

# Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and Russian and Chinese Information Influence

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## Abstract

This paper explores how Russia and China use disinforming, distorting, and deceptive information manipulation to target a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP), a pillar of Japan's foreign and defence policies. Drawing on empirical data collected around four events in 2023, it is one of the first open-source intelligence (OSINT) analyses of the Japanese information space and the ways it is targeted via foreign state-backed information threats to be published in an academic journal. It analyses the organisation and conduct of Russian and Chinese information manipulation and interference, highlighting how they use distinct but uncoordinated approaches to generate mutually reinforcing effects in an attempt to undermine Japan's vision of FOIP and its values-driven strategic communications.

## Introduction

Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' is the core of its foreign and security policy. It builds upon a strategic vision that the country has pursued since the late 2000s, when it began conceptualising the Indo-Pacific as a unified geostrategic space connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Rather than a simple geographic or security framework, Japan's approach to the Indo-Pacific articulates values such as rule of law, freedom of navigation, and connectivity—making it a geopolitical vision deeply tied to the principles of strategic communications.<sup>1</sup> The concept has since helped frame cooperation in groupings such as the 'Quad'—the quadrilateral security cooperation among Japan, India, Australia, and the United States. It has also helped to underpin a range of strategic and defence dialogues and agreements among democracies across the globe, highlighting its function as a proactive, connective vision, rather than a purely reactive policy instrument.

Hence, it has long been anticipated and suspected that Japan and its Indo-Pacific discourse would attract information manipulation

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1 Chiyuki Aoi, 'The Indo-Pacific, Geopolitics and Strategic Communications: Construction of "the Indo-Pacific"', *Defence Strategic Communications* 14 (Spring 2024).

and interference from actors that reject this vision. Indeed, deliberate international influence campaigns and operations orchestrated by adversarial ‘challenger states’ (including China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea) have been perceived as threatening Japan’s interests and reputation, seeking to contest or erode support for ideas like FOIP and the values they embody, and to make them appear less stable and less widely shared. Their campaigns and operations attempt to engineer an opportunity to hasten the establishment of an alternative world order, governed by very different kinds of principles and processes to those encapsulated by notions that the Indo-Pacific region either can or should be ‘free and open’.

Several high-profile investigations have adduced evidence of the scale and sophistication of these kinds of influence efforts. Meta’s internal review exposed multiple coordinated campaigns targeting the Indo-Pacific region, illustrating the reach and adaptability of foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) activities.<sup>2</sup> The US State Department also issued a report on Chinese information manipulation activities throughout the world, including the Indo-Pacific, especially Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> In Korea the National Cyber Security Center, under the National Intelligence Service, published its findings on influence operations attributed to the People’s Republic of China, which established ‘fake news’ websites in Korea,<sup>4</sup> a revelation also matched by a university-based research group’s work on Chinese online ‘commenting’ operations.<sup>5</sup> For Japan itself, recent Nikkei revelations of Chinese information operations targeting

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- 2 Dina Sadek, ‘FIMI 101: Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Targeting the 2024 US General Election’, *DFRLab*, 26 September 2024, <https://dfrlab.org/2024/09/26/fimi-101>.
  - 3 Global Engagement Center, *How the People’s Republic of China Seeks to Reshape the Global Information Environment*, Global Engagement Centre Special Report, 27 November 2023, [https://2021-2025.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/HOW-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-SEEKS-TO-RESHAPE-THE-GLOBAL-INFORMATION-ENVIRONMENT\\_508.pdf](https://2021-2025.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/HOW-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-SEEKS-TO-RESHAPE-THE-GLOBAL-INFORMATION-ENVIRONMENT_508.pdf).
  - 4 National Cyber Security Center, *China’s Malign Activities by Exploiting ‘Fake News Websites’* (2023), [www.ncsc.go.kr:4018/eng/cop/bbs/selectBoardArticle.do?bbsId=Notice\\_eng&nttlId=153801#LINK](http://www.ncsc.go.kr:4018/eng/cop/bbs/selectBoardArticle.do?bbsId=Notice_eng&nttlId=153801#LINK).
  - 5 Yoon Minwoo and Kim Eunyung, ‘An Analytical Study on Monitoring China’s Malicious Influence in Cyberspace’, unpublished government report, Republic of Korea, 2023; Kim Jung-ha, ‘Editorial: Time to Counter an Army of Chinese Trolls’, *Korea JoongAng Daily*, 6 October 2024, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-10-06/opinion/columns/Time-to-counter-an-army-of-Chinese-trolls/2149093>.

Okinawa attracted much public attention.<sup>6</sup> Such findings are echoed in articles published by DFRLab (a research and analysis unit within the US-based Atlantic Council) that describe a network of accounts on X (formerly Twitter) in the Japanese information space that target a range of Japanese policies, from the Fukushima nuclear water release to the sovereign status of Okinawa.<sup>7</sup>

Building out from this developing research base, this paper presents one of the earliest open-source analyses dedicated to exploring adversarial information influence activities targeting Japan, and particularly its concept of FOIP. Specifically it compares and contrasts the information manipulation and influence activities organised and conducted by both Russia and China, from overt propaganda through state broadcast and press media assets to more covert exploitation of the affordances of social networks. This research design was devised in recognition of the influence these two external powers exert over the geopolitical environment—an environment which Japan's FOIP policy both operates in and aims to shape—and how their influence increasingly spills over into Japan's own policymaking processes. Further, this design represents a constructive innovation in its analytical approach.

Rather than track a single threat actor, as most existing studies do,<sup>8</sup> this research reveals how multiple manipulation and influence campaigns by Russia and China cumulatively appear in the Japanese information space, offering a realistic depiction of their aggregated scale and modalities. Assessing the resultant impact of these campaigns—such as attitudinal change in Japan—lies beyond the scope of this article and is not demonstrated by the present analysis. But what this study does show is

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6 Nihon Keizai Shimbun, 沖縄独立煽る偽情報拡散 [Spread of Disinformation Promoting Independence of Okinawa], 3 October 2024, [www.nikkei.com/telling/DGXZTS00012030S4A900C2000000](http://www.nikkei.com/telling/DGXZTS00012030S4A900C2000000).

7 Julia Janicki, 'Foreign Narratives Proliferate among Japanese X Communities', *DFRLab*, 18 December 2024, <https://dfrlab.org/2024/12/18/foreign-narratives-proliferate-among-japanese-x-communities>. See also Dylan J. Plung and Kenton Thibaut, 'Japan's Technology Paradox: The Challenge of Chinese Disinformation', 25 March 2025, <https://dfrlab.org/2025/03/25/japan-tech-chinese-disinformation>.

8 See for an exception Janicki, 'Foreign Narratives Proliferate'.

how Chinese and Russian influence channels overlap and intersect to produce a complex, evolving web of manipulated information.

Accentuating this point is not intended to imply any explicit coordination between Russia and China in their influence operations. Their respective information influence operations and related disinformation campaigns are probably designed and delivered separately. Nevertheless, they might separately identify and seek to exploit and manipulate similar vulnerabilities as a target, and as a way of respectively seeking to advance their particular geopolitical interests and strategies. But the critical point is that by shifting our focus from specific campaigns of targeting and transmission of manipulated content by malign actors to their cumulative information effects, questions of attributable coordination become less salient. Rather, the degradation and destabilisation of concepts such as FOIP could be caused by both an intended outcome of an individual country's adversarial strategies, but also an unintended consequence of the interactions and overlaps that occur as a result of differently configured and operationalised campaigns run by Chinese and Russian assets. The 'net information effect' in this case results from the accumulation of the multiple array of strategies and tactics that are 'in play'.

To study the scope and modalities of Chinese and Russian information manipulation empirically, we draw on data from four event-based case studies. In different ways, these four cases illuminate how both Russia and China have sought to leverage information manipulation strategies and tactics, seeking to shape public perceptions and political decision-making about aspects of FOIP specifically, but also in the process to damage Japan's international reputation. Data collection and analysis to explore these multidimensional issues was based upon open-source research of public media and social media materials conducted by researchers at Cardiff University around the four key events of interest, which were identified in advance. This work enables us to explore general themes and patterns in terms of the contents of what propaganda was being both overtly and more covertly communicated, as well as some of the more

deceptive aspects of these transmission pathways, through, for example, the mobilisation of networks of unavowed social media accounts.

In exploring the issues outlined above, this article is shaped by several cautionary considerations. First, there are the ethical nuances and complexities of conducting and operationalising open-source research in contexts such as Japan, where traditions of data transparency and accountability differ from those in many Anglo-American and some European polities. These conditions generate ethical concerns that are often not sufficiently appreciated and understood, including by other allied governments or commercial actors working in and around the Japanese information space. For example, such aspects have been largely overlooked when international bodies such as the European Union and G7, and governments including the United States (before President Trump came to office) and Canada, require Indo-Pacific states to treat the threats of foreign information interference more seriously and devise effective countermeasures. Recent studies further point to different political and social situations that might inhibit the open embrace of some of the established methodologies for countering FIMI activities, including open-source research.<sup>9</sup> Reasons for this recalcitrance include the political sensitivities associated with publicising cases of interference, especially if such actions are publicly attributed to external actors, given diverse political and strategic allegiances and cultural heterogeneity in the region. Compared with Europe, Indo-Pacific governments are generally less willing to explicitly ‘name’ perpetrators, often meaning the People’s Republic of China (PRC) more than Russia, but sometimes Western states, notably the United States, as sources of coercive influence. This reluctance is reinforced by concerns that exposing interference may require intelligence declassification, potentially revealing tradecraft or priorities, which in turn shifts growing pressure onto private-sector entities to assume responsibility for such work.

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9 Chiyuki Aoi et al., ‘A Comparative Study on Strategic Communications and Counter-FIMI Policy and Institutions among Democracies’, unpublished reports, research project funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)-Kakenhi, Grant Number JP23K25483 (2023-2025).

Another area warranting caution is the tendency to treat the impact of information manipulation as a direct consequence of its mere occurrence. Many analyses, shaped by methodological choices and at times political bias, implicitly assume a near linear causal effect whereby the presence of manipulative activity is automatically considered impactful on target societies. This is often too simplistic when applied to complex institutional and cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western settings across the IndoPacific. Authoritative studies, for example, highlight the high degree of resilience in Japan's information space despite decades of extensive Chinese engagement in Japanese politics, business, media, and society, and repeated attempts—both overt and covert—to secure pro-Chinese outcomes. Such resilience is attributed to structural factors that constrain foreign influence operations, including Japan's relatively homogeneous and socially cohesive society, an oligopolistic media landscape dominated by a few major newspaper-TV groups, and persistently negative public opinion towards both China and Russia. Surveys show roughly 85–90 per cent of Japanese hold unfavourable views of these countries.<sup>10</sup>

Yet some analysts also question whether this earlier view of Japan's relative insulation may be giving way to more competitive realities, even in the Japanese information space.<sup>11</sup> One factor is the growing diffusion of the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical concept, a perception that is accentuated by the rise of China, creating a contested arena of coexisting narratives and inviting sharper reactions.<sup>12</sup> Another is the altered strategic context since Russia's fullscale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which has transformed relations between Japan and Russia. Tokyo has worked with the G7 to consolidate a unified stance placing responsibility for the war on Russia as a breach of international law, thereby moving beyond the more Russia-friendly approach pursued under former prime minister Shinzo Abe in the hope of achieving a peace treaty and the return of the

10 Heather A. Conley, Rachel Ellehuus, Timothy Kostelancik, Jeffrey Mankoff, Cyrus Newlin, Amy Searight, and Devin Stewart, 'Countering Russian & Chinese Influence Activities', Centre for Study of International Security (January 2020), [www.csis.org/analysis/countering-russian-chinese-influence-activities-0](http://www.csis.org/analysis/countering-russian-chinese-influence-activities-0); D. Stewart, *China's Influence in Japan: Everywhere yet Nowhere in Particular* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program/Southeast Asia Program, 2020).

11 See notes 3–7.

12 Aoi, 'Indo-Pacific, Geopolitics and Strategic Communications'.

Northern Territories currently under Russian control.<sup>13</sup> The increasingly close alignment between China, Russia, and North Korea around the war in Ukraine has further reshaped the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. Finally, several domestic developments are reshaping Japan's once homogeneous information space. Most notably, the strong performance of the far-right, populist-wing Sanseito in the July 2025 upper house election may indicate that its anti-globalist, anti-migration, and anti-gender-equality messages have begun to resonate more broadly with segments of the Japanese electorate. These segments had already been in existence by the election in mid 2025.<sup>14</sup>

These shifts may have given both Russia and China stronger incentives to view targeted covert information manipulation as a more useful instrument than in the past, when they tended to rely more on soft-power efforts<sup>15</sup> to cultivate pro-Chinese or pro-Russian attitudes, or on direct interference via political and business ties.<sup>16</sup> This view aligns with the overarching assessment that these two powers exert strong influence on geopolitical environments globally, through a range of policies they enact, but also in the way they seek to shape and influence the understandings and reactions of their allies and adversaries alike, by acting upon the information environment. This article therefore analyses Russian and Chinese information manipulation targeting Japan, while recognising that assessing its broader impact on societal attitudes—or effects beyond the measured reach of specific campaigns—lies beyond its scope. Hence this analysis offers an innovative, focused, empirical examination of Russian and Chinese information manipulation aimed at the Japanese information space, and intent on undermining the idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific. It situates these efforts in their broader structural and geopolitical context, while exercising caution about how the findings should be interpreted and translated into policy recommendations.

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13 'Japan Protests Russian Halt to World War Two Peace Treaty Talks', *Reuters*, 22 March 2022.

14 Yuichi Shiga and Shotaro Tani, 'Japan Ruling Coalition Routed by Upstarts: Key Election Takeaways', *Nikkei Asia*, 21 July 2025.

15 James Brown, 'Russian Strategic Communications toward Japan: A More Benign Model of Influence?', *Asian Perspective (Special Section: Regional Communicative Dynamics and International Relations in the Asia-Pacific)* 45, No 3 (Summer 2021): 559–86.

16 Such as the current China–Japan disputes over Japanese legal terminologies and classification of contingencies, which China is protesting against.



The next section discusses the concept of FOIP, especially in the context of the increasingly precarious geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. This sets up an account of the research design and how empirical data were collected and analysed, including a brief overview of the four main events of interest that were cast as the key units of analysis. Following this, we present some largely quantitative data, tracking comparatively the patterns of coverage by Russian and Chinese state-owned media sources, before a more detailed analysis of activities on social media is introduced. This element of the discussion foregrounds how such assets are deployed to amplify narratives from press and broadcast sources, as well as some of the more deceptive techniques that can be used. The concluding section reprises the main empirical themes, using these as the basis for highlighting some of the more general implications of the analysis for how we both study and understand the causes and consequences of adversarial information operations and related disinformation campaigns—especially in complex and mosaicked social, political, and economic contexts such as the Indo-Pacific region.

## Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Strategic Communications at the Core of Japan's Foreign and Defence Policy

Japan's FOIP vision is a prime target for adversaries seeking to undermine the liberal order that underpins US-led alliances, and the broader security architecture supporting Western security and prosperity. This vulnerability is closely tied to Japan's position as a key US ally in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific, as well as its core role as a member of the G7. Although Japan's relative economic weight has diminished from its former status as the world's second-largest economy and leading aid donor, its diplomatic and strategic influence remains significant. Discrediting FOIP through information manipulation offers adversaries a pathway to erode the foundations of Japan's external relations—including alliance ties and its standing in the G7—thereby weakening stability and shared values across the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

Before analysing how such campaigns are configured, it is essential to recognise FOIP as a central pillar of Japan's twenty-first-century grand strategy, and its foreign and security policy. As Aoi argues, Japan's Indo-Pacific framework and FOIP vision together constitute a form of conjoined geopolitics and strategic communications designed to shape proactively a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.<sup>17</sup> Rather than a purely regional construct, FOIP is articulated as a global vision that now increasingly links the Indo-Pacific with the Euro-Atlantic arena. It seeks to rally like-minded partners that support core principles of existing international law, above all the prohibition on changing national borders by force. In doing so, FOIP is meant not only to mitigate the destabilising effects of a shifting balance of power in the Indo-Pacific but also to influence the evolving global order, so that its core meaning of being 'free and open'—as codified in international law—is preserved.

Japan's FOIP vision encompasses the recognition that the Indo-Pacific is central to global stability, prosperity, and a rules-based international order. Building on Shinzo Abe's 2007 articulation of the Indo-Pacific as a shared democratic and prosperous space linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and highlighting future Japan–India cooperation,<sup>18</sup> this vision was formalised at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) VI in 2016 as a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'. FOIP was thus defined through three core principles: promoting the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade; advancing economic prosperity through connectivity and partnerships; and supporting peace and stability via capacity building and assistance.<sup>19</sup> In the context of increasingly tense situations across the maritime domain of the East and South China Seas, with an increasingly assertive China rapidly developing military and paramilitary capabilities, FOIP became a framework through which Japan articulated its visions for an inclusive, open, and rules-based order. FOIP became not only a diplomatic message to international audiences, but also a guiding precept, shaping Japan's

17 Aoi, 'Indo-Pacific, Geopolitics and Strategic Communications'.

18 Shinzo Abe, 'Confluence of the Two Seas' (speech, Parliament of the Republic of India, 22 August 2007), available at [www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html).

19 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific', [www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000430632.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000430632.pdf), (accessed 24 December 2025).

own regional and global engagements. It emphasised cooperation with like-minded partners in and beyond the region, and positioned Japan as a proactive contributor to regional and global peace. These are pillars that continue to underpin Japan's diplomatic and security strategy in the region and beyond.

It is noteworthy that the geopolitics of FOIP, or the broader Indo-Pacific, was developed as a strategic communications practice. It was through discourses on the Indo-Pacific that Japan propelled the intended expansion of its relations with the Quad countries, Southeast Asia (relations which would be updated and strengthened), and Europe (whose relations would likewise be broadened and updated).<sup>20</sup> In 2019 Japan introduced substantial changes to its National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG),<sup>21</sup> signalling a new direction closely tied to the FOIP vision. This update was characterised by the development of the Multi-Domain Defense Force, bringing together capabilities across land, sea, air, space, cyber, and the electromagnetic spectrum. This accompanied newly reformulated, tripartite defence objectives, including the creation of an international environment amenable to Japan's interests and values; deterrence; and countering the failure of deterrence. Strategic communications was now formally incorporated under the first objective of Japan's defence (i.e. the creation of an international environment in which its interests and values would be promoted), and was now definitively linked to the promotion of FOIP through activities such as defence engagement conducted in conjunction with diplomacy. But here it first gained a doctrinal basis. The guidelines thus demonstrated a shift towards a more complex and interconnected approach to national defence.

With the Indo-Pacific firmly placed at the centre of Japanese grand strategy, in 2022 the National Security Strategy (NSS) explicitly addressed, for the first time, the growing significance of 'information warfare' in the so-called 'cognitive domain, including the spread of

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20 Aoi, 'Indo-Pacific, Geopolitics and Strategic Communications'.

21 Government of Japan, 'National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2019 and Beyond', 18 December 2018, available at [https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/20181218\\_e.pdf](https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/20181218_e.pdf).

disinformation<sup>22</sup> facing Japanese defence, though the strategy document does not specifically mention FIMI as defined in the European Union context. The 2022 rewrite of all three strategic documents, including the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defence Buildup Program, emphasised a shift to counter-strike capabilities, requiring a fundamental upgrading of defence capabilities and increasing Japan's defence budget to 2 per cent of GDP (by 2027). Amid these fundamental shifts, Japan's 2022 strategic documents placed a new emphasis on strengthening analytical capabilities for 'information warfare in the cognitive domain', including disinformation, and on developing advanced intelligence and analytical systems—potentially using artificial intelligence (AI)—by around 2027. Through these initiatives, Japan aims to bolster its resilience and capacity to manage regional contingencies with its key ally, the United States, while also expanding more independent capabilities, including in responding to foreign-instigated information operations such as disinformation.

Hence, Japan's strategic and policy updates illustrate a continuous, adaptive use of strategic communications to try to shape regional discourse, as illustrated in the NDPG 2019, and later moves to build resilience against evolving information threats in the NSS 2022 and later policies.

The policy following the 2022 strategy would include roles played by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Ministry of Defence (MOD). MOFA emphasises building up its capacity to monitor and respond to 'information warfare' through enhancing its information gathering and analytical functions, and then using these to shape public communications to contest hostile narratives. MOFA launched a dedicated web page, 'The Responses to Information Manipulation,

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22 'National Security Strategy of Japan', December 2022, [www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf](http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf), p. 27 (English version); 'National Defence Strategy of Japan', 16 December 2022, available at: [www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy\\_en.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy_en.pdf).

including Spread of Disinformation’,<sup>23</sup> to explain both Japan’s own measures and what it perceives as international trends. The term ‘foreign information manipulation’ is mentioned on the page, closely approximating the EU’s FIMI concept. Internationally MOFA participates in the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism and other bilateral and multilateral consultations and agreements to discuss information manipulation and seek areas of cooperation, including the US Japan Memorandum of Cooperation on Countering Foreign Information Manipulation signed in December 2023.<sup>24</sup> The same page also lists two specific cases of what the government regards as foreign-instigated disinformation, both concerning the release of ALPS-treated water from the Fukushima nuclear sites, but without publicly attributing the perpetrator(s).<sup>25</sup> The MOD, similarly, following 2022 strategic directions, treats disinformation as part of the threat environment it must monitor and respond to. It does so by building analytical and AI-supported warning systems, feeding verified information into government-wide strategic communications, and integrating ‘cognitive-domain’ defence into Japan’s overall posture and concepts.

Other governmental responses approach information threats from technology, platform, digital, and cyber security perspectives, although disinformation is still not fully mainstreamed. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications approaches disinformation mainly through ICT-literacy promotion, public awareness, and platform governance. It also engages platforms and industry via forums and study groups, and supports multistakeholder initiatives such as the Safer Internet

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23 Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘The Responses to Information Manipulation, including Spread of Disinformation’, 4 December 2025, [www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pagewe\\_000001\\_00052.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pagewe_000001_00052.html).

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.; Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, ‘Regarding Media Report of an Alleged Fake Document of Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, Press Release, 14 August 2023, [www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000454.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000454.html); Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, ‘Regarding Media Report of a Meeting with an Alleged Senior Official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Handling of ALPS Treated Water’, Press Release, 22 June 2023, [www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000443.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000443.html).

Association and the Japan Fact Check Center.<sup>26</sup> The Digital Agency advances the Priority Policy Program for Realizing a Digital Society, which includes elements relevant to information integrity and secure digital infrastructure, recognising disinformation as a 'new threat' facing the safe and secure digital society.<sup>27</sup> The Information-Technology Promotion Agency, as an independent administrative agency under the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, supports cybersecurity and digital infrastructure, and increasingly frames disinformation as part of Japan's broader digital security agenda.<sup>28</sup>

## FOIP and Regional Geopolitics through the Lens of Strategic Communications

Despite the relative success of the Indo-Pacific geopolitical initiatives in attracting like-minded countries, and the setting up of the ongoing counter-disinformation mandate contained in the 2022 NSS alongside emerging FIMI policy and capabilities, Japan's strategic communications are being tested by increasingly divided regional conditions. In many ways these regional geopolitical contests have been channelled through competing discourses and discursive practices advanced by adversarial, neutral (or fence-sitting), and even like-minded states. As the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical relevance has grown, it has increasingly become a productive arena for rival narrative projections, each seeking to establish itself as the dominant framing of regional order. These struggles are

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- 26 Government of Japan, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 'Release of "Learn ICT Literacy in Five Areas: Build and Safeguard a Secure Information Society" and "How to Deal with the Internet: What You Should Do to Avoid being Deceived by Dis/Misinformation, 2nd Edition"', 19 March 2025, [www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_sosiki/joho\\_tsusin/eng/pressrelease/2025/3/19\\_4.html](http://www.soumu.go.jp/main_sosiki/joho_tsusin/eng/pressrelease/2025/3/19_4.html); Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan, Whitepaper on Information and Communications, 2023, 'Chapter 5: ICT Policy Initiatives in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications', [www.soumu.go.jp/johotsusintokei/whitepaper/eng/WP2023/pdf/01-chap5.pdf](http://www.soumu.go.jp/johotsusintokei/whitepaper/eng/WP2023/pdf/01-chap5.pdf).
- 27 Government of Japan, Digital Agency of Japan, 'Priority Plan for the Advancement of a Digital Society', 13 June 2025, [www.digital.go.jp/assets/contents/en/node/basic\\_page/field\\_ref\\_resources/5ecac8cc-50f1-4168-b989-2bcaabffe870/92216eb9/20250728\\_policies\\_priority\\_outline\\_en\\_02.pdf](http://www.digital.go.jp/assets/contents/en/node/basic_page/field_ref_resources/5ecac8cc-50f1-4168-b989-2bcaabffe870/92216eb9/20250728_policies_priority_outline_en_02.pdf).
- 28 Government of Japan, Information Technology Promotion Agency, Information Security White Paper 2025 [in Japanese], [www.ipa.go.jp/publish/wp-security/j5u9nn0000004wk0-att/ISWP2025\\_Chap4.pdf](http://www.ipa.go.jp/publish/wp-security/j5u9nn0000004wk0-att/ISWP2025_Chap4.pdf).

especially visible among 'Global South' members of the Indo-Pacific, and on global stages, as well as in Southeast Asia. This provides the rationale for the methodology adopted in this paper, which analyses event data from scheduled diplomatic encounters involving a mixed participation beyond Western advanced economies, such as G20, ASEAN, and ASEAN–Japan summit meetings, where many of these discursive battles are rendered observable.

On one hand are discourses promoted by China that have trickled into the Global South and, in more nuanced ways, into Southeast Asia, underscoring the resonance of Chinese narratives. A key macro-level frame in this regard is the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI). For China this represents an effort to reorient its economic growth model outward through infrastructure and connectivity projects that absorb excess industrial capacity, open new markets, and deepen trade and financial links with the Global South. The BRI is presented both as an instrument for expanding China's global economic and strategic reach, and as a vehicle for advancing elements of its industrial policy.<sup>29</sup>

China also seems to combine increasingly this constructive macro-level discourse with tactical information manipulation utilising both state machineries and ostensibly private social media accounts targeting IndoPacific audiences, although identifying the overall pattern of these activities lies beyond the scope of this study. Such manipulation often seeks to undermine or discredit FOIP by portraying it as a US-led containment scheme against China.

On the other hand, Russia's discourse towards Indo-Pacific audiences is primarily manipulative in intent and practice, centring on efforts to recast the reality and perception of the war in Ukraine. The Russian government has consistently framed its invasion of Ukraine as a 'special military operation' to remove a supposedly neo-Nazi leadership in Kyiv, while denying or undermining Ukraine's sovereignty in ways that mirror

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29 Jin Keyu, *New China Playbook: Beyond Socialism and Capitalism* (Viking, 2023); also see her interview for *Panorama*, BBC, 24 November 2025 ('Britain and China: Following the Money', viewing in Tokyo), [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002mfm2](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002mfm2).

narrative patterns observed in Europe. In parts of the Indo-Pacific, Russia has encountered relatively sympathetic or at least ambivalent audiences, to the concern of Japan and other G7/European governments, and has repeatedly sought to downplay or deflect discussion of its responsibility for aggression. In the events monitored for this study, Moscow's messaging worked to prevent the war in Ukraine—particularly questions of Russian accountability—from becoming a central theme, thereby diluting or diverting debate around the conflict.

FOIP has thus increasingly had to compete with Chinese and Russian accounts in parts of the Global South where audiences remain open or ambivalent to these alternative discourses. In many cases such versions sit alongside or directly challenge FOIP's pursuit of liberal values and a rules-based order. Southeast Asian states, which generally resist being subsumed under the broader 'Global South' label, advance their own discursive emphasis on strategic autonomy<sup>30</sup> rather than relying on FOIP's value vocabulary, although Southeast Asia cooperates with Japan's FOIP on a case-by-case basis. In the Indo-Pacific context this autonomy—rooted in ASEAN's founding aspiration since 1967—implies freedom of decision-making from great-power interference by extra-regional actors such as the United States, China, or Russia, and reflects a pragmatic, hedging stance that differs from FOIP's more explicitly liberal alignments.

Japan's diplomacy has also been traditionally pragmatic, and this has shaped how FOIP has been articulated and implemented in practice, particularly in relations with ASEAN, which have long been central to Tokyo's regional strategy. In dealings with Southeast Asian partners, references to values have at times taken a back seat to maintaining cooperative ties, and respecting ASEAN's preference for consensus and non-interference.

Divergent political alignments within this regional operating environment have caused friction for Japan's strategic communications, while Tokyo and its G7 Partners increasingly worry about attempts to manipulate

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30 Aoi, 'Indo-Pacific, Geopolitics and Strategic Communications'.



information channelled through Global South members, where both Russia and China can find more receptive audiences than in established democratic forums.

In this context, gaps in Japan's diplomatic signalling and within its domestic information space present potential opportunities for adversarial state. This generates an ongoing contest between external manipulation efforts and Japan's still developing ability both to project its foreign and defence policies in a values-consistent way and to safeguard its information environment.

## Open-Source Research Data Collection and Analysis

The methodology underpinning this research involved active monitoring of the Japanese information space by a research team from Cardiff University during four major diplomatic events in 2023, where Japanese foreign policy surrounding the FOIP pillar was potentially expected to attract hostile and malign attention. The four events of interest were the G7 Summit (Japan, 19–21 May); the ASEAN Summit (Indonesia, 4–7 September); the G20 Summit (India, 20 September); and the 50th Anniversary Summit on ASEAN–Japan Relations (Japan, 16–18 December). This 'event-based' research design involved data collection and analysis activities oriented around the defined events with keywords and search strategies configured to detect signals of information manipulation by pro-Russian and pro-PRC actors. It is an approach that can be counterposed with several others. For example, a different way of researching the issues arises if one elects to track the activities of known and publicly attributed information operations, such as Russia's *Doppelganger* or China's 'Paperwall' campaigns. Other viable strategies might include concentrating data collection around the deployment of a specific influencing tactic or platform of operation.

In accordance with the event-based sampling approach, the observation period for each of the four events was designated as the duration of the event plus the four days before and after each one. For these time periods, researchers systematically analysed content from Chinese state-owned media (CSOM), Russian state-owned media (RSOM), official state-affiliated social media accounts (especially on X/Twitter but also including other platforms), and accounts identified as influential or potentially engaged in coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

A mixed-method analytic approach was then applied to the incoming data streams in two phases. For each case study, the first phase involved combinations of quantitative network analytics with qualitative content analysis, designed to enable comprehensive mapping of state-led and inauthentic influence operations for each individual event in turn. Once this was completed, in the second phase of analysis a more comparative approach was introduced. This involved comparing and contrasting the patterns of behaviour and contents observed across the four case studies, to delineate any nascent patterns, for both similarities and differences between the Russian and Chinese assets identified.

The monitoring of all four events suggests the existence of intentional efforts by Russia and PRC-linked entities to create networks of pro-Russia and pro-PRC accounts that respond to and interact with official media sources, with the intent seemingly being to amplify the public visibility of official discourses, through series of coordinated actions. Evidence from the monitoring of the ASEAN and G20 Summits in September 2023 indicates that one key channel for Russian messaging was a highly autonomous community network with 108 members (Oso Russia<sup>31</sup>) on X/Twitter, where members post primarily in Japanese.

An additional key finding derived from this research design worth briefly rehearsing is how Russian- and Chinese-aligned assets repeatedly amplified overlapping narratives, primarily seeking to undermine Japanese cooperation with Western alliances. There was also a clear

31 Oso Russia does not mean anything in particular in English, but its phonetic equivalent in Japanese (Osoroshia) means a proclamation of fear ('I am afraid').

attempt to opportunistically exploit domestic narratives of disaffection. The adversarial agenda appears to have been to undermine Japan's alignment with Western alliances, and project Russian/PRC influence by exploiting domestic issues and wider geopolitical debates. Both RSOM and CSOM sources also utilised affiliated networks of accounts on social media that tended to present alternative strategic narratives, probably intended to override existing or dominant ones, which are essentially a legacy of a post-WWII liberal world order. For example, Japan was often portrayed as a 'pawn of the West/US'. There was also emphasis on domestic unrest, delegitimising Japan's position in the existing global order. Japan's political leaders, such as former prime minister Fumio Kishida and former foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, were portrayed as incompetent. These alternative tropes highlighted through the thematic data analysis repeatedly questioned the utility of the US–Japan alliance (ASEAN Summit and G20); flagged the potential for nuclear escalation (G7 in Hiroshima); highlighted the treatment of Fukushima treated water (ASEAN Summit and G20); engaged in the promotion of alternative world orders (accenting 'multipolarity' and the role of the 'Global South'); and focused on Ukraine's status in its war with Russia.

This last theme is an especially significant vector of attack because, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Japan has supported Ukraine as part of the G7, initially leading in its condemnation of Russia's invasion as a blatant breach of international law. This included altering some key aspects of its traditional policy towards Russia, in which it prioritised progress towards ending the war between the two nations by concluding a peace agreement, Northern Territories issues, and avoiding uniting Russia and China in their strategic calculus.

## Comparative Analysis of Overt State Media Propaganda

To commence a more detailed ‘richer picture’ analysis of the empirical data collected across the four key events, we first trace out some base patterns of activity performed by known Russian and Chinese media sources. For instance, monitoring of the 2023 G7 Summit took place between 16 and 24 May covering CSOM, RSOM, and official state-affiliated accounts on Twitter, as well as social media accounts identified by researchers as especially influential, or because they were suspected of engaging in coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

Russian and Chinese state media outlets were investigated to establish which key themes and issues were being pushed by each state during the monitoring period. This analysis was then used subsequently to identify accounts on social media signalling affinities to each state. Where possible, verbatim language used in state media articles or official statements were also tracked through to social media accounts. As with all G7 summits, there was a certain level of general ‘noise’ in media and social media conversations and traffic. To control for this, the analysis focused upon narratives and actors connected to the Japanese information environment.

For the period of 16–24 May 2023, the Russian and Chinese state media outlets subject to monitoring posted a similar number of English language articles mentioning the G7 (CSOM, 157; RSOM, 146). Intriguingly, however, plotting the distribution of these articles over time identified a key difference in approach (see Figure 1). CSOM sources were more engaged in presenting alternative narratives after the summit had ended. Their strategy appears to have been more reactive and engaged in framing how the key themes of the summit were publicly and politically positioned and remembered. In comparison, the volume of RSOM articles peaked during the summit, and several of the key narratives on which Russian communications assets focused were originally seeded by state officials in the period before the summit began.

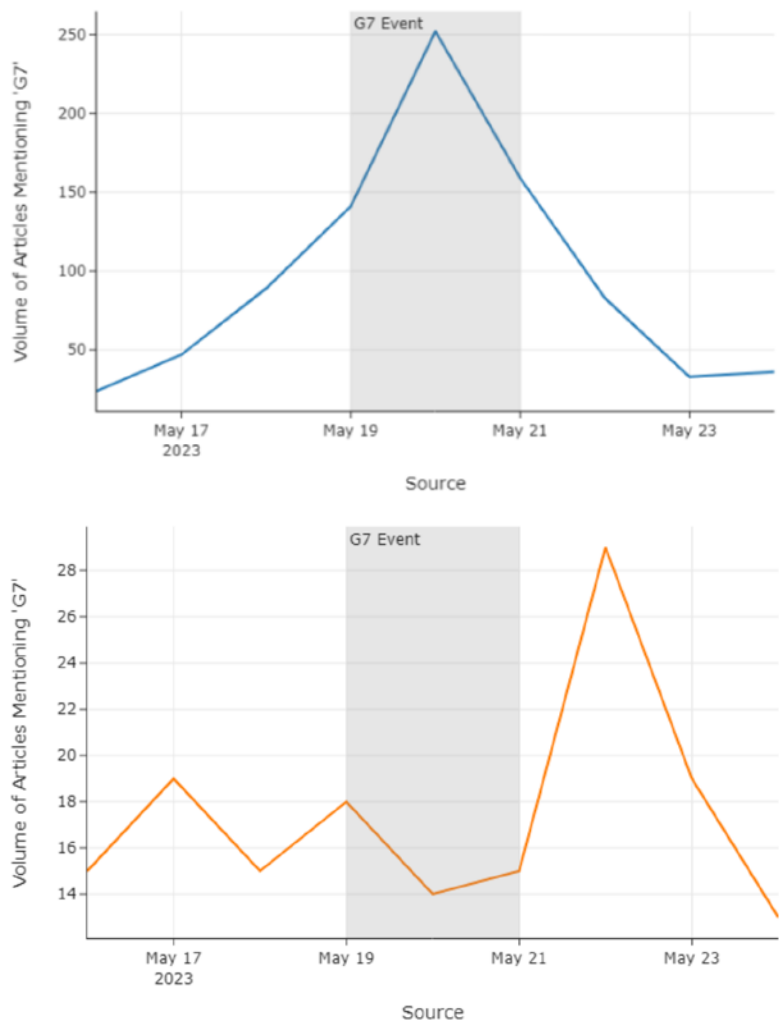


Figure 1. CSOM (top) and RSOM (bottom) articles mentioning G7, 16–24 May 2023

This result potentially reflects differences in the strategies adopted by the two different states. Such strategies may have involved different timings by which actors responded to environmental cues and signals,

before shifting their lines of action in ways that in turn conditioned the environment they were seeking to navigate.<sup>32</sup>

It was also found that while state-led narratives quickly dispersed across social media platforms as official and non-official pro-PRC/Russian social media accounts picked up and amplified some, there was also a significant difference in the narrative focus of both states. Pro-PRC accounts focused on G7 claims of 'Chinese economic coercion', comparisons between Ukraine and Taiwan, and offering alternative narratives to those presented against China at the summit. Pro-Russian accounts, in contrast, tended to focus more on the Ukraine war, current nuclear escalation threats, and nuclear history in Japan. The strong and recurring nuclear theme connects to and reflects the history of Hiroshima (see Figure 2), where there was clear strategic messaging. Notably the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Maria Zakharova held a press conference on 17 May to highlight the 'cynicism' and 'absurdity' of holding a summit that focused on the 'nuclear threat from Russia' in Hiroshima, the site of a nuclear bomb dropped by America. This perspective was pushed by many official Russian accounts on X/Twitter, and was subsequently repeated by non-official pro-Russian accounts also on this platform.<sup>33</sup> The narrative around Hiroshima and US/Japanese nuclear history was also exploited to support pro-Russian narratives around the 'escalation' of the Ukraine war.

Figure 2 is a visualisation of the top ten key terms featuring in aggregated RSOM and CSOM media articles in association with the key search term 'G7'. Certain narratives were shared by both state medias. In particular there was narrative convergence on the topics of the Hiroshima protests and anti-US sentiments. These more closely linked narratives are denoted by the data points towards the top-right corner of the

32 Whether this process may be akin to what Abernethy terms 'Perception-Action Coupling' merits further research. D. Farrow and B. Abernethy, 'Do Expertise and the Degree of Perception—Action Coupling Affect Natural Anticipatory Performance?', *Perception* 32, No 9 (2003): 1127–39. <https://doi.org/10.1068/p3323>.

33 [https://twitter.com/buhi\\_2/status/1660235230874329088](https://twitter.com/buhi_2/status/1660235230874329088) (ぶひ: #NOWAR #戦争反対 原爆、フクチン反対。平和を祈ります。21 May 2023). Please note that some of the tweets cited have been deleted since their original publication.

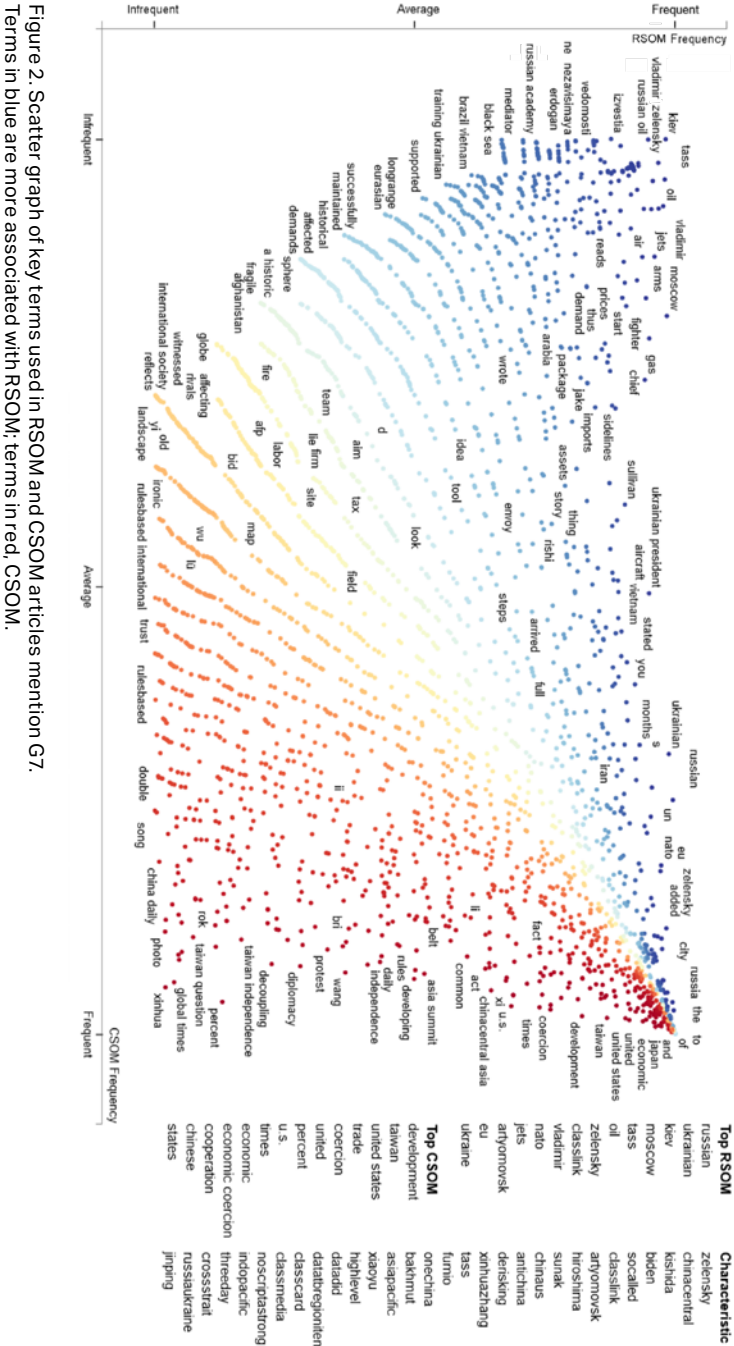


Figure 2. Scatter graph of key terms used in RSOM and CSOM articles mentioning G7. Terms in blue are more associated with RSOM; terms in red, CSOM.

graph. However, Figure 2 also clarifies some of the themes where the two countries' medias developed distinct and independent positions, indicated by the concepts and data points plotted more towards the bottom left of the graph.

To develop some of these preliminary implications in the data, researchers sought to trace out some of the transmission pathways of these media-based narratives and how they were being disseminated by social media accounts. This resulted in the identification of an interconnected network of highly influential accounts seeding and amplifying pro-PRC and pro-Russian narratives, primarily across X/Twitter. There was evidence of a number of these accounts displaying signals of inauthentic behaviour and amplifying pro-PRC and pro-Russian narratives in the Japanese language. There were also recurring interactions between state officials and these probably 'inauthentic' accounts with them amplifying one another's content. Evidence of operational hashtags being utilised by a few accounts was also captured, including a specific anti-Kishida narrative.

For the time being, however, we should return to the initial finding reported above—namely, the temporal differences detected between Russian and Chinese state media sources, since this may serve as an indicator of the different strategic intents and purposes underpinning each state's influencing campaigns. Russian state actors appeared to be more intent on seeding narratives and framing the discussion before the summit. In contrast, PRC state actors were more reactive, responding to official G7 statements where these were perceived to challenge or even contravene China's interests or damage its reputation.

A similar analytic approach was operationalised for each of the subsequent three events of interest, to see if the same pattern was replicated. The 2023 ASEAN meeting in Jakarta and the G20 Summit in New Delhi took place on 4–7 September and 9–10 September, respectively. Figure 3 provides a comparative temporal profiling for the RSOM and CSOM articles published in relation to the ASEAN meeting. Measured by volume, CSOM sources published 156 articles, and the RSOM sources 239.



Although not quite as clearly delineated as for the G7 event, similar differences in the patterns of publication timing were again identified.

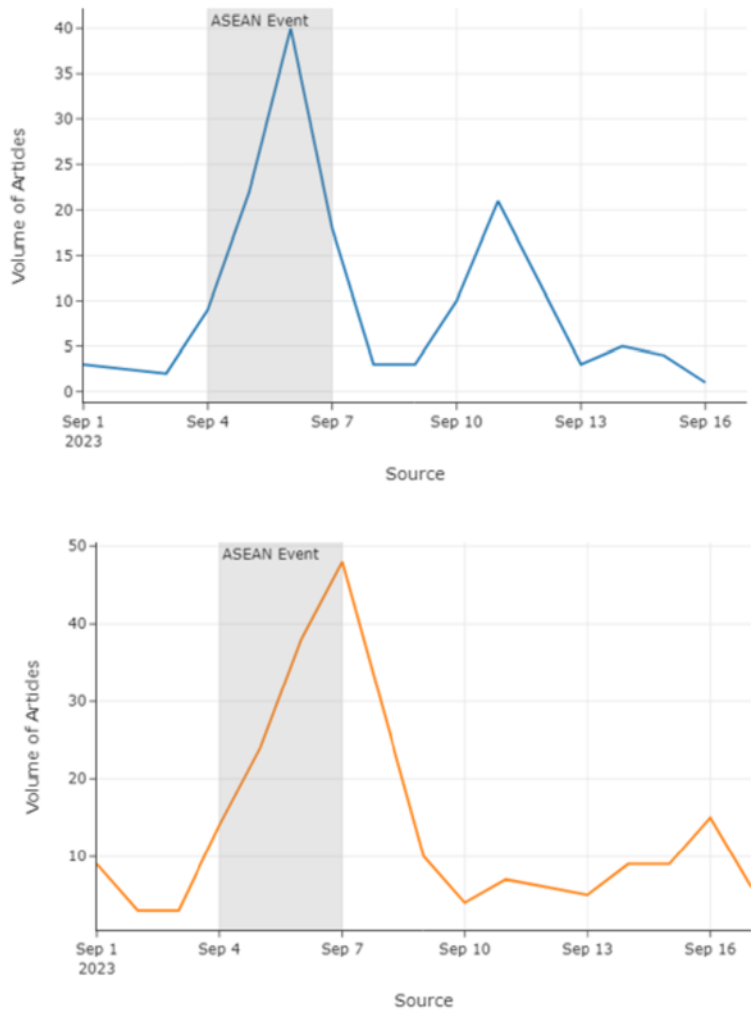


Figure 3. CSOM (top) and RSOM (bottom) articles mentioning ASEAN, 1–16 September 2023

For the ASEAN Summit, the primary narrative focus of PRC-linked state actors was the Fukushima water release, which commenced on 24 August, just before the summit began. Chinese media quickly denounced the water release, amplifying coverage of local protests in Japan and a public rejection of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) proposal relating to it.

The coverage of the Fukushima water release shows how tactical reactions were opportunistically and frequently organised around and fed into broader, more persistent, strategic adversarial narratives. Chinese state-owned media was highly critical of this event, and inauthentic social media accounts amplified this criticism. In so doing, they were echoing and reproducing attempts to undermine Japanese alignment with Western nations and alliances consistent with its Indo-Pacific strategy.<sup>34</sup> This was tried through blending several tactical narratives that repeatedly appeared. It was also leveraged through a mix of strategic and opportunistic reactions to global events, such as the Fukushima water release and previously reported protests in Hiroshima during the G7. Russian state media<sup>35</sup> and pro-Russian social media influencers also shared footage of the protests in Hiroshima. These were both framed as something that mainstream democratic media would not report on<sup>36</sup> and linked to concerns expressed about the possibility of military escalation.<sup>37</sup>

This segueing of tactical issues and strategic themes was accomplished across a range of textual and visual communication formats. A *Global Times* (GT) article released on 6 September criticised Japan for using the ASEAN event as a public relations stunt and asserted that Japan would probably seek to 'play down the hazardous dumping of Fukushima nuclear-contaminated

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34 Disputes over Japan's release of treated water were captured in the press globally as well. See BBC, 'Fukushima: The Fishy Business of China's Outrage over Japan's Release', 25 August 2023, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66613158](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66613158); BBC, 'Fukushima Nuclear Disaster: Activists March against Tokyo's Waste Plan', 12 August 2023, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66486233](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66486233).

35 [https://twitter.com/RT\\_com/status/1659740726362767361](https://twitter.com/RT_com/status/1659740726362767361) (@RT\_com, Anti-war demonstrators clash with police in Hiroshima ahead of G7 summit, 20 May 2023).

36 <https://twitter.com/Sprinter99880/status/1660507254758469634> (@SprinterMediaNews Hiroshima, as free (from conscience) democratic media will not show it to you, 22 May 2023).

37 <https://twitter.com/apocalypseos/status/1660471078379225091> (@apocalypseos, 22 May 2023).

wastewater into the ocean’ (Figure 4).<sup>38</sup> This story was picked up across *GT*’s social media platforms and by Zhang Heqing, a Chinese embassy official in Pakistan.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, China Daily and CGTN published articles on 7 and 8 September respectively, dismissing Japanese articles that claimed China had refused to join the IAEA.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 4. *Global Times* cartoon on the Fukushima water release

Chinese premier Li Qiang’s discussion with Japanese prime minister Kishida on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit highlighted the Fukushima issue. CSOM outlets such as China Daily and Xinhua News quickly disseminated<sup>41</sup> his calls for Japan to ‘handle the matter in

38 Global Times, ‘Japan Likely to Use ASEAN Event for PR Stunt; Kishida Urged to Explain Dumping with Sincerity, Science-Based Attitude’, 6 September 2023, [www.globaltimes.cn/page/202309/1297720.shtml](https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202309/1297720.shtml).

39 [https://twitter.com/zhang\\_heqing/status/1699789358675689699](https://twitter.com/zhang_heqing/status/1699789358675689699) [no longer available].

40 Jiang Xueqing, ‘Embassy Refutes Rumor on China, IAEA and Japan Discharge’, *ChinaDaily*, 7 September 2023, [www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202309/07/WS64f9d60fa310d2dce4bb48ab.html](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202309/07/WS64f9d60fa310d2dce4bb48ab.html); CGTN, ‘Chinese Embassy in Japan says Reports on China, IAEA and Fukushima are False’, 8 September 2023, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2023-09-08/Chinese-embassy-says-reports-on-China-IAEA-and-Fukushima-are-false-1mVvTSKumGc/index.html>.

41 Cao Desheng, ‘Premier Calls for Asian Countries to Focus on Peaceful Development’, *ChinaDaily*, 6 September 2023, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202309/06/WS64f86dc7a310d2dce4bb44d2.html>.

a responsible way’,<sup>42</sup> as ‘nuclear-contaminated water concerns the global marine ecosystem and public health’,<sup>43</sup> in a possible attempt to frame subsequent coverage.

Russian state narratives, in contrast, revolved around Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov’s attendance and concerns about NATO and AUKUS, with less focus on Japan. Russian outlets also reported Myanmar’s calls for increased Russia–ASEAN cooperation, emphasising growing energy needs and the role of Asia in world trade. Kang Zo, Myanmar’s minister of investment and foreign economic relations, argued for more cooperation between Russia and ASEAN, stating: ‘economic ties between Russia and ASEAN should increase significantly due to the growing energy needs of ASEAN countries and the growing role of Asia in world trade’.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the Russian embassy in Japan published negative tweets regarding Japanese cooperation with the US, but did not connect this to ASEAN.

A secondary story for both states was a commentary on the global world order, in particular critiquing Japan’s relationship with the US and Western alliances. As demonstrated in Figure 5, RSOM and CSOM often mentioned their own country with ASEAN to emphasise their own bilateral relationship with the Asian association.

## State Officials as Social Media Influencers

The preceding discussion highlighted how Maria Zakharova, as a Russian state official, played a key role in amplifying specific narratives. A similar role was also played for the PRC by Xue Jian, Chinese consul general in Osaka. Xue is a well-known figure owing to his recurring role in actively

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42 Sakuma Murakami, ‘Japan PM Speaks to China’s Li about Radioactive Water Release’, *Reuters*, 7 September 2023, [www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-pm-kishida-says-he-spoke-with-china-premier-li-asean-sidelines-2023-09-06](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-pm-kishida-says-he-spoke-with-china-premier-li-asean-sidelines-2023-09-06).

43 Global Times, ‘Japan Likely to Use ASEAN Event’.

44 RIA Novosti, ‘Myanmar Declares Interest of ASEAN Countries in Cooperation with Russia’ [in Russian], 11 September 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230911/asean-1895444349.html>.

spreading PRC tropes via social media, using his X/Twitter account which has a huge audience reach. On 20 May 2023 the account shared a video of protesters lining the streets of Hiroshima to protest against the G7 Summit, reaching over 246,000 X/Twitter users.<sup>45</sup>

Narratives posted in this account include:

- The G7 Hiroshima Summit was a failed meeting that fuelled factional conflict, undermined regional stability, and stifled the development of other countries.<sup>46</sup>
- G7 member states secretly supported and advocated for ‘violent’ demonstrations in Hong Kong in an effort to divide China.<sup>47</sup>
- G7 member states are controlled by the US, the world’s largest nuclear power.<sup>48</sup>
- Japan and the United States will make full use of the G7 to divide the world and do serious damage to the economic development of each country, regional stability, and world peace.<sup>49</sup>

The Xue account repeatedly retweets the content of pro-PRC and Russian state media outlets, and engages with pro-PRC/Russian content in the Japanese language that appears to originate with inauthentic accounts. These activity patterns are prolific, on occasion reaching over 4000 tweets a day. In June 2022 the account posted over 6000 tweets on one day.

Sometimes this influencer role can be quite directly confrontational. In relation to the G7 Summit, on 16 May the US ambassador to Japan, Rahm Emanuel, tweeted: ‘G7 members are developing tools to deter

45 <https://x.com/SprintMediaNews/status/1660507254758469634> (@SprintMediaNews Hiroshima, as free (from conscience) democratic media will not show it to you, 22 May 2023).

46 <https://x.com/xuejianosaka/status/1660813269203062786> (@xuejianosaka, 23 May 2023).

47 <https://twitter.com/xuejianosaka/status/1658989086257086465> (@xuejianosaka, 18 May 2023).

48 <https://twitter.com/xuejianosaka/status/1660301951962349568> (@xuejianosaka, 22 May 2023).

49 <https://x.com/xuejianosaka/status/1660199087071965184> (@xuejianosaka, 21 May 2023).

and defend against China's economic threats and retaliation.<sup>50</sup> This elicited a rapid response from several Chinese officials who quickly posted alternative narratives portraying China in a positive light, the US as an economic villain, and Japan as a US puppet.

The social media account of the Russian embassy of Japan (@RusEmbassyJ) played a key role in seeding pro-Russian narratives across the monitoring period associated with the ASEAN and G20 events. It published a total of 345 posts from 1 to 17 September, including a statement from Sergey Lavrov on the 3rd that gained a total of 554,000 views.

Figure 5 compares and contrasts the volume and timing of tweets from both the embassy and Xue Jian that mention the key words 'ASEAN' or 'G20' over the monitoring period. Xue Jian mentioned the keywords 40 times, while the Russian embassy mentioned them approximately 13 times. The embassy focused primarily on G20 and posted the highest number of tweets on 8 September, one day prior to the summit. These tweets centred on comments made by the director of Russia's Foreign Ministry Department for Economic Cooperation, Dmitry Birichevsky, in an interview with BRICS TV on 7 September, suggesting G20 members find 'common ground'.<sup>51</sup>

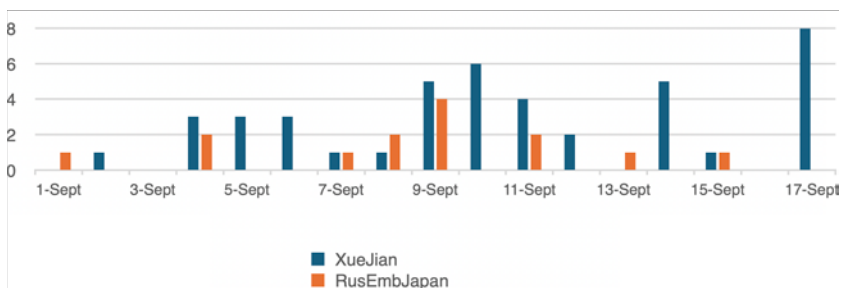


Figure 5. Comparing timings of tweets on ASEAN and G20 by key state accounts

50 <https://twitter.com/USAmbJapan/status/1658280122351489024> (@USAmbJapan, 16 May 2023).

51 駐日ロシア連邦大使館 on X: 🇷🇺D.A.ビリチエフスキー@MID\_RF: 🗨️ 今日、世界の団結はかつてないほど必要とされているため、インドを議長国としたG20のスローガン「全世界は一つの家族」は非常にタイムリーです。Russian Embassy in Japan, 'D.A. Birichevsky@MID\_RF: 🗨️ Today, as we need unity of the world more than ever before, the slogan of G20 chaired by India, "The whole world is one family", is very timely', Telegram, 9 September 2023, <https://t.co/RSLfJZgIfT>.

Furthermore, on 13 September, the Russian embassy account amplified Lavrov's statements at the G20 Summit,<sup>52</sup> signalling to its followers to see more details on its Telegram page—thus highlighting use of cross-platform amplification tactics. The Telegram page continued to discuss the success of the summit as Russia and other BRICS nations 'advocated [for] depoliticising discussions' and 'worked together to thwart Western attempts to "Ukrainise" the G20 format'.<sup>53</sup> Its use of signposting to direct followers to Telegram to 'read more' demonstrates that the embassy may use Telegram to communicate more complex and divisive interpretations. The Telegram post received a total of 545 views, and the X post was viewed over 4000 times.

Sometimes the interactions between state officials, state media outlets, and social media outlets leveraged striking levels of audience reach and engagement. Figure 6 is a screenshot of a story in a Xinhua article about the dangers of US economic coercion, reposted via Weibo, which received over one million reads/views on that platform alone. The key point to be derived from this discussion is how high-profile officials and their social media accounts can function as 'influencers', acting as key nodes in shaping the transmission pathways of propaganda narratives for both Russia and China. In the Japanese context, such communicative interventions can attract attention to an issue.

Pro-PRC and Pro-Russian Social Media Accounts and the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN–Japan Friendship and Cooperation in December 2023

The preceding discussion, in different ways and from different perspectives, centred on how relatively overt assets are harnessed and deployed on behalf of PRC and Russian state interests, in the process seeking to denude and degrade Japan's international influence and reputation. This section focuses on the less visible workings of accounts and assets on social media. These are variously attributable in terms of

52 <https://twitter.com/RusEmbassyJ/status/1701850542819963308> (@RusEmbassy, 13 September 2023).

53 <https://t.me/rusembjp/12904> (Embassy of Russia in Japan, 13 September 2023).



Figure 6. Xinhua article reposted to Weibo with view metrics

their links to nation state structures, but are key components in the communications system where narratives are developed, amplified, and disseminated. Here we will focus exclusively upon the fourth key event of interest, which celebrates ongoing links between Japan and its ASEAN partner countries.

By way of context, several concerns were raised during the summit meeting itself that were reworked into messaging content by accounts operating on social media, some of which appear to have obfuscated links to Russia and China respectively. Japanese and ASEAN leaders advocated for imminent access to humanitarian aid for Gaza and brought up concerns over the 'situation in East and South China Sea'.<sup>54</sup> ASEAN also conveyed its appreciation to Japan for supporting the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately leaders adopted a joint vision that addressed several of these concerns, including focusing on security and economic cooperation, signing a security assistance deal with Malaysia

54 Associated Press, 'Japan Bolsters Security Ties with Neighbors at Summit, amid Tensions with China', NPR, 17 December 2023, [www.npr.org/2023/12/17/1219884122/japan-bolsters-security-ties-with-neighbours-summit-amid-tensions-china](https://www.npr.org/2023/12/17/1219884122/japan-bolsters-security-ties-with-neighbours-summit-amid-tensions-china).

55 Tempo, 'ASEAN-Japan Summit Urges Broad Humanitarian Aid for Gaza', 18 December 2023, <https://en.tempo.co/read/1810759/asean-japan-summit-urges-broad-humanitarian-aid-for-gaza>.



and Indonesia to boost their maritime security, and reinforcing support for ASEAN's efforts to tackle climate change, among others.<sup>56</sup>

There was only limited engagement with this event from PRC state media and no Russian state media interest in the summit.

There was, however, more event-related activity on social media, albeit this was also at a lower volume than for earlier events. During the monitoring for the three preceding events of interest, a network of around 70 X/Twitter pro-PRC and pro-Russian accounts had been identified engaging in suspicious activities. Some displayed potential signals of 'inauthenticity' in that the account personas appeared fabricated. Others in the network appeared to be coordinating their messaging activity, either temporally or in terms of highly similar content. Tracking the operations of these networked accounts, focusing on their activities on the Japanese information space, identified behavioural traces indicative of persistent attempts to undermine Japan's reputation, or intent on amplifying Russian or Chinese interests. There were also low levels of cross-platform signalling, pushing Japanese audiences on X onto more 'specialised' platforms, such as Telegram and Weibo.<sup>57</sup>

For the PRC-aligned accounts, a key strategic narrative gravitated around attempting to undermine Japan's relationship with ASEAN, promoting instead China's relationship with ASEAN. There were also allegations about Japan's 'militarism', suggesting the country was using ASEAN to boost defence capabilities. Several accounts in the network were observed trying to leverage political disorder in Japan and amplifying pro-PRC and pro-Russian narratives on the Israel–Gaza conflict in Japanese. @wangan2010, who regularly engages with official diplomatic accounts, questioned where Japan would find the 4.9 trillion yen promised to ASEAN, which 'places the highest priority on economic relations with China'. This post included a link to another post by Sputnik Japan,

56 Mari Yamaguchi, 'Japan and ASEAN Bolster Ties at a Summit Focused on Security and Economy amid Tensions with China', *Associated Press*, 17 December 2023, <https://thehill.com/homenews/ap/ap-top-headlines/ap-japan-and-asean-bolster-ties-at-summit-focused-on-security-economy-amid-china-tensions>.

57 <https://twitter.com/LuLu0122/status/1749685991764562050> [no longer available].

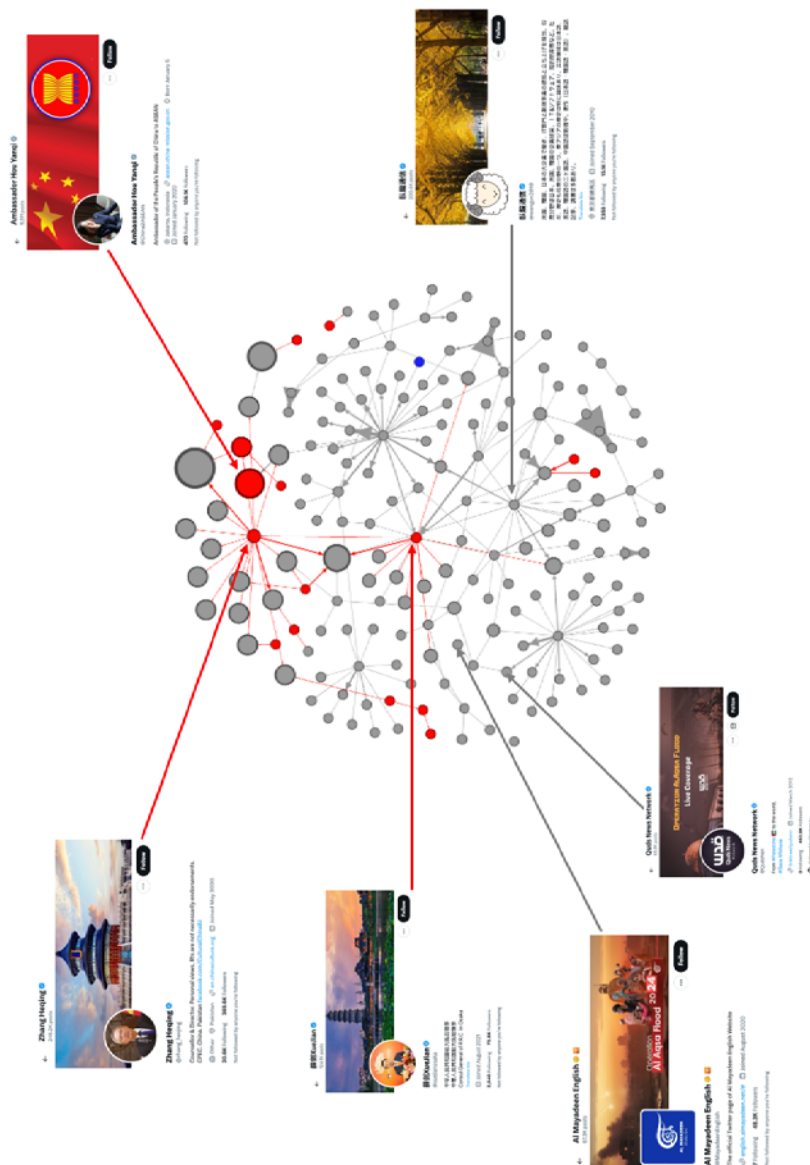


Figure 7. Retweet network of those interacting with influential accounts and with Russian and Chinese official accounts

which has since become unavailable. It is unclear as to whether this latter post was taken down by X or was deleted by the account. At least six accounts in the network reposted this message.<sup>58</sup>

Figure 7 provides a network visualisation of all the accounts over the monitoring period that retweeted the Chinese and Russian embassies in Japan and mentioned ‘ASEAN’ or ‘Japan’. There were 181 users and 208 retweets in total. This is notably smaller than the network that resulted from G7 discussions ( $N$  users = 839), and reflects the smaller online conversation around this monitored event. The red nodes in the graph represent Chinese official state accounts, while blue represents Russian official state accounts. The network also includes key ‘influential’ and unattributed accounts identified over the different phases of this research. These are therefore interacting with the official accounts on a recurring basis.

One notable difference in the network’s activities at this point, compared with previous monitoring periods, was the inclusion of outlets and actors messaging on the Gaza conflict. Specifically there were accounts engaged in pushing pro-Iran or pro-Russia messaging and content derived from Iran’s Quds News Network and Hezbollah’s Al Mayadeen (see Figure 8), both of which are funded by Iran and appear in the network diagram.

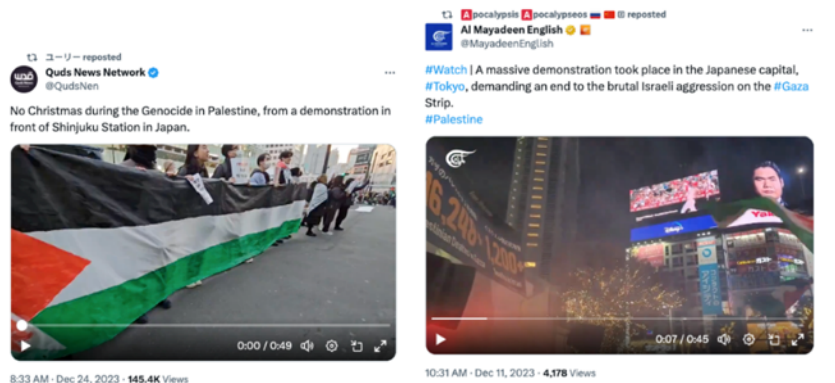


Figure 8. Iranian-funded media outlets being retweeted by Japanese language accounts on X

58 <https://x.com/wangon2010/status/1736374385194480077> (@wangon2010, 17 December 2023).

The detection of this evolution and adaptation in the network's behaviour serves to reinforce an interpretative point made earlier. This relates to how effective information influence operations are highly agile and responsive to global events. They are able to develop rapidly and disseminate tactical stories about conditions surrounding a specific event, but in ways that are inflected with broader and deeper strategic themes that speak to established geopolitical issues.

## Membership Oso Russia (会員制おそロシア) on X/Twitter

As part of the monitoring for the G7 event, analysis identified user [@Z58633984](#) as an account actively spreading pro-Russian messages in Japanese on X/Twitter, operating in the context of the aforementioned network. Tracking it across subsequent events of interest suggests that the role of this account evolved, emerging as moderator of a community group, Membership Oso Russia,<sup>59</sup> that was created in July 2023<sup>60</sup> (see Figure 9). At the time of detection, the community consisted of 108 members, with four moderators including account [@Z58633984](#). The community's creator account appears to have been [@4mYeeFHhA6H1OnF](#), which promoted discussion of Russian narratives on the community page and on its individual account.

The community's short description states it is 'limited to pro-Russians'. Members of the group post in Japanese with extensive discussion of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. That said, only one community post focused upon the events of interest, where member [@lindenb](#) reposted an article from [@AlMayadeenNews](#),<sup>61</sup> a Beirut-based pan-Arab media outlet. The article stated: 'Russian Foreign Minister: The Global South's

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59 <https://x.com/j/communities/1681756863187263488> (会員制 おそロシア 親露限定 30 November 2023).

60 X/Twitter communities were announced by the platform in 2021 as a 'new way for you to connect, talk, and bond with others who share your interests and values': <https://business.twitter.com/en/products/communities.html#:~:text=Communities%20is%20a%20new%20way,with%20people%20who%20get%20you> [no longer available].

61 <https://twitter.com/AlMayadeenNews>.

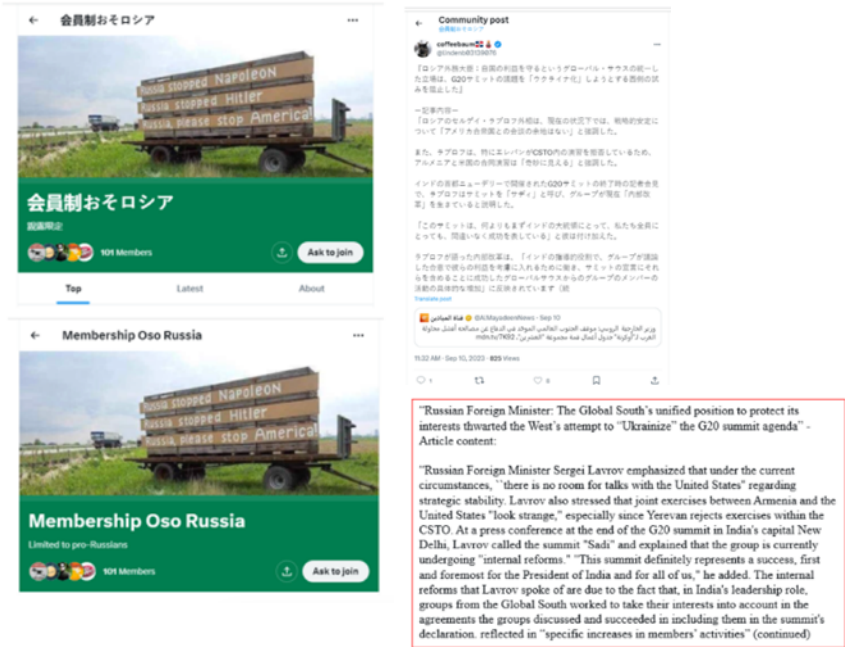


Figure 9. Screenshots from Oso community posts and interactions relating to the G20 Summit

unified position to protect its interests thwarted the West’s attempt to “Ukrainize” the G20 summit agenda.’ However, the group also frequently held community X/Twitter ‘spaces’, where members have live audio conversations, but the topics and contents of these were not available to researchers.

By December 2023 and the time of the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN–Japan Friendship and Cooperation, the community on X had expanded to 180 members. Content was being shared in the group at a relatively steady rate. Significantly, and reinforcing a previous point about cross-platform activity, members were now being encouraged to join Telegram chats or live X spaces that included information on Russia in Japanese (Figure 10).

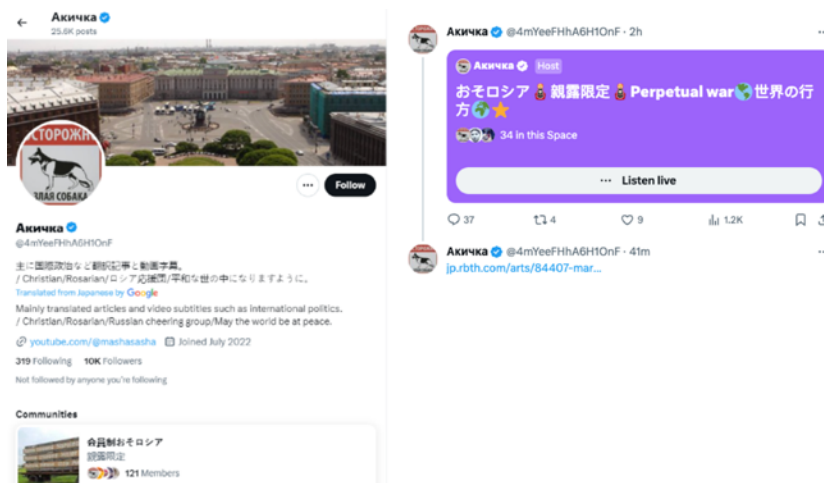


Figure 10. Japanese-language X space linked to the Oso Russia community

One user was observed sharing a screenshot to the ‘Russia Beyond Japanese’ Telegram channel and the corresponding website.<sup>62</sup> This is a Japanese offshoot of the broader Russia Beyond channel which promotes Russian culture abroad. The Telegram channel has a limited audience with only 481 subscribers (Figure 11).

The left-hand image of Figure 11 translates from Japanese as ‘Five facts to recommend the acclaimed Russian drama “The Boy’s World: Blood On the Asphalt”’, followed by ‘Top 10 USSR/Russian animated films recognized worldwide—from Venice, Tokyo, and Los Angeles—USSR-made animations won numerous prestigious awards (Culture)’. The right-hand image reads:

62 <https://twitter.com/TTFcsIJBaZ11597/status/1734200710848495928/photo/1> [accessed 29 February 24; message deleted from platform].

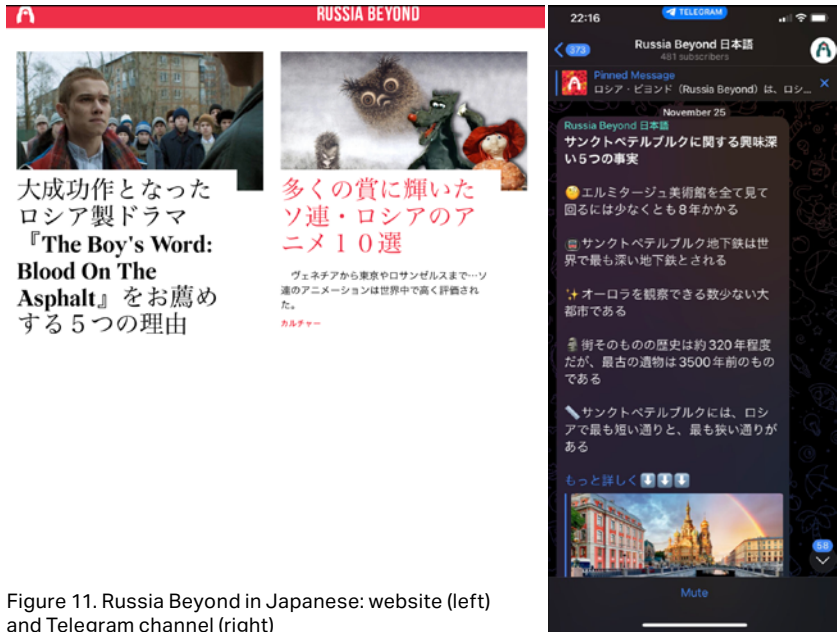


Figure 11. Russia Beyond in Japanese: website (left) and Telegram channel (right)

### Russia Beyond (Japanese)—Five interesting facts about St Petersburg

- It takes at least eight years to see everything in the Hermitage Museum
- St Petersburg’s subway is the deepest in the world
- The city is one of the few where you can see the aurora
- St Peterburg existed for 320 years, but its oldest building dates back 3500 years
- The city has the shortest and also the narrowest street in Russia. For more details, click the link.

One moderator of the group, @4mYeeFHhA6H1OnF, regularly held Japanese-language Twitter/X spaces. These featured titles such as ‘Russia’s perpetual war’. Given the number of users joining the sessions, it is clear they were reaching users outside the Oso community as well, with generally around 200–300 virtual ‘attendees’, although the number reached over 400 on one occasion,<sup>63</sup> and over 650 on another.<sup>64</sup>

## Interpretation

This research involved targeted open-source research of four major diplomatic events between May and December 2023, analysing the Japanese and related information space for signals of possible manipulation by pro-Russian and pro-PRC actors. The purpose was to evaluate how these actors sought to influence, shape, or undermine Japan’s foundational concept of FOIP. Analysis was grounded in public online discourse across English, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese language sources, focusing particularly on state official media (CSOM/RSOM) and influential pro-PRC/pro-Russia accounts on X (formerly Twitter) with a documented tendency to amplify these narratives.

The aim of such an approach was to develop a more holistic and ‘systemic’ picture, including how media and social media campaigns of both Russia and China and their assets interact and operate in conjunction with each other. This includes multiple operations and campaigns run by the same challenger state actors, but also interactions and reinforcements arising from the triangulated impacts of different operations run by and on behalf of different states.

The ensuing analysis identified the following major trends in the overall pattern and processes of information manipulation campaigns of these two state actors. First, the event-led analysis clearly discerned a persistent

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63 <https://twitter.com/AlMayadeenNews>.

64 <https://twitter.com/TFcslJBaZ11597/status/1734200710848495928/photo/1>  
[accessed 29 February 24; message deleted from platform].



pattern in which there were differences in the strategies through which these two state actors pursued adversarial information manipulation campaigns. This probably signals the uncoordinated nature of the information operations of the two state actors vis-à-vis this particular information space and time. Interpreting how, when, and why these two state actors decide to act, and in the process adapt to the feedback that results from their actions, has the potential to be developed into a more nuanced and sophisticated account of the ways in which information operations evolve and adapt over time.

Second, the innovative approach adopted in this research entailed empirically focusing on what might be termed the ‘net information effects’, the cumulative effect on the information space of exposure to multiple overlapping and interacting influences, performed by and on behalf of state actors. It is an approach that guides us to question whether there might be a mutual ‘harm multiplier’ effect that aggregates from overt and covert influence and interference actions performed by different state challengers.

The empirical analysis identified emergent and evolving networks of both Russian and Chinese state actor accounts propagating antagonistic narratives that undermine or often discredit FOIP and the nature of Japanese leadership facing particular diplomatic issues. This supports and justifies the slightly unorthodox ‘sampling strategy’ deployed in guiding the data collection and analysis. Specifically, we were interested in attempts to degrade and destabilise the FOIP construct. This is not how most studies of state information threats have been organised to date. Typically they sample an ‘operation’ to study its tactics, techniques, and procedures in detail. Or they adopt a purely ‘event-based sample’, around an election; for instance, to determine the attack vectors directed towards it. Instead, by pivoting around a concept (FOIP) this study has illuminated and revealed some different aspects of the organisation and conduct of state information threats, and consequently could be explored further in future studies.

In operationalising this approach, the empirical data suggested a persistent pattern whereby both Chinese and Russian state-linked accounts, as well as networks of sympathisers, propagated critical and antagonistic narratives towards Japanese diplomacy. This activity was prevalent around three of the four monitored events (G7, ASEAN Summit, G20), manifesting as rapid amplification on Japanese-language X/Twitter accounts. Notably the Japanese language was widely used for these campaigns, suggesting efforts to embed adversarial messaging in local discourse and maximise resonance among Japanese audiences.

Social media analysis identified a network of accounts, growing over time, displaying signals of inauthentic behaviour, and actively disseminating pro-PRC and pro-Russian content. Also highlighted was the emergence and evolution of the 'Oso Russia' group, possibly illustrating a strategic community-building effort, and underpinning Russian narrative dissemination over time. The group's membership increased from 108 to 180 between September and December 2023. Along with other monitored accounts, this group routinely amplified both misinformation (accidental) and disinformation (deliberate)—frequently exploiting topical domestic grievances such as corruption scandals and the Fukushima disaster—thus undermining confidence in the Japanese government and its alliances.

Quantitative findings suggested that although the direct impact (views and retweets) of state official media posts was relatively limited compared to the reach of highly networked social media communities, their narratives 'travelled' rapidly across X/Twitter, in part owing to the interventions of both official and non-affiliated accounts. These converging digital activities formed an ecosystem whereby the manipulation of critical accounts—especially those designed to delegitimise Japan's cooperation with Western partners—became routinised and normalised. Indeed, it is our hypothesis that this 'normalisation effect' of critical, polarising, and divisive sentiments in the Japanese information space may be a key objective.

Importantly the research did not establish direct operational coordination between pro-PRC and pro-Russian actors, although clear alignment in strategic objectives and the spread of similar narratives was observed. For instance, state-linked messaging regularly characterised Japan as subordinate to Western powers, condemned alliances such as AUKUS and the G7, and attacked Japan's reputation as a champion of democratic norms and the rules-based order. These narratives, while inauthentic to specialists in Japanese international relations, may be effective in forming prejudices among less informed domestic and international audiences.

## Conclusion

Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision has become an increasingly active target for adversarial information manipulation by Russia and China. They deploy distinct but mutually reinforcing strategies to contest Japan's values-based diplomacy and its anchoring role in a liberal rules-based order. The event-led and concept-based open-source research design adopted in this study demonstrates that, while these actors do not appear operationally coordinated, their campaigns aggregate into a net information effect that seeks to erode confidence in FOIP, Japan's alliances, and Japan's democratic credentials over time.

There are multiple strategic implications identified, as these essentially tactical and uncoordinated manipulations still have important cumulative effects.

The analysis of four major diplomatic events in 2023 shows that Russian and Chinese state media and affiliated social media ecosystems consistently used Japan-related summits as opportunities to seed or amplify narratives portraying Japan as a pawn of Western powers, delegitimising its leadership, and questioning the value of its cooperation with the G7, the United States, and ASEAN. Russian actors tended to act earlier and more proactively around events, especially on issues

linked to Ukraine and nuclear risk. Chinese actors more often reacted to perceived challenges to Beijing's interests, opportunistically leveraging controversies such as Fukushima water releases and domestic discontent in Japan and the wider Indo-Pacific.

These practices were reinforced by the systematic use of Japanese-language content and hybrid networks of state, quasi-official, and apparently inauthentic accounts, including community-building initiatives such as the Oso Russia X/Twitter group and cross-platform signposting to Telegram and Weibo. The cumulative pattern suggests an emerging ecosystem in which critical, polarising, and anti-FOIP narratives are routinised, rather than remaining exceptional interventions. The potential long-term consequences might be to normalize these disruptive dialogues that harm both domestic resilience and external perceptions of Japan's role in the liberal order.

In terms of *conceptual and methodological contributions*, by privileging FOIP as the sampling lens, rather than a single campaign, actor, or platform, this study offers one of the first systematic OSINT analyses of how multiple challenger states simultaneously contest a core strategic communications construct in the Japanese information space. Moreover, the analysis focusing on multiple state actors with attention to net effects highlights how adversarial actors iteratively interpret feedback, adapt tactics, and layer tactical narratives (Fukushima, Gaza, corruption scandals) onto deeper strategic projects aimed at undermining Japan's alignment with a rules-based order. This approach underscores the importance of moving towards more systemic frameworks that can capture how overlapping influence efforts interact with one another and also with structural features of Japanese society, media markets, and political culture. It also points to the additional and important need to consider ethical and contextual challenges of conducting OSINT in Indo-Pacific democracies, where sensitivities around attribution, data transparency, and indirect modes of political communication require some local tuning when utilising open-source research methods.

Yet the findings here should not lead one to leap to the conclusion that FOIP's resilience is effectively undermined by these attempts at manipulation, although they could interact with social vulnerabilities in the Japanese information space.

Despite escalating external pressure, FOIP remains deeply embedded in Japan's strategic identity and public commitment to a liberal rules-based order. And Japanese opinion towards China and Russia continues to be broadly negative. However, emerging domestic socio-economic, gender, and ideological cleavages, alongside the rise of anti-globalist and populist actors, have begun to open new vectors through which adversarial narratives can resonate with disaffected constituencies and align with broader 'Global South' or multipolar framings, promoted by Russia, China, and, occasionally but increasingly, Iranian-linked outlets.

In this environment the key risk lies less in single, disruptive operations and more in the potential for gradually normalising antagonistic frames that erode Japan's perceived legitimacy, its Western partnerships, and the credibility of FOIP as an inclusive, values-driven vision. Addressing and mitigating these diffuse, long-term effects requires not only technical detection and disruption capabilities, as outlined in Japan's recent strategic policy documents, but also, and more importantly, a sustained commitment to strategic communications. Japan has a long-standing tradition in strategic communications, illustrated by its constructive role in shaping the 'Indo-Pacific' vision. When confronted with adversarial manipulation, Japan must further prioritise strategic communications with a long-term perspective, one rooted not only in geopolitical acumen, but in the values that uphold a rules-based order and engage increasingly diverse domestic and regional audiences.

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