the 203rd session of the Parliament, were used as the main information and historical sources for the research. Stylistic and linguistic analysis of the speech made it possible to assess priorities and state interests, which we came to by analyzing the content and modality of the text. The usage of common scientific methods of analysis and synthesis made it possible to study the basic documents published by the Office of the Prime Minister of Japan to identify changes in Japan's foreign policy.

Japanese media materials were also involved: articles published in the oldest English-language Japanese newspaper, The Japan Times, and other electronic publications.

To assess the level of public support, the data from a survey conducted by the largest Japanese news agencies Kyodo Tsushin, Yomiuri Shimbun and Asahi Shimbun were used.

The method of systematization was used to understand the consistency and effectiveness of Yoshihide Suga's activities as the Prime Minister of Japan.

The SWOT analysis method was also used to assess internal and external factors that could and did influence the development of Japan during his premiership. This allowed us to consider the strengths and weaknesses of its policy, opportunities and threats.

Results

In the course of the study, we conducted a SWOT analysis of the content of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's speech at the 203rd session of Parliament, published on the website of the Prime Minister's Office⁴

Let's note the strengths of Yoshihide Suga's speech to the parliament:

the Prime Minister's desire to contribute to solving global problems (the use of renewable energy sources and the promotion of nuclear policy, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050);

willingness to set ambitious goals for the country (Japan's entry into the era of 100-year life expectancy);

Yoshihide Suga publicly fixed his position on reforming the policy of promoting regions (including through the development of the tourism industry, "create a dynamic region", the "Furusato Nozei" system);

understanding the importance of improving laws to support the restoration of livelihoods for the victims of natural disasters;

⁴ 第百三回国会における菅内閣総理大臣所信表明演説 [Political speech of Prime Minister Suga at the 203rd session of Parliament]. 16.04.2023. Available from: https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/99_suga/statement/2020/1026shoshinhyomei.html

- understanding that the infectious disease highlighted various problems, such as delays in digitization of public services and the private sector, as well as an imbalance in supply chains;

- understanding the importance of the well-being of the rural population, the need to create a new flow of people from cities to rural areas;

- Yoshihide Suga insisted on the need for decisive measures to counteract the decline in the birth rate;

Weak aspects of Yoshihide Suga's speech to parliament (as we see them):

the Prime Minister positively assessed the activities of the tourism industry and investments in this area, at the same time, the spread of the new coronavirus contributed to the risk of the increase of infection in society;

- the Prime Minister understood the need to participate in the exchange between people and the influx of people from abroad, but there arose the question of compliance with quarantine measures;

- Yoshihide Suga was determined to further develop relations of trust and cooperation with the United States and other countries, as well as to develop active diplomacy, including solving the problem of the northern territories ownership and signing a peace treaty with Russia, but at the same time the format of meetings with other countries should be of a significantly limited nature.

We need to note the opportunities for the development of Japan that the Prime Minister saw during his tenure:

- further effective implementation of "Abenomics" created new drivers for the economy, respectively, the promotion of further reforms in this direction was expected;

- a proposal to take the necessary measures and continue to closely monitor economic trends in Japan and abroad, including the impact of the new coronavirus pandemic on the economy, in order to minimize the consequences in the future;

- readiness to ensure national security, consideration of the Japanese-American alliance as the basis of peace, prosperity and freedom in the Indo-Pacific region and in the international community;

- continuation of Japan's social policy pursued earlier by Shinzo Abe (promotion of efforts to increase healthy life expectancy through prevention and health promotion, provision of nursing staff and increased productivity in care facilities).

We will also note some threats and dangers for Japan that followed from the Prime Minister's speech:

- the Head of the State understood the inevitability to continue to take some measures in manual control mode;

- it was not clear whether the Prime Minister understood the media's concern about the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

In general, the Prime Minister's speech to Parliament can be called a success. It inspired hope for the Japanese for their security, stability and focus on the solution of emerging problems; the Prime Minister demonstrated clear understanding of the challenges facing the society. At the same time, some aspects of Japan's development were

only outlined, and methods for achieving the goals were not identified. The Prime Minister's speech demonstrated his understanding of the multi-vector nature of the Government's activities, the problems he marked were quite relevant for Japan, and the reform-oriented course was of great importance.

At the same time, some of the threats identified by the authors during the SWOT-analysis are confirmed by the surveys conducted by the media. So Suga's statements about the Olympic Games contradicted public opinion: an NHK poll from December 2020 showed that the majority of Japanese would prefer the Olympic Games to be postponed (31%) or even cancelled (32%)⁵. A later Kyodo poll showed that these figures rose to 44.8% and 35.3%, respectively, which means that 80% of its participants did not want the Olympic Games in Tokyo to take place, as expected, in the summer of 2021⁶. Let's add to this the budget of the Olympic Games, which was further increased due to the delay of the Games, which made them the most expensive Summer Olympic Games in history [4:67]. This contrasts with the fact that most of the funding for the Olympics was state money (officially about \$8.7 billion, but in fact probably much more). As Shimada Toshio claimed, according to the analysis of NHK opinion polls over the past almost two years there were observed "fluctuations in attitudes towards politics", in particular Suga Yoshihide led the fight against coronavirus, the measures he took demonstrated political and administrative readiness, but on the other hand, these measures were not always considered reasonable, and the author emphasizes that this reality is an important lesson for the future (13:26). Also, as a threat, the Head of State took the inevitability to continue to take some measures in the manual control mode. What was revealed as part of the SWOT analysis is indirectly confirmed by Kenichi Ogura, the director of Itomos Research Institute: Japanese vaccination was initially postponed, so trying to compensate for the delay, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga surprised others by announcing that he would increase the number of vaccinations per day to 1 million, which was about five times more than at that time (19:28).

The first challenge Yoshihide Suga faced during his tenure as Prime Minister was the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the conclusion of T.E.Gorchakova and O.I.Kazakov, 2020 laid the foundation to the "post-coronavirus era", which is only beginning to form in different countries and manifest itself in various forms of "distance" life and non-contact interaction [3:61]. This circumstance was the reason for Yoshihide Suga's first official visit to Vietnam in October 2020. Traditionally in Japan, Prime Ministers chose to visit countries such as the United States and China right after taking office, but due to restrictions in the availability of these traditional countries for a visit, the tradition was interrupted. But Du Ying, in the article "The analysis on the trend of Japan's economic diplomatic policy after Yoshihide Suga came to power" noted that Yoshihide Suga chose Southeast Asia for his first visit instead of the United States, not only because of the restrictions associated with the

⁵ How TV Coverage on COVID-19 Was Affected by the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. 12.04.2023. Available from: https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/english/reports/pdf/report_20220301_6_01.pdf.

⁶ An Assessment of Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga: Which Path is he taking? 13.04.2023. Available from: <https://eias.org/publications/op-ed/an-assessment-of-japans-prime-minister-yoshihide-suga-which-path-is-he-taking/>

pandemic, but mostly as the opportunity to declare the “economically oriented” nature of Japan’s foreign economic activity. Yoshihide Suga would insist on creating a strong bilateral alliance with the United States, while avoiding “disconnection” with China [15:549].

The visit to Vietnam was a symbolic event. As A.A.Kireeva noted in her works, Japan attaches great importance to the development of joint cooperation to jointly overcome the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, to the expansion of economic relations (against the background of Japan’s diversification of its production networks), to the ability to export the patrol aircraft, radars and other types of weapons and military technologies to Vietnam, which became topics for negotiations between the leaders of the two countries [6:10].

His predecessor as Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, made about 80 diplomatic visits, actively built his personal relations with the heads of other countries, and did a lot for Japan to be positively perceived by the world community. According to Ming Shan Wu, Yoshihide Suga chose as his main strategy the continuation of the course laid down by Shinzo Abe [16:33]. Tokyo continued close relations with Washington even after Shinzo Abe left the post of Prime Minister. The focus on achieving positive cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region and preserving the alliance between the two countries is proclaimed as the foundation of peace in the Asia-Pacific region. As Yoshihide Suga declared himself, maintaining stability in the country’s foreign policy, as well as the course started by his predecessor, is his main goal⁷.

According to the conclusion of M.A.Butrimova, the COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on the international community, many meetings and events had to be postponed or cancelled, but this did not prevent the Japanese Prime Minister from holding a meeting with the US. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on October 6, 2020. The goal pursued at the meeting was to get acquainted with the new leaders of the country. Both sides confirmed the continuation of the previous course to strengthen both bilateral and regional relations, against the background of China’s increasing influence [2:108]. In addition, one of the most important events during Yoshihide Suga’s premiership was his participation in the meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”), which includes the United States, Japan, India and Australia. The quadrilateral “Quad” format plays an important role in maintaining regional security, both from the point of solving the counter-terrorism tasks and from the standpoint of containing the growing might of the PRC [14:7]. This issue was considered in detail in the context of Japan’s national security in D. V. Streltsov’s article “Will Japan become a “normal” country? The temptations and risks of the military power status”: as the author concludes, this event only confirms that the Japanese security strategy is increasingly oriented not towards a bilateral paradigm, but a multilateral paradigm and one cannot disagree with this [12:183]. In addition, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga stated several times that he intended to adhere to Shinzo Abe’s policy on armaments, namely, to slowly but surely increase the military power of the state, gradually expanding the powers of the Self-Defense Forces, increasing both quantitative

⁷ 第二百三回国会における菅内閣総理大臣所信表明演説 [Political speech of the Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga at the 203rd session of Parliament]. 16.04.2023. Available from: https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/99_suga/statement/2020/1026shoshinhyomei.html

and qualitative indicators of weapons⁸. This correlates with the results of the study carried out by A.N.Panov and V.V.Nelidov: reacting to the military-political situation in Northeast Asia which is undergoing significant changes, characterized, among other things, by the collapse of the system of unipolar dominance of the United States, and seeking to ensure its own security, official Tokyo is taking a wide range of steps in military-political sphere. Of course, the Japanese-American alliance still remains as the basis of Tokyo’s course in this area and, most likely, will remain so for the foreseeable future [8:88].

Japan has very difficult relations with neighbouring countries, namely, China, South Korea, North Korea and Russia. Lee Hsien Loong confirmed in the article “The Asian Century is in danger” that the relations with Russia were especially important for Abe, he made unprecedented efforts, but the willingness to radically change the position on the territorial issue (moving away from the demands to return four islands at once) did not meet any enthusiasm from the Russian side, and this caused rejection by the Americans [7:183]. Also, Aoi Yoshi, considering the positions publicly expressed by Japan and Russia, admitted that it is difficult to foresee the course of negotiations on the conclusion of a peace treaty between Japan and Russia, including the issue of the northern territories [18:11]. A similar view is taken by D.V.Streltsov. In his opinion, the territorial dispute and the absence of the basic agreement on bilateral relations are likely to serve as an obstacle to cooperation for a long time. Nevertheless, Russia and Japan have an extensive sphere of common interests in the international political sphere, which can become the ground for further dialogue. Both countries fully understand the insufficiency and fragility of the mechanisms for ensuring international security that have developed in East Asia. Moscow and Tokyo are both interested in solving the nuclear problem of the Korean peninsula and in strengthening the non-proliferation regime there, in easing international tensions over territorial conflicts in the South China and East China Seas, in jointly combating terrorism, crime and maritime piracy, and coordinating efforts to counter unconventional threats [11:79].

Relations between Japan and Russia have undergone certain changes since Shinzo Abe. It seems that the Japanese leadership after S. Abe did not consider relations with Russia as an important priority. Yoshihide Suga never met with the Russian leader, limiting himself to telephone conversations. On September 29, 2020, a telephone conversation took place between V.Putin and Y.Suga. Commenting on this event, the Chief Cabinet Secretary of Japan Kato Katsunobu noted that

“...the course aimed at solving the territorial problem without passing it on to the next generations and concluding a peace treaty remains unchanged. The “Northern Territories” are islands to which the sovereignty of Japan extends, and the issue of the ownership of the four islands is the subject of negotiations for a peace treaty”⁹

⁸ The Self-Defense Forces continue to strengthen their potential. [Electronic resource] // Red Star / Available from: <http://redstar.ru/sily-samooborony-prodolzhayut-ukreplyat-svoj-potentsial>

⁹ Walker J. & Azuma H. (2020). Shinzo Abe’s Unfinished Deal with Russia. War on the Rocks, 11 September. 04.04.2023. Available from: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/09/shinzo-abetes-unfinished-deal-with-russia/>

On October 26, 2020, Mr. Suga Yoshihide said:

"I will strive to develop the entire complex of Japanese-Russian relations, including the conclusion of a peace treaty with Russia, through a sincere exchange of views between the leaders"¹⁰.

Thus, unlike Shinzo Abe, Yoshihide Suga treated Japanese-Russian relations with great scepticism, did not consider this area an important priority. Therefore, we should agree with the D.V.Streltsov's conclusion, who characterized Russian-Japanese relations after Shinzo Abe, that with his resignation in September 2020, the achievements of "personal diplomacy" based on close relations between the two leaders ceased to work. The appearance of new prime ministers in Japan meant that relations with them had to start almost from scratch, despite the experience of interaction during the Shinzo Abe era (Suga Yoshihide held the post of General Secretary of the Cabinet of Ministers under him, and Kishida Fumio held the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2012-2017) [10:124]. This is confirmed by A.S.Berdova: from 2007 to 2020, with a short break, Shinzo Abe rigidly and single-handedly pursued his own political course, but now Japan is once again entering the era of "revolving doors", when factions within the ruling party will agree on a regular change of leader, thereby ensuring the changeability of power within the elites, while maintaining the leading the positions of the Liberal Democratic Party. Accordingly, one should not expect such a leader as Suga to conduct a bright and independent foreign policy and qualitative changes in the course. Even the ruling party of Japan itself will not allow this [1:93].

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the content of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's speech at the 203rd session of Parliament, we came to the conclusion that, in general, the Prime Minister's speech to Parliament can be called successful. It gave the Japanese people hope for their security, stability and focus on solving emerging problems; the Prime Minister demonstrated understanding of the challenges facing the society. At the same time, some aspects of Japan's development were only outlined, but the methods to achieve these goals were not disclosed. Yoshihide Suga's speech reveals his understanding of the multi-vector nature of the Government's activities, the problems he identified were quite relevant for Japan at those times, and the course reforms were of great importance. However, understanding the actual tasks, with the absence of specific tools for solving the latter, did not lead his government to the expected results. The hosting of the Olympic Games in the coronavirus pandemic was accompanied by a number of difficulties, including disapproval from the local population, who advocated the cancellation of such a major event. This

¹⁰ Prime Minister Kishida's keynote speech at the 205th session of Parliament. 04.04.2023. Available from: https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/100_kishida/statement/2021/1008shoshinhyomei.html

contrasted to the fact that most of the Olympics funding was state money (officially about \$8.7 billion, but in fact, probably much more)¹¹.

Answering the question: "Did the determination of the new Prime Minister really correlate with the results of his work, were his methods to achieve the stated goals in relation to Russia working out?" we can conclude: of course, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga was determined to solve the problem. This is confirmed by his words from his speech in Parliament: "With Russia, through a sincere exchange of views between the leaders, I will strive to develop the entire complex of Japanese-Russian relations, including the conclusion of a peace treaty"¹². The relations with Russia were also particularly important for Abe: he made unprecedented efforts in this regard. And Yoshihide Suga did not want to lose what he had previously achieved. At the same time, relations between Japan and Russia have undergone certain changes since Shinzo Abe. Yoshihide Suga never met with the Russian leader, limiting himself to telephone conversations. The analysis of works on similar issues confirms that with the resignation of Shinzo Abe, Russian-Japanese relations are undergoing particular changes, and the coming of new Prime Ministers in Japan meant that relations with them should be started almost from scratch, despite the experience of interaction between the leaders in the Abe era. While Shinzo Abe almost single-handedly pursued his own hard-line political course, nowadays, with the fractions within the ruling party agreeing on a regular change of a leader, thereby ensuring the changeability of power within the elites, one should not expect a leader like Suga to conduct a brilliant and independent foreign policy or qualitative changes of the course. Thus, it can be concluded that despite all the determination to continue the line the former Prime Minister started in relation to Russia, it was not possible for Yoshihide Suga to achieve the stated goals.

The authors could also answer the question: "Was Japan, under the leadership of Yoshihide Suga, able to qualitatively change its approach to the implementation of foreign policy and is there a possibility that Japan will move to a completely new understanding of its geopolitics?" As part of the foreign policy course, the COVID-19 pandemic made a huge impact on the international community, many meetings and events had to be postponed or cancelled, but despite this, Yoshihide Suga sought to maintain relations with foreign partners. He set himself to continue the course started by Shinzo Abe, which became his main strategy. According to the Prime Minister, to maintain stability in the foreign policy of the country and develop the political line which his predecessor started was his main goal¹³. The Prime Minister held several meetings during the official visit to Vietnam in October 2020, following which the issues of developing joint cooperation to overcome the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding economic ties (with Japan diversifying

¹¹ Senior IOC member says he's not sure Tokyo Games will happen. 13.04.2023. Available from: <https://apnews.com/article/yoshihide-suga-tokyo-coronavirus-pandemic-2020-tokyo-olympics-japan-cc0ff909fc55074063a736d042dac9a8>

¹² Prime Minister Kishida's keynote speech at the 205th session of Parliament. 04.04.2023. Available from: https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/100_kishida/statement/2021/1008shoshinhyomei.html

¹³ 第二百三回国会における菅内閣総理大臣所信表明演説 [Political speech of Prime Minister Suga at the 203rd session of Parliament]. 16.04.2023. Available from: https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/99_suga/statement/2020/1026shoshinhyomei.html

its production networks) and the possibility of arms exports were discussed. In October 2020, the Prime Minister had a meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, where the parties confirmed their wish to continue the previous course to strengthen both bilateral and regional relations, against the backdrop of China's increasingly growing influence. In addition, one of the most important events during Yoshihide Suga's premiership was his participation in the meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("Quad"), which includes the United States, India and Australia besides Japan. At the same time, Japan maintained quite strained relations with neighbouring countries, namely, China, South Korea, North Korea and Russia. The opinion of some experts that Yoshihide Suga qualitatively changed his approach to the implementation of foreign policy was not confirmed. We stated that his choice was to continue the political course laid down by Shinzo Abe, but at the same time Yoshihide Suga was limited by certain circumstances, with the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the main obstacles.

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