

The first Royal Navy aircraft carrier deployment to the Indo-Pacific since 2013: Reminiscent of an untold story of Japan-UK defence cooperation

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Introduction: Anticipating the UK's theatre-wide commitment to the Indo-Pacific in 2021

On 5 December, it was reported that the UK Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS *Queen Elizabeth* would deploy to the Indo-Pacific region in early 2021 and conduct training with Japan and the US.¹ It is the first time in the eight years since the disaster relief operations for the Philippines affected by typhoon in November 2013, that a Royal Navy aircraft carrier will deploy to the region. It is highly possible that the UK would clarify its theatre-wide commitment to the Indo-Pacific through the deployment of a brand-new aircraft carrier.

According to a previous study on the UK's military involvement in the region, for example, in Southeast Asia, “the development of security from 2010 to 2015 is limited” and “in reality, they conducted a patchy dispatch of their vessels when required for humanitarian assistance and search and rescue”.² However, the study overlooked that in the context of disaster relief and search and rescue of missing aircrafts, considerably substantial defence cooperation has been already promoted between Japan and the UK, resulting in a huge impact on Japan's defense policy. Coincidentally, the year of 2021 is also the 100th anniversary of the Washington Conference which decided to renounce the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, so it will be a good opportunity to look at Japan-UK defence cooperation.³

The Japan-UK Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) came into effect on 1 January 2021. The UK promoted bilateral economic partnership with Japan while the UK completed its formal separation from the EU at the end of 2020.⁴ At the Japan-UK summit telephone talk in September 2020, Japan welcomed the UK's interest in joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP 11),⁵ and it is expected that the UK's presence in the region will gradually increase in future.

¹ “Britain to send aircraft carrier strike group to waters near Japan”, Kyodo News, 5 December 2020 [Accessed 6 December 2020].

² TANAKA Ryosuke, “Eikoku no Indo-Pacific heno gunjitekiteki kanyo” [The UK's military commitment to the Indo-Pacific], *NIDS Briefing Memo*, March 2020, p. 1.

³ Regarding the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Washington Conference, see the following. Ryusuke Yokoyama, “Washington kaigi to taiheiyo bobi mondai” [The Washington Conference and the Pacific defence limitation issue], *Boeikenkyujo kiyō*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (December 1998). KADOTA Masafumi, “The end of the Anglo-Japanese alliance: The influence of the First World War and the United States of America”, *Japan MSDF Command and Staff College Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (June 2015).

⁴ “Japan ratifies UK trade deal to take effect Jan. 1”, *Nikkei Asia*, 5 December 2020 [https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Trade/Japan-ratifies-UK-trade-deal-to-take-effect-Jan.-1] [Accessed 6 December 2020].

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), “Japan-UK Summit Telephone Talk”, 23 September 2020 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/page4e_001093.html] [Accessed 6 December 2020].

Anticipating that the year of 2021 will see the UK's theatre-wide commitment to the Indo-Pacific, this article recalls a blurry but noteworthy scene of Japan-UK defence cooperation realized during disaster relief for the Philippines affected by typhoon in November 2013.

Development of Japan-UK defence cooperation through disaster relief operations for the Philippines affected by the Typhoon Haiyan

In November 2013, the large-scale Typhoon Haiyan directly hit the centre of the Philippines, causing catastrophic damage. Soon the Japanese Ministry of Defense (JMOD) and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) formulated the first-ever Joint Task Force to conduct disaster relief activities.⁶ At the scene of the disaster, HMS *Daring*, cruising towards a goodwill visit to Japan,⁷ changed its course and commenced disaster relief activities.⁸ Simultaneously, the UK decided that aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious* in the Indian Ocean would be sent to the Philippines to relieve HMS *Daring*.⁹

Regarding policy-oriented utilization of high-value units, the UK's action was in complete contrast to Japan's. HMS *Illustrious* made a port visit to Manila and accepted a visit by Philippines' Secretary of National Defense Gazmin.¹⁰ JS *Ise*, however, exclusively conducted her activities off the coast of Leyte Island, and she returned home without any port visits to the Philippines. As a result, the JMOD/SDF failed to provide an opportunity for prominent figures in the Philippines to visit and acknowledge JS *Ise*.

Thus, the disaster relief for the Philippines made the JMOD/SDF fully recognize the importance of communication in how it will utilize JS *Ise* as one of the SDF assets from a policy-oriented perspective.

Sea power has frequently been used for political means, and naval diplomacy has been a means of communication in power relationships.¹¹ The Japan-UK defence cooperation in the Philippines in the aftermath of the 2013 typhoon was mainly conducted by the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) and Royal Navy.

Those disaster relief activities for the Philippines accelerated enhancement of Japan-UK defence cooperation, which saw three later corollaries: the conclusion of the Japan-UK Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), acceptance of permanent liaison officer from the Royal Navy to the MSDF, and the introduction of the UK's own methodology on strategic communications to Japan. Each corollary is reviewed below in detail.

⁶ Japanese Ministry of Defense (JMOD), "International Disaster Relief Operations in the Philippines" [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/kokusai_heiwa/kokusai_enjyo/philippines/index.html] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

⁷ GOV UK, "HMS Daring visits Japan", 26 November 2013 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hms-daring-bound-for-japan>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

⁸ "Typhoon Haiyan: HMS Daring docks in Philippines", BBC, 17 November 2013 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-24977525>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

⁹ Royal Navy Facebook post, "HMS Illustrious takes over from HMS Daring in the Philippines", 25 November 2013 [<https://www.facebook.com/royalnavy/videos/hms-illustrious-takes-over-from-hms-daring-in-the-philippines/189076597951558/>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

¹⁰ GOV UK, "HMS Illustrious completes Philippines aid mission", 11 December 2013 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hms-illustrious-completes-philippines-aid-mission>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

¹¹ Edward Luttwak, "Political Uses of Sea Power," *Studies in International Affairs*, No. 23 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Regarding naval diplomacy, see Kevin Rowlands, "'Decided Preponderance at Sea': Naval Diplomacy in Strategic Thought", *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Autumn 2012).

Corollary 1: Conclusion of the Japan-UK ACSA

During the disaster relief efforts, Japan sent a replenishment vessel, *JS Towada*, and she refuelled the Royal Australian Navy's *HMAS Tobruk*.¹² This fact indicates the possibility that the UK MOD might have asked the JMOD to provide refuelling, and the JMOD seems to have declined the UK's request because of the lack of relevant legal frameworks such as an ACSA.¹³ Following this event, the defence authorities of both Japan and the UK shared the same recognition about the necessity of concluding the ACSA, and it was signed in January 2017 and entered into force in August after some coordination.¹⁴ This is the first corollary that Japan and the UK concluded the ACSA as an institutionalized measure originating from operational necessity.

Corollary 2: Acceptance of permanent liaison officer from the Royal Navy to the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF)

During the disaster relief, a mutual dispatch of liaisons was realized between aircraft carrier *HMS Illustrious*, deploying off the coasts of the Panay and Cebu Islands, and helicopter destroyer *JS Ise*, deploying off the coasts of the Samar and Leyte Islands. While the joint training and exercises in the past saw a great deal of ad hoc exchange of crews between the MSDF and foreign navies' vessels for temporary coordination, it was a rare case for liaisons to be exchanged at an unexpected actual operation.

This exchange was merely a one-time, several-day cooperation with the smallest footprint, though it has been regarded as a meaningful activity not only with operational necessity but also with a policy-oriented message, as introduced by then Prime Minister ABE during a visit to the UK. Based on this temporary but meaningful exchange of liaisons,¹⁵ it was realized that MSDF accepted Royal Navy's permanent liaison officer wearing two hats, one for the Self-Defense Fleet and one for the Seventh Fleet of the US Navy, in February 2015.¹⁶ This is the second corollary that the MSDF accepted the Royal Navy's permanent liaison officer originating from the temporary exchange of liaisons.

¹² Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), "Philippines heno kokusai kinkyu enjo" [International disaster relief for the Philippines] [<https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/operation/cooperate/philippines/>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

¹³ A statement by the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs at the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense of the House of Councilors on 6 April 2017. "Negotiation on Japan-UK ACSA started based on the UK's proposal after they recognized its necessity when SDF and British Armed Forces conducted cooperation for the Philippines affected by typhoon in 2013".

¹⁴ MOFA, "Nichiei buppin ekimu sougo teikyo kyotei no hakko" [Entry into force of Japan-UK ACSA], 18 August 2017 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_004920.html] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

¹⁵ The Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, "Redefining Japan-UK Relations - Remarks by Prime Minister Abe at the Welcoming Dinner Hosted by the City of London", 1 May 2014 [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201405/london.html] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

¹⁶ British Embassy Tokyo Facebook post, "untitled", 16 February 2015 [<https://www.facebook.com/ukinjapan/photos/japanese-maritime-self-defense-force-jmsdf-vice-adm-eiichi-funada-commander-in-c/812717365460062/>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

Corollary 3: Introduction of the UK's own methodology on strategic communications to Japan.

The news on the exchange of the liaisons between JS *Ise* and HMS *Illustrious* was rapidly uploaded on the official websites managed by Japan and the UK. The JMOD Facebook page posted one article on Japan's liaison sent to HMS *Illustrious* dated 28 November 2013,¹⁷ and the other on the Royal Navy's liaison to JS *Ise* dated 12 December 2013.¹⁸ Later, a short column by the Royal Navy's liaison was published in *Defense of Japan 2014*,¹⁹ and the JMOD website posted the longer column by the liaison entitled "A New Page for the Japan-UK Defense Cooperation".²⁰ The Royal Navy website also posted a similar article,²¹ as did the UK Embassy in Japan on its website,²² which led to the positive dissemination of information. At an early stage, it is not difficult to suppose that the defence authorities of both Japan and the UK managed to realize a coordinated upload of the same article in a shorter period on an hourly basis. Nevertheless, it underscored that the basic key messages and issue narratives in those articles were not wholly synchronized, as their content included the same fact about the exchange of liaisons and a similar emphasis on Japan-UK defence cooperation intended for the Philippines affected by typhoon. As for the uploader, the Japanese articles were uploaded exclusively on JMOD's own website, and the UK articles were mainly uploaded on the Royal Navy and the Embassy websites, though not on the UK MOD website. It can be concluded that these kind of activities made the JMOD/SDF enhance its recognition on significance of strategic communications.

In fact, guests from the UK MOD, Foreign Commonwealth Office and the Embassy held the first-ever lectures on strategic communications attended by officials from the JMOD, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) and Cabinet Office in May 2014. The JMOD website has regularly uploaded an official public-relations brochure in English, the Japan Defense Focus. In June 2014, the brochure included a column entitled "Strategic Communication [SC] Program Initiated by the United Kingdom".²³ The column clearly mentions that PA [Public Affairs] staff from JMOD and MOFA were invited to London to join a week-long SC course, and that time, the SC team visited Japan to further spread their idea throughout Japanese government and also mentions that officials not only from JMOD, but also from Cabinet Office took part in the course. It also highlights that the lectures included the basic theories of strategic

¹⁷ JMOD Facebook post, "Japan's Disaster Relief Activities in the Philippines", 28 November 2013 [<https://m.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=631136483615436>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

¹⁸ JMOD Facebook post, "Japan's Disaster Relief Activities in the Philippines", 12 December 2013 [<https://m.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=638447629550988>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

¹⁹ JMOD, ed., *Defense of Japan 2014*, p.312.

²⁰ JMOD, "A New Page for the Japan-UK Defense Cooperation" [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/others/ukmod/Japan_uk_defense.html] [Accessed 7 December 2020]. The column was also copied and renamed "The Japan-UK Defense Cooperation" later [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/kokusai_heiwa/kokusai_enjyo/philippines/Japan_uk_defense.html] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

²¹ Royal Navy, "Japan Exchange", 19 December 2013 [<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2013/december/19/131219japan-exchange>] [Accessed 25 December 2019].

²² GOV UK, "UK - Japan goodwill exchange at sea", 29 November 2013 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-japan-goodwill-exchange-at-sea>] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

²³ JMOD, 'Strategic Communication Program Initiated by the United Kingdom', *JDF Japan Defense Focus*, No.53, June 2014.

communications, target audience analysis, communication during crisis, information operation methodology, and so forth.²⁴

This is the third corollary that the introduction of the UK's own methodology on strategic communications to Japan originated from the coordinated dissemination of information on the exchange of the Japan-UK liaisons between JS *Ise* and HMS *Illustrious* deploying off the coasts of the Philippines for international disaster relief activities, which subsequently led to it that not only the JMOD but also the MOFA and Cabinet Office acquired technical know-how and methodology on strategic communications.

Conclusion: The further development of Japan-UK defence cooperation in the future

This article, anticipates the UK's theatre-wide commitment to the Indo-Pacific in 2021, focused on the promotion of Japan-UK defence cooperation realized during disaster relief for the Philippines affected by typhoon in November 2013. As a result, the enhancement of Japan-UK defence cooperation has seen three corollaries: the conclusion of the Japan-UK ACSA, acceptance of permanent liaison officer from the Royal Navy to the MSDF, and the introduction of the UK's own methodology on strategic communications to Japan.

Future UK-Japan defence cooperation has, to some extent, potential for further development from several perspectives. For example, since both the British aircraft carrier and the escort vessels JS *Izumo* and JS *Kaga* are going to be equipped with the F-35B,²⁵ it is expected that mutual operational know-how can be shared even if there are differences in the structure of the vessels. Once the F-35 maintenance bases in this area are located only in Japan and Australia, Japan-Australia cooperation will be almost automatically considered when the Royal Navy's aircraft carrier are deployed to the Indo-Pacific.²⁶ Furthermore, from the perspective of repairing and maintenance of those carriers, it will be possible that the UK vessels frequently access to the port facilities including Yokosuka, although their capacity is limited.

The British Armed Forces, unlike in the Middle East, do not maintain a fixed full-fledged supply base in the region.²⁷ It is expected that they might acquire a maintenance base, for example in Brunei, which is historically closely related as well as expand the functions at a base in Singapore under the Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA).²⁸

On the other hand, the cooperation in the intelligence domain seems uncertain so far. With regard to Japan's participation in the intelligence network, what is called "the Five Eyes" by AUSCANZUKUS,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Royal Navy, "HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH (R08)" [<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-organisation/the-fighting-arms/surface-fleet/aircraft-carriers/hms-queen-elizabeth>] [Accessed 6 December 2020].

²⁶ The United States Department of Defense, "Japan, Australia to Provide F-35 Maintenance Sites in Pacific Region", 17 December 2014 [<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/603831/>] [Accessed 6 December 2020]. Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency, "F-35 no kitai no seibi kyoten (regional depot) no unyo kaishi nitsuite" [On the start of operation of the regional depot for F-35 airframe], 1 July 2020 [<https://www.mod.go.jp/atla/pinup/pinup020701.pdf>] [Accessed 6 December 2020].

²⁷ Li Jie Sheng, "Where Is Britain's Indo-Pacific Strategy?" *the Diplomat*, 7 June 2019 [<https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/where-is-britains-indo-pacific-strategy/>] [Accessed 8 December 2020].

²⁸ Ian Storey, "Can the UK Achieve Its Naval Ambitions in the Indo-Pacific?", *The Diplomat*, 7 November 2020 [<https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/can-the-uk-achieve-its-naval-ambitions-in-the-indo-pacific/>] [Accessed 6 December 2020].

UK Prime Minister Johnson clearly mentioned at the House of Commons, “It is not something that our Japanese friends have yet raised with me” and “It is an idea that we are thinking about”.²⁹ In fact, it has been a quite short time since the two leaders of Japan and New Zealand welcomed their commencing a joint study towards negotiating a security information sharing agreement in 2019.³⁰ One of the distinguished scholars in Japan also insists on Japan’s closer cooperation rather than membership for intelligence.³¹ In addition, the Japan-UK agreement will continue to discuss modelling after the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement, and it will take a certain amount of time to conclude it.³²

The UK, unlike France and Germany, has not yet issued any official documents on the Indo-Pacific. In November 2020, it was reported that a British think tank compiled a report calling for an inclination towards the Indo-Pacific, hence it seems that relevant discussions are ongoing over how the UK should be involved in the region.³³ The UK stands in a different position from the EU member states such as France and Germany. It is possible that the UK seeks to formulate policies on the Indo-Pacific in line with the upcoming update of the NATO New Strategic Concept while they carefully keep in mind the situation in China, including Hong Kong.³⁴

Furthermore, Britain is said to be “faced with a long-standing challenge of balancing NATO’s collective defense and forces outside the region”,³⁵ and it is difficult to foresee whether the UK’s involvement in the Indo-Pacific will make a leap forward or not in future. Indeed, Prime Minister Johnson has only mentioned the region once, when referring to the dispatch of Royal Navy’s aircraft carrier during a speech on the increase in defence budget.³⁶

Nonetheless, within the next few months, the Indo-Pacific region will witness a show of the UK’s national will by the deployment of the aircraft carrier. From this point of view, it is strongly expected that Japan-UK defence cooperation will be updated in a timely manner.

(Translated on 3 January 2021)

²⁹ House of Commons Liaison Committee, *Oral evidence from the Prime Minister*, HC 744, 16 September 2020 [https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/851/default/] [Accessed 6 December 2020].

³⁰ MOFA, “Japan-New Zealand Summit Joint Statement 2019”, 19 September 2019 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000518544.pdf] [Accessed 6 December 2020].

³¹ Tsuruoka Michito, “Japan and the Five Eyes: A Reality Check”, nippon.com, 24 December 2020 [https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00654/] [Accessed 3 January 2021].

³² The Joint Statement at the Japan-UK Summit Meeting in January 2019 mentioned, “We will continue to work on a framework to improve administrative, policy and legal procedures to facilitate joint operations and exercises between the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and British Armed Forces, looking ahead to future possible negotiations”. MOFA, “UK-Japan Joint Statement”, 10 January 2019 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000436675.pdf] [Accessed 3 January 2021]. “Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement”, Jiji Press, 17 November 2020 [https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2020111700951] [Accessed 6 December 2020]. Australian Embassy Tokyo, “Nichigo enkatsuka kyotei nitsuite” [On Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement], [https://japan.embassy.gov.au/kyojapanese/pr2020_tk17.html] [Accessed 6 December 2020].

³³ “UK should tilt foreign policy to Indo-Pacific region, report says”, the Guardian, 22 November 2020 [https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/nov/22/uk-should-tilt-foreign-policy-to-indo-pacific-region-report-says] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

³⁴ Jens Stoltenberg, “Adapting NATO for 2030 and beyond”, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 23 November 2020 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_179665.htm] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

³⁵ TANAKA Ryosuke, p. 6.

³⁶ GOV UK, “Oral statement to Parliament: PM statement to the House on the Integrated Review”, 19 November 2020 [https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-to-the-house-on-the-integrated-review-19-november-2020] [Accessed 7 December 2020].

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