

Japanese Ministry of Defense's "Defense Diplomacy"

— Revitalized Engagement with ASEAN and Pacific Island Countries¹

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Introduction

The Japanese Ministry of Defense (JMOD) has been making strides in "defense diplomacy" with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. At the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2023, former Defense Minister HAMADA Yasukazu stated, "As the Shangri-La Dialogue is valued as an important platform for **defense diplomacy** by the IISS, diplomatic efforts among defense authorities become a crucial component for peace and stability of the international society. In order to contribute to diplomatic efforts by the whole government of Japan, the JMOD will proactively promote **diplomatic efforts in defense sphere** for peace among defense authorities."² Subsequently, Defense Minister KIHARA Minoru announced a new defense cooperation initiative "JASMINE" towards ASEAN and "5 Point Cooperation Concept" towards the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), enhancing defense engagement with regional countries. This paper explores the JMOD's "defense diplomacy" efforts and analyzes their features.

Definition of "Defense Diplomacy"

Japanese security policy researchers and practitioners have defined "defense diplomacy" as "the use of the assets of the national defense authorities and armed forces to cooperate with other countries mainly in peacetime to create an environment conducive to the achievement of foreign policy and security objectives."³ Specific measures include exchanges and consultations between defense authorities, port call and stopovers by the vessels and aircraft, joint trainings, and capacity building assistance.⁴ There are no confirmed examples where the JMOD has directly and officially used the term "defense diplomacy."⁵ Although the term "defense diplomacy" was used in former Defense Minister Hamada's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue, when referring directly to the JMOD's initiatives, the expression "diplomatic efforts in defense sphere" was used.⁶ According to the prior research, the terms "defense cooperation and exchanges" and "security cooperation" traditionally used by the JMOD have been regarded as synonymous with "defense diplomacy."⁷

Revitalized Engagement with ASEAN and Pacific Island Countries

Efforts to package specific measures of “defense diplomacy” and present them as defense cooperation initiatives have been commonly made, such as the “Vientiane Vision.” In the Japanese fiscal year 2023, a new defense initiative and concept for ASEAN and the PICs were announced. This section provides an overview of each initiative and concept, followed by an analysis of the shared vision for the region and the orientation towards regional interconnectivity shown in both policies.

(1) Towards ASEAN: “JASMINE”

[Overview: Shared Vision for the Region and Four Pillars of Cooperation]

In November 2023, which marked the 50th year of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation, the Japan-ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting was held. During the meeting, the “**J**apan-**A**SEAN **M**inisterial **I**nitiative for **E**nhanced Defense Cooperation,” commonly referred to as “JASMINE,” was announced.⁸ The initiative reaffirmed that Japan and ASEAN have “the shared view to promote a rules-based Indo-Pacific region that is free and open.”⁹ It called on ASEAN to “unite each other’s efforts together to realize this shared vision.”¹⁰ Specifically, the following four pillars were outlined:

- (1) Japan-ASEAN to carry out efforts to create a security environment that does not allow any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion
- (2) To continue and expand the Japan-ASEAN defense cooperation
- (3) To pursue further friendship and opportunities between Japan and ASEAN defense officials
- (4) To support defense cooperation between ASEAN, Japan, and the Pacific Island countries¹¹

(1) indicates cooperation on traditional security issues, (2) pertains to cooperation on emerging security issues such as climate change and cybersecurity, (3) involves strengthening people-to-people ties, and (4) focuses on enhancing regional interconnectivity.¹²

[Features: Japan-ASEAN as Co-contributors for Regional Security]

The key feature of “JASMINE” lies in its redefinition of the Japan-ASEAN defense relationship as co-contributors. The JMOD has been supporting “ASEAN centrality, unity and resilience,”¹³ based on the “Vientiane Vision 2.0,” which “presents the overall picture of Japan’s direction of defense cooperation with ASEAN.”¹⁴ The original Japanese text for “defense cooperation with ASEAN” is “ASEAN **e no** bōei kyōryoku [defense cooperation/support **to** ASEAN]” in Japanese,¹⁵ which places emphasis on providing support for ASEAN. In contrast, “JASMINE” presents “specific defense cooperation that Japan would like to advance **together with** ASEAN.”¹⁶ The original text in Japanese is also “ASEAN to tomoni [together with ASEAN].”¹⁷ This indicates that “JASMINE” views ASEAN not as recipients of support but as partners collaborating for regional security.

The background for seeking ASEAN as a collaborative partner seems to be the increasingly severe security environment. The JMOD explained that “JASMINE” was announced “to **advance Japan-ASEAN defense**

cooperation to a new level in the face of an increasingly severe and complex security environment, and at a time **when the realization of the shared vision for the Indo-Pacific region was being challenged.**¹⁸ As highlighted in the first pillar of cooperation, it can be said that “JASMINE” is an initiative aiming to revitalize efforts “to create a security environment that does not allow any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion.”

(2) Towards the PICs: “5 Point Cooperation Concept”

[Overview: Three Principles and Two Coordination Points]

The “Cooperation Concept for Unified Security Efforts in the Pacific Islands Region,” commonly known as the “5 Point Cooperation Concept,” was announced at the “Japan-Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue (JPIDD),” which was held in-person for the first time in March 2024.¹⁹ This concept outlined the following three principles and two coordination points.

Three proposed principles:

- ① Respecting Centrality, Unity, and Ownership of Pacific Island Countries
- ② Strengthening Equal, Mutually Beneficial and Supportive Relationships
- ③ Supporting Collaboration between the Pacific Island Countries, Japan, and ASEAN

Two proposed coordination points:

- ① Strengthening Coordination between JPIDD and SPDMM
- ② Strengthening Coordination between JPIDD and PALM²⁰

Regarding Principle 1 to 3, they outline the basic principles and priorities for cooperation with the PICs. Coordination points 1 and 2 emphasize the importance of coordination between various international forums within the region.²¹

[Features: Principles of Defense Cooperation Respecting Self-determination of the PICs]

Although defense cooperation with the PICs has been limited, it has gradually progressed through activities such as port call and stopovers by vessels and aircraft, goodwill training, and capacity-building programs.²² The “5 Point Cooperation Concept” reaffirms the principles and policies that Japan holds dear in its defense cooperation with the PICs. By presenting the overall picture and basic principles of defense cooperation, it can be considered a “Vientiane Vision” for the PICs.

Among the basic principles, the respect for the self-determination of the PICs is emphasized. In the keynote speech where this concept was announced, it was stated that the “key players in guarding the order of this region are none other than the Pacific Island Countries yourselves.”²³ This perspective is particularly evident in Principle 1, which asserts that the PICs should take the lead and the future of the region should be shaped by their collective efforts.²⁴ By respecting the self-determination of the PICs in this manner, it can be interpreted as both distancing the JMOD from narratives of paternalism and great power competition, and as a warning against some of the PICs’ tilt towards China.

Commonalities between “JASMINE” and “5 Point Cooperation Concept”

(1) Outlining a Shared Vision for the Indo-Pacific that Regional Countries Can Agree Upon

Both the initiative and concept share two main commonalities. First of all, they present a dichotomy between those upholding the international order based on rules and those challenging it. As a vision for the future of the region, “JASMINE” states “a **rules-based** Indo-Pacific region that is free and open,”²⁵ while the “5 Point Cooperation Concept” advocates for “an international order **based on the rule of law**.”²⁶ Neither initiative nor concept adopt the narrative of power such as U.S.-China great power competition, or the narrative of values, such as democracy versus authoritarianism.

By presenting a shared vision for the Indo-Pacific that does not force countries in the region to take sides—articulated as an international order based on rules or the rule of law—they likely aim to “unite each other’s efforts together to realize this shared vision.”

(2) Promoting Regional Interconnectivity

Secondly, they emphasize regional interconnectivity, particularly the “defense cooperation between ASEAN, Japan, and the Pacific Island Countries.” The promotion of such regional interconnectivity is highlighted as the fourth pillar in “JASMINE” and as the third principle in the “5 Point Cooperation Concept.”

One of the specific efforts is the “Ship Rider Cooperation Programs.”²⁷ In conjunction with the “Fifth Japan-ASEAN Ship Rider Cooperation Program” conducted by the JMOD in August 2023, the “Japan-Pacific Islands Countries and Timor-Leste Ship Rider Cooperation Program” was held for the first time during the same period.²⁸ These programs were also conducted simultaneously in June of this year.²⁹

The orientation to regional interconnectivity extends beyond ASEAN and the PICs. For instance, “the Second Japan-AEAN Cybersecurity Training Program” held in November 2023 welcomed participants from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Maldives as observers, in addition to ASEAN countries.³⁰

The inclusion of other regional countries in Japan-ASEAN-related projects will allow the JMOD to expand its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region with limited resources, while also supporting multilayered collaboration of like-minded countries across the region.

Conclusion

The speech by former Defense Minister Hamada at the 2023 Shangri-La Dialogue, and the subsequent announcements of “JASMINE” and the “5 Point Cooperation Concept” under Defense Minister Kihara, have reinvigorated “diplomatic efforts in defense sphere.” These new defense cooperation policies reaffirm a shared vision of the region where the international order based on rules is maintained and call on AEAN and the PICs to work on maintaining and enhancing this order in the Indo-Pacific region.

To “...maintain and protect...international order based on international law,” is one of Japan’s national interests as outlined in the 2022 National Security Strategy.³¹ The announcements of “JASMINE” and the “5 Point Cooperation Concept,” which call for uniting efforts towards an Indo-Pacific where the international order based on rules is preserved, indicate that the focus of the JMOD’s “defense cooperation and exchange” has evolved from merely building good relations with regional countries to promoting the national interest of maintaining and protecting the rules-based international order.

As Hans J. Morgenthau stated, the primary objective of diplomacy is “the promotion of the national interest by peaceful means.”³² In this sense, the defense cooperation advanced by the JMOD can indeed be seen as embodying “defense diplomacy.”

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¹ Originally published in Japanese as Riho Aizawa, “Bōei-shō ni yoru ‘bōei gaikō’: Saikasseika sa reta ASEAN shokoku to taiheiyō tōshoku e no kanyō [‘Defense Diplomacy’ by the Ministry of Defense: Revitalized Engagement with ASEAN Countries and Pacific Island Countries],” *NIDS Commentary*, no. 342 (July 26, 2024), <https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/publication/commentary/pdf/commentary342.pdf>. Some parts have been edited.

² Ministry of Defense, “20th Shangri-La Dialogue (2023) DM Hamada Speech at the 4th session ‘Asia’s Evolving Maritime Security Order,’” June 3, 2023, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2023/06/bba91d20d29ccbc0fa3bf31776dbf8f157bc6999.html>.

³ Ippeita Nishida and Tsuneo Watanabe, Preface to *Strengthening Japan’s Defense Diplomacy*, (Tokyo: Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 2022), https://www.spf.org/en/global-data/user33/SPF_DefenceDiplomacyProposal.Mar2022.pdf, v.

⁴ Tsuneo Watanabe and Ippeita Nishida, *Bōei gaikō to wa nani ka: Heiji ni okeru gunji-ryoku no yakuwari* [Defense Diplomacy: A Role of the Military Force in Peacetime] (Tokyo: Keisoshobo, 2021), 2–3, 15–16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶ Ministry of Defense, “20th Shangri-La Dialogue (2023) DM Hamada Speech at the 4th session ‘Asia’s Evolving Maritime Security Order,’” June 3, 2023.

⁷ Watanabe and Nishida, *Bōei gaikō to wa nani ka: Heiji ni okeru gunji-ryoku no yakuwari* [Defense Diplomacy: A Role of the Military Force in Peacetime], 11, 68; Ministry of Defense, “Defense Cooperation and Exchanges with Other Countries,” <https://chatgpt.com/c/103523bc-bbeb-48ba-b26d-7f241eef665b>.

⁸ Ministry of Defense, “Defense Minister Kihara’s Participation in the 8th ASEAN-Japan Defence Ministers’ Informal Meeting,” November 15, 2023, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_act/exc/admm/admm_8.html.

⁹ Ministry of Defense, “Annex: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation: JASMINE,” https://www.mod.go.jp/en/images/13th_annex.pdf, 1.

¹⁰ Ministry of Defense, “Defense Minister Kihara’s Participation in the 8th ASEAN-Japan Defence Ministers’ Informal Meeting,” November 15, 2023.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Ministry of Defense, “Annex: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation: JASMINE,” 2; Ministry of Defense, “JASMINE: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation,” https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/dialogue/j-asean/pdf/jasmine_j.pdf.

¹³ Ministry of Defense, Reference 57 Vientiane Vision 2.0 in *Defense of Japan 2023*,

https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2023/DOJ2023_EN_Reference.pdf, 210.

- ¹⁴ Ministry of Defense, "Annex: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation: JASMINE," 1.
- ¹⁵ Ministry of Defense, Shiryō 57 Vientiane Vision 2.0 [Reference 57 Vientiane Vision 2.0,] in *Reiwa 5 nenban Bouei Hakusho* [Defense of Japan 2023], <https://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/wp/wp2023/html/ns057000.html>.
- ¹⁶ Ministry of Defense, "Annex: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation: JASMINE," 1.
- ¹⁷ Ministry of Defense, "Besshi: Bōei kyōryoku kyōka no tame no nichi ASEAN daijin initiative: JASMINE [Annex: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation: JASMINE], https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/dialogue/j-asean/pdf/asia_tokyoseminar_13th_b.pdf, 1.
- ¹⁸ Ministry of Defense, "Annex: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation: JASMINE," 1.
- ¹⁹ Ministry of Defense, "The 2nd Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue," March 21, 2024, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2024/04/133b72b88bef1421b1f5394f6ae75693291492db.html>.
- ²⁰ Ibid. The "Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue (JPIDD)," hosted by the JMOD, is a defense ministers' meeting with the PICs. However, it also welcomes the PICs without military forces as well as partner countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The most recent meeting was also attended by the Japan Coast Guard and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, a private think tank, making it an international forum that addresses broader security issues. Additionally, the "South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM)" is a defense ministers' meeting for the Pacific Islands Region hosted by Australia, and the "Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM)" is a summit-level meeting with the PICs hosted by Japan.
- ²¹ Ministry of Defense, "Keynote Speech by Defense Minister Kihara at the 2nd JPIDD," March 20, 2024, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/images/20240320_jpidd_keynote.pdf.
- ²² Ministry of Defense, "Opening Remarks by Parliamentary Vice-Minister Miyake at the 2nd JPIDD," March 19, 2024, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/images/20240319_jpidd_opening.pdf, 1.
- ²³ Ministry of Defense, "Keynote Speech by Defense Minister Kihara at the 2nd JPIDD," March 20, 2024, 2.
- ²⁴ For specific definitions of "centrality, unity, and ownership," refer to the original text; Ministry of Defense, "Keynote Speech by Defense Minister Kihara at the 2nd JPIDD," March 20, 2024, 2–3.
- ²⁵ Ministry of Defense, "Annex: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation: JASMINE," 1.
- ²⁶ Ministry of Defense, "Keynote Speech by Defense Minister Kihara at the 2nd JPIDD," March 20, 2024, 2.
- ²⁷ During the Ship Rider Cooperation Programs, the participants exchange views on a variety of topics including international maritime law, observe exercises on the ship, and take a flight on an onboard aircraft. Ministry of Defense, "The Fifth Japan-ASEAN Ship Rider Cooperation Program," <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2023/10/6ad65cfd5297a1ed1343b39f84b2fc0acc8cde1f.html>; Ministry of Defense, "The 2nd Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue," March 21, 2024; Ministry of Defense, "Defense Minister Kihara's Participation in the 8th ASEAN-Japan Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting," November 15, 2023.
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- ³⁰ Ministry of Defense, "Cybersecurity," November 2023, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2023/11/0b23e4b2de7337f3c3e5639cf43afdf623aa31f0.html>.
- ³¹ Cabinet Secretariat, *National Security Strategy of Japan*, December 2022, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryō/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>, 4.
- ³² Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth W. Thompson, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 563.

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