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## Toward a More Strategic Use of Multi-lateral Security Cooperation/ Dialogue

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# NIDS Commentary

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### Foreword

The keynote address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Asia-Pacific Security Summit (the Shangri-La Dialogue) held from May to June, 2014 in Singapore received a good response from regional countries as well as the US in that the speech clarified the Japanese role in the context of regional security. The remarks of the leaders of various nations in multi-lateral security dialogues are instantly disseminated through social media such as the researchers' blogs and Twitter, exerting a certain influence on formulating international opinions while their every word or every phrase is debated in various forums. In addition, opportunities have increased in which regional defense ministers all meet together such as at the ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting (ADMM) Plus established in 2010. One of the crucial issues for Japanese security policy is how to use such multi-lateral security cooperation/dialogue in a strategic manner.

### Stepping up multi-lateral security cooperation/ dialogue

For the 20 years from 1970 to 1989, the era of the Cold War, the Japanese Minister (Director) of Defense had met with Defense Ministers of non-US countries only 18 times including international conferences. In comparison to this, the numbers for the 10 years after the Cold War (1990-1999) increased to 60 times and to 118 times for the 10 years from 2000 to 2009. In addition, the number of deliberations among working-level officials of defense agencies from 1990 to 1999 was 27 times; over the next 10 years it

increased to 91 times, triple the previous decade<sup>1</sup>. Under the recent "diplomacy that takes a panoramic perspective of the word map" adopted by the Abe Government, trilateral conferences and 2 plus 2 (a ministerial conference of foreign affairs and defense) as well as bilateral defense exchange and cooperation has increased, and the opportunities for exchange and cooperation with other nations have further increased due to the efforts of enhanced capacity building support, etc. This is why this has come to be called "the era of defense diplomacy"<sup>2</sup>.

In conjunction with the above mentioned bilateral or trilateral defense exchanges and cooperation, the number of multi-lateral security cooperation/dialogue has increased, including various military exercises and international conferences mixed with private sector' participants. In addition to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) established in 1994 and the ADMN-Plus launched in 2010, the international conference on security by deputy director-general class officials of foreign affairs and defense has taken place within the framework of the East-Asia Summit since 2013. Moreover, conferences hosted by the private sector such as the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue (2002-) have been frequently held in addition to government-driven multi-lateral conferences such as the "Tokyo Defense Forum" (1996-) hosted by Japan's Defense Ministry, the "Halifax International Security Forum" (2009-) of the Canadian government, the "Seoul Defense Dialogue" (2012-) by the ROK's Ministry of National Defense and the "Jakarta International Defense Dialogue" (2013-) hosted by Indonesian Ministry of Defense. Japan has

dispatched the Minister of Defense or the Administrative Vice-minister of Defense to these conferences.

With regard to multi-lateral exercises, the multi-lateral exercise of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) within the framework of ADMM took place for the first time in June 2013 on top of the practical exercise (ARF-DiREx) of HA/DR which has been hosted by ARF every two years since 2009. In addition, apart from such large scale exercises, many relatively small scale exercises hosted by respective ASEAN nations are carried out and the SDF/ the Ministry of Defense has received invitations on such occasions.

Some critics say that any argument related to regional issues is not practically discussed in these multi-lateral security cooperation and dialogues and these are nothing but a mere “talk-shop”. Furthermore, it is sometimes said that multi-lateral exercises centered on ASEAN nations end up a “demonstration” and are of little advantage to the enhancement of the SDF’s strategy and skills. Although many initiatives in the field of PKO or natural disasters have been proposed in the ASEAN centered conferences, such proposals have been scarcely realized and most of them left untouched. In the field of HA/DR, for example, ASEAN led disaster relief exercises basically aim for multilateral cooperative response through the AHA centre (ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management). In reality, however, it is a coalition of willing countries (mostly centered around the US) that has coped with actual disasters, showing that a great gap still exists between the idea advocated in the exercise and actual operations.

Nonetheless, if these conferences were regarded as a real opportunity to pursue Japan’s national interests, it could be said that multilateral security dialogue provides a favorable place to promote bilateral or trilateral defense conference, in which practical discussion is expected. Good examples of this are the US-Japan, the US-Japan-Korea and the

US-Japan-Australia defense Ministers dialogues carried out yearly on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue. In addition, the participation in multilateral exercises hosted by ASEAN nations plays an important role in making Japan’s presence felt on the region, contributing to the improved soft power of Japan.

Multilateral security cooperation is also important from a viewpoint of assisting capacity building for developing countries. For example, Japan and Laos have assumed the co-chairmanship of the Expert Working Group (EWG) in the ADMM-Plus since 2014. Japan can communicate its SDF exercise know-how and efforts in HA/DR through EWG operation and meetings, to other ASEAN members, beginning with Laos. In particular, Laos regards HA/DR as important activities due to recent damage from flooding, etc. and there are growing voices in the country to expect a great deal of assistance from Japan which has much experience and know-how in this field. At first glance, these activities may not exert direct influence on the security of Japan. In the long term, however, they will contribute to the region’s stability and prosperity in terms of correcting the development gap among ASEAN member counties and assisting their unity and resiliency, and therefore have vitally important implications for Japan which has many security interests in the region including sea lanes of communications.

In addition, as the Shangri-La dialogue stated in the beginning of this paper, recent multilateral security dialogue can be exploited as an important opportunity in which each nation states its defense and security policy and insists on its legitimacy. For example, that the countries such as Japan, the US and Australia assert fundamental principles of the rule of law and the freedom of air flight and navigation, etc. symbolically shows the unity of these nations, which has more significance than the mere “formulating of international opinions”. Describing Japan’s security policy under the phrase “Proactive Contribution to Peace”, though it is not necessarily novel, impresses upon regional countries including the US the change in

Japan's security and seems to have displayed a certain effect as far as gaining support over the expansion of Japan's security role in the region.

In the age of "Word Politics" in which not only military and economic power but the power of "words" weighs more significantly in persuading other nations, a multilateral security dialogue acts an important role in terms of gaining the other country's understanding of one's own country's security policy and creating a more advantageous international environment. In this sense, multilateral dialogue that the Ministry of Defense participates in also becomes a part of excellent tool as "Defense Diplomacy" now.

### More Strategic Use of Multilateral Security Dialogue

Based on the discussion above, the MOD could further advance Japan's national interest by exploiting multilateral security cooperation/dialogue in a more strategic way than before. The strategic use of multilateral security cooperation/ dialogue is stressed by Japan's first "National Security Strategy" formulated in December, 2013, which declared that Japan would actively utilize the framework for regional cooperation such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the EAS, ASEAN+3 (Japan, China and South Korea), the ARF and the ADMM to enhance diplomacy/security cooperation with partners in the Asia-Pacific Region and resolve regional issues.

In the future, it is necessary to build and implement more specific field level strategies as to what approaches should be used to achieve these objectives in a concrete way, how Japan will collaborate with bilateral or trilateral defense exchanges and cooperation for the purpose of achieving these objectives effectively or how different regional frameworks will be combined. The issues are, for example, how Japan can leverage multilateral security cooperation/ dialogue in the course of strengthening the relation with the US or Australia and, with regard to the recent stagnant bilateral relationship with Korea and China, how Japan should

find the first step toward dialogue utilizing the opportunities of multilateral security cooperation/ dialogue. In fact, as for multilateral military exercises frequently carried out within ASEAN, what exercise hosted by which country and with what scale Japan should participate in must be discussed in connection with the above-mentioned comprehensive strategies.

In addition, in order to more organically utilize many multilateral security cooperation/ dialogues, it is indispensable to coordinate and divide respective roles with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

Until recently, in my own humble opinion, it seemed that the connection between the MOD and the MOFA has not been as tight as mentioned above with the except in the field of Japan- US relations. However, in the age of "Defense Diplomacy", diplomacy is no longer the sole prerogative of the MOFA and the tight connection between the MOD and the MOFA is also required even in statements of defense exchange and cooperation with nations other than the US and multilateral conferences, etc.

In this regard, the role of the National Security Council (NSC) established in December 2013 seems to be crucial. The NSC periodically carries out a policy coordination meeting with the director-class officials of respective ministries and agencies, through which the MOD and the MOFA frequently share information and coordinate policies, making it possible to develop more strategic defense diplomacies in a multilateral security cooperation/ dialogue.

### Boosting Personnel and Budget Aspects

The second issue is the aspect of boosting personnel and budget to cope with increasing visit opportunities to respective countries and international conferences. For example, the ADMM + Plus which the MOD emphasizes as a key to regional security cooperation has six EWGs for respective 4 non-traditional security issue fields such as counter terrorism, PKO and HA/DR. Each pair of chair countries has carried out the EWGs

on average one to three times a year. Roughly calculated, conferences are held 6 to 18 times a year or 1 to 3 times every two months. In addition, there are not only the EWGs but also director-class working groups, the Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs) and a ministry-class plenary meeting held every two years in the ADMM+Plus. Moreover, in case of implementing exercises, etc., arrangement meetings for them are also frequently carried out. If other international conferences such as ARF and EAS take place in addition to the above conferences, some kind of conferences or meetings would be held almost once a week during the busiest term and the arrangement for logistics and personnel dispatch have to be implemented on all such occasions.

Though increasing such opportunities for defense diplomacy necessitates a certain number of human resources with suitable capability and language ability, in reality a limited number of personnel alone undertake all of these missions. The enhancement of human resource is an urgent matter.

Similarly, it would become of increasing necessity for SDF officials to actively participate in international conferences, etc. Originally, respective nations' military personnel who are supposed to be "experts" for military/ defense matters form the core and take part in the EWG in the ADMM +Plus. As a matter of fact, almost all participants are military personnel in uniform and they hold discussions from an expert's perspective. Though the participants of Japan SDF officials have tended to increase in recent years, the number is far fewer than the number of participants from the Internal Bureau of the Ministry of Defense.

According to an inherent objective of defense diplomacy such as confidence building among relevant nations and improved transparency from a military aspect, it is preferable for SDF officials to participate in not only military exercises but also multilateral conferences, etc. and speak assertively.

In addition, securing a budget in proportion to the expenses of increasing security cooperation/ dialogue (especially expenses for traveling abroad) is also important. Of course, considering the recent strict financial situation, it is difficult to predominantly apportion the budget to only multilateral security cooperation or dialogue. In this sense, it is necessary to prioritize existing international conferences and exercises or request the reorganization and unification of conferences and initiatives whose content overlaps. On the other hand, the inability to participate in truly necessary conferences or exercises due to "budget shortages" should be avoided by any means

#### **As a Means of Japan's Public Diplomacy**

Finally, though this is not a matter of only the MOD, enhancing international communication influence through multilateral security dialogue is crucial. Japan, centering on the MOFA or the Japan Foundation under the name of "public diplomacy", has made efforts to improve the power to disseminate information to the outside from several years ago. These efforts, however, focused primarily on the communication ability enhancement of "soft" areas such as Japanese language and "pop culture". Until recently, the international communication influence in "hard" areas such as defense/ security seems to have been less recognized in general. As a result, foreign researchers often indicated that there was little information in English about Japanese security policy and groundless criticism of Japan such as the "leaning to the right" argument or "militarization" has been left unchecked.

It is from this context that the aforementioned "National Security Strategy" pointed out that: "In order to promote the National Security Policy, it is necessary to strengthen cooperative relations and build confidence with various nations as well as deepen the Japanese people's understanding by proactively and effectively disseminating the idea outside and inside Japan and

heighten its transparency”. It also mentioned the necessity of disseminating thoroughly unified strategic information which is under the Prime Minister-led government.

Actually, the government is making efforts to reinforce cross ministry and government office diplomatic publicity through restructured external publicity related organizations, an increased international publicity budget, and social networking services (SNS)<sup>3</sup>.

Based on this standpoint, the MOD also has to make efforts to formulate common norms among regional nations regarding the importance of international discipline on the basis of “rule of law” as well as accounting for the intention or objectives of Japan’s defense policy from time to time utilizing the opportunity of increased bilateral and multilateral defense exchange / cooperation. At that time, the MOD needs to disseminate Japan’s progress as a peaceful post-war nation including its positive involvement in regional security cooperation and create, with civilian experts, if necessary, a basic strategy to hammer out its message and under what kind of policy regarding Japan’s security. Again, in this regard, the role of the NSC and the “Liaison Conference for International Publicity Enhancement” established in the Prime Minister’s Office seems to be significant.

Lastly, support for security related conferences conducted in foreign countries is also an important issue. For instance, in a conference held in South-East Asia

every year, there is a traditional session called “Japan Session”, to which Japanese experts have been invited and asked to give lectures regarding security issues. However, I heard that the future of the session was in doubt due to reduced financial support from the Japanese government. That is a large international conference at which as many as approximately 400 policy makers and experts gather. Therefore the disappearance of a session related to Japan is a huge disadvantage. From now on, positive international publicity of Japanese security policy through the dispatching of high-level officials from the MOFA or the MOD as well as more strategic support of these conferences seems to be vitally important.

(Translation of original transcript in Japanese, which was published in January 2015)

<sup>1</sup> The numbers mentioned are based on the table on pp. 96-97 in Yukinari Hirose, “The History of Japan’s Security/ Defense Exchange”, *The History, Present Situation and Prospect of Japan-China Security/ Defense Exchange* (Akishobo, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Michito Tsuruoka, “The Age of Defense Diplomacy” by *NIDS Commentary* (October, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Masashi Kaneko, “The Public Diplomacy of Japan at a Turning Point”, *International Affairs*, No. 635, p. 45 (October, 2014).

## Profile



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### Research Interests

Alliance Studies, Asia-Pacific Security,  
Japanese Defense and Security Policy

Please note that the views in this column do not represent the official opinion of NIDS. Please contact us at the following regarding any questions, comments or requests you may have.

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