

Japan's Security Cooperation with ASEAN: Pursuit of a Status as a "Relevant" Partner

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Abstract

Currently, Japan is keen to reinforce security cooperation with ASEAN and its approach is both multi-layered and multi-dimensional, with its bilateral/multilateral activities becoming diverse. Japan's objectives are largely twofold: first, the country pursues a more "comprehensive" partnership with ASEAN by forging security ties, in addition to long-held economic and political cooperation; and second, China's growing assertiveness in the East and South China Seas has prompted Japan to cooperate with ASEAN to jointly address it. In discussing Japan's strategic efforts to strengthen and support ASEAN-centered multilateralism, the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus should be referred to first. Japan's activeness in the ADMM-Plus has been demonstrated by its consecutive EWG co-chairmanships. Capacity building assistance led by Japan's Ministry of Defense is considered to be one of the important strategic options for the Japanese Government to reinforce ties with ASEAN. Moreover, Tokyo's basic approach in multilateral arenas is to put maritime security on the agenda, reiterating the importance of resolving territorial disputes in a peaceful manner and securing freedom of navigation based on the rule of law. Compared to activities in multilateral dialogues, Japan's bilateral support to ASEAN countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam focuses more on the strengthening of their coastal defense capabilities.

Introduction

It is not difficult to notice a significant change in the nature of relations between Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) when comparing two joint declarations issued at their commemorative summits, which were held in 2003 and 2013 respectively. The 2003 summit highlighted "reinforcing comprehensive economic partnership and monetary and financial cooperation" as the top priority of their common strategies, whereas the vision statement issued at the 2013 summit mentioned their joint commitment to maintaining peace and stability as the top agenda, implying an emphasis on addressing issues pertaining to maritime security.¹ As this comparison shows, the center of gravity in Japan-ASEAN relations seems to be moving from the economy to security.

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¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), "Tokyo Declaration for the Dynamic and Enduring Japan-ASEAN Partnership in the New Millennium," December 12, 2003, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/year2003/summit/tokyo_dec.pdf, "Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation: Shared Vision, Shared Identity, Shared Future," December 14, 2013, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000022449.pdf> (accessed on July 1, 2015).

In fact, Japan's relations with ASEAN have been entering a new phase. The country is increasingly reinforcing cooperation with ASEAN in security affairs. Tokyo's security approach toward ASEAN is both multi-layered and multi-dimensional, and its bilateral/multilateral activities are becoming diverse, ranging from active engagement in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) cooperation within the framework of the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus, to the promotion of capacity building assistance to respective countries in Southeast Asia. On the basis of its new security concept of "proactive contribution to peace," Japan will foster more cooperation in defense equipment and technology as well.

Since the re-launch of the incumbent Abe administration in December 2012, Japan's security approach toward ASEAN has been further strengthened. Within one year following his re-inauguration, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited all ten ASEAN Member States. Abe also hosted a second Japan-ASEAN Commemorative Summit Meeting in December 2013. Moreover, at the commemorative summit, he proposed to hold the first defense ministerial roundtable meeting between Japan and ASEAN. Although this series of diplomatic overtures to forge security ties with ASEAN might reflect Abe's personal view on the current state of affairs and future prospects of Japan's strategic environment and international security cooperation, it is also reasonable to assume a structural change of the strategic environment surrounding Japan, which has prompted the country to promote security cooperation with its long-held economic and political partner(s) in Southeast Asia.

Why is Japan so vibrant with the strengthening of security cooperation with ASEAN? The objectives are largely twofold: first, from the perspective of the entire relationship between Japan and ASEAN, the Japanese Government pursues a more "comprehensive" partnership with ASEAN by forging security ties, in addition to long-held economic and political cooperation. Tokyo aspires to play a greater role in securing Southeast Asia. It is encouraged mainly by Japan's desire to keep "relevant" for ASEAN against the backdrop of competition with other external powers, China in particular. The other dimension is the increasing importance of ASEAN for Japan's own security, especially maritime issues. Beijing's growing assertiveness in the East and South China Seas has encouraged Tokyo to cooperate with regional partners to jointly address it. In sum, Japan's motivation to pursue more security cooperation with ASEAN is closely related to the rise of China.

Based on the observations mentioned above, this paper aims to analyze the dynamics of Tokyo's security cooperation with ASEAN. Although there had long been a scarcity of academic research on security relations between Japan and ASEAN, in these years some significant academic or strategic products have been made, probably because of increasing interest in Prime Minister Abe's proactive approach toward security and Southeast Asia.² In order to add new insights to the previous literature on the topic, this paper focuses on recent developments in Japan's security cooperation with ASEAN by considering historical developments in relations between the two and structural changes currently taking place in the region. First, I analyze two dimensions of Japan's security approach toward ASEAN, namely Japan's "comprehensive" approach toward the association and enhanced importance of ASEAN for Japan's security. Second, as perspectives of

² For example, see Ian Storey, "Japan's Maritime Security Interests in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea Dispute," *Political Science*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 2013, pp. 135-156, John Lee, "Strategic Possibilities and Limitations for Abe's Japan in Southeast Asia," *Trends in Southeast Asia*, No. 8 (2015), Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS, Singapore).

Japan's comprehensive approach, the country's activities in the ADMM-Plus and capacity building assistance will be explored. Third, as one of the most contentious security issues in the region, maritime security cooperation between Japan and ASEAN will be analyzed. Finally, the paper concludes discussion by considering implications for the US-Japan alliance. In analyzing Tokyo's efforts to forge strategic ties with its critical partner(s) in Southeast Asia, the modalities will be largely categorized into multilateral and bilateral approaches.

Japan's Security Approach toward ASEAN: Two Dimensions

The significance of Japan's reinforced security cooperation with ASEAN encompasses two dimensions. First, Japan is pursuing building a "multi-dimensional, comprehensive partnership" with ASEAN. Basically, forging ties with ASEAN has been a historical imperative for Japan from economic and geostrategic perspectives. Since the post-war period, Tokyo has been keen to establish and maintain cooperation with Southeast Asian countries in economic and political terms. From the 1960s to the 1970s, Japan's official development assistance (ODA) and investment provided Southeast Asia with basic conditions for economic take-off and further development. Based on deepened economic ties, Japan embarked on expanding political cooperation with ASEAN. The Fukuda Doctrine in 1977 clarified Japan's political stance toward Southeast Asia by showing its willingness to be an equal and relevant partner for ASEAN. Political partnership between the two successfully developed, exemplified by ASEAN's acknowledgement of Japan as its first dialogue partner.³ Furthermore, Japan gradually took initiative in regional security. From a political-security perspective, the Japanese Government greatly contributed to establishing the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).⁴

Thereafter, the primacy of Japan's status in ASEAN's external relations was shaken. The rise and growing influence of emerging powers such as China and India, combined with the economic decline of Japan, relatively reduced Japan's presence in Southeast Asia. In particular, Beijing's diplomatic offensive, including its initiative to conclude a free trade agreement with ASEAN and decision to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) ahead of other external players, effectively forged economic and political ties between China and ASEAN. The rise of the emerging powers has prompted Tokyo to strive to enlarge and diversify its role in Southeast Asia in terms of gaining support from, and remaining relevant for, ASEAN.⁵

Tokyo has thus cultivated security fields, seeking cooperation in nontraditional matters in particular. In the late 1990s, Japan put forward the concept of "human security" to promote regional cooperation in environmental degradation, narcotics, and transnational crime. During the Koizumi era, the Japanese Government tried to strengthen mutual cooperation in addressing nontraditional security issues such as terrorism, piracy, and human trafficking. Moreover, Tokyo sought a path for contributing to maritime security in the Malacca Strait. Japan took the lead to establish a framework of regional cooperation in addressing piracy (ReCAAP), based on which an

³ Tomotaka Shoji, "Pursuing a Multi-dimensional Relationship: Rising China and Japan's Southeast Asia Policy," Jun Tsunekawa ed., *The Rise of China: Responses from Southeast Asia and Japan*, NIDS Joint Research Series No. 4, 2009, pp. 160-162.

⁴ Jusuf Wanandi, "ASEAN-Japan Relations: The Underpinning of East Asian Peace and Stability," *ASEAN-Japan Cooperation: A Foundation for East Asian Community*, Tokyo and New York: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2003, p. 4.

⁵ Shoji, "Pursuing a Multi-dimensional Relationship," pp. 175-176.

information sharing center was launched in Singapore.⁶ Tokyo's impetus is further reinforced by the enhanced status of ASEAN in the international community, brought by steady and continuous economic development in Southeast Asia.

The second dimension is the increasing importance of ASEAN for Japan's own security. The necessity to cooperate with ASEAN is clearly located in Japan's strategy on defense and security. The National Security Strategy (NSS), which was issued in December 2013, is the first document for Japan to define basic principles of national security, centering on diplomatic and defense policies.⁷ The NSS identifies security challenges facing Japan and stipulates strategic approaches to address these challenges. ASEAN is referred to in many regards within the NSS, which demonstrates that Japan considers the association to be an important security partner.

First, ASEAN is strongly related to a key concept of the NSS. A "proactive contribution to peace" (PCP) is the key concept of Japan's security strategy. In order to create a peaceful and stable strategic environment, the country needs to play a more proactive role in addressing regional and global security issues. In this regard, the PCP requires Japan to enhance "trust and cooperative relationships between Japan and its partners within and outside the Asia-Pacific region," and promote "practical security cooperation."⁸ The PCP therefore entails international cooperation. In the NSS, ASEAN is mentioned as one of the most important strategic partners to cooperate with, following South Korea and Australia. The NSS states that given ASEAN's influence on peace and stability in the Asia Pacific, Japan should further support their efforts to strengthen unity of the association.⁹ The Japanese Government fully recognizes the significance of ASEAN and its centrality for Japan's and regional security.

Second and more specifically, Japan needs to enhance cooperation with ASEAN in maritime security. As a maritime state, Japan has pursued securing sea lanes for sustainable economic growth through trade. Rule of law and freedom of navigation are vital factors to observe for ensuring "open and stable seas."¹⁰ As for security in Southeast Asia, territorial disputes in the South China Sea are salient for Japan since for the country the sea is the main route of energy supply from the Middle East. Tokyo is concerned about whether freedom of navigation in the South China Sea could be threatened in case of the escalation of confrontations between the relevant countries.

In addition, the South China Sea is an issue related to how to deal with a powerful and assertive China in the East China Sea. Recently, Japan has been facing a security challenge with regard to China's growing assertiveness of its sovereign and maritime rights over surrounding sea areas, especially with heightened tensions between the two countries in the East China Sea. Within the context of increasing tensions in the East China Sea, the Japanese Government is addressing the South China Sea in tandem with the East China Sea. More concretely, Japan is pursuing cooperation with ASEAN in multilateral fora as well as fostering bilateral cooperation with ASEAN claimants such as Vietnam and the Philippines, aiming to jointly address China's

⁶ Ibid., pp. 177-178.

⁷ Ministry of Defense (MOD), "Boei-seisaku no Kihon [Basics of Defense Policy]," <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/seisaku/kihon03.html> (accessed on June 12, 2015).

⁸ Cabinet Secretariat, "National Security Strategy (NSS)," December 17, 2013, <http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/131217anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf> (accessed on June 12, 2015), p. 5.

⁹ NSS, pp. 23-24.

¹⁰ NSS, p. 7.

assertiveness.¹¹

In a broader context, the maritime disputes and China's assertiveness are related to challenging the long-held regional order. Tokyo aims to protect and strengthen the US-led liberal order in East Asia. Japan's growing strategic interest in ASEAN is reinforced by Tokyo's desire to protect the existing regional order. To attain this objective, the Japanese Government under Abe is trying to cooperate with ASEAN to check China's rise not only in military terms but also the strengthening of maritime law enforcement agencies, providing "greater hedging and balancing options" for ASEAN countries.¹²

The increased importance of forging security ties with ASEAN has been exemplified by Abe's active diplomacy toward Southeast Asia. At the outset of his re-inauguration in December 2012, Abe chose ASEAN as the destination of his first overseas trip. In January 2013 he visited Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. During this trip, Abe raised five new principles for Japan's diplomacy, focusing on maritime cooperation with ASEAN. The five principles included concerted efforts between Japan and ASEAN to protect free and open seas as public goods, which should be governed by the rule of law and not by use of force, as well as supporting the US "rebalancing" toward the Asia Pacific.¹³ Abe's strategy toward ASEAN as a diplomatic priority was quite clear, since he visited all the ASEAN countries within a year of taking office as prime minister. It should also be noted that Abe tried to reinforce bilateral security dialogue with ASEAN members, such as the agreement with Cambodia to launch a security dialogue in October 2013.

In addition to the fore mentioned diplomatic overtures of the Japanese Government, the fact that Abe met with invited vice-ministers from ASEAN countries at the Fourth Japan-ASEAN Defense Vice-ministerial Forum in March 2013 implies his will to establish security relationships and strengthen exchanges of relevant personnel with ASEAN. He also proposed to convene a Japan-ASEAN defense ministers meeting at the commemorative Japan-ASEAN summit in December 2013.¹⁴ Japan's current activeness in cooperation with ASEAN has reflected the prime minister's strong initiative. In this respect, Japan's security approach toward ASEAN has been reinforced by the combination of the changing strategic environment amid maritime security for Japan, which has prompted the country to cooperate more with ASEAN, and a strong belief held by Japan's incumbent prime minister of the necessity to strengthen strategic ties with ASEAN.

Pursuing a "Comprehensive" Partnership: The ADMM-Plus and Capacity Building Assistance

The ADMM-Plus: Promotion of Practical Military Cooperation through Multilateralism

In discussing Japan's strategic efforts to strengthen and support ASEAN-centered multilateralism, the ADMM-Plus should be referred to first. The ADMM, which was launched in 2006, provides

¹¹ Tomotaka Shoji, "The South China Sea: A View from Japan," *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security*, No. 15 (December 2014), p. 128.

¹² Lee, "Strategic Possibilities and Limitations for Abe's Japan in Southeast Asia," p. 4.

¹³ MOFA, "The Bounty of the Open Seas: Five New Principles for Japanese Diplomacy," Address by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, January 18, 2013, Jakarta, http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/abe_0118e.html (accessed on July 6, 2015).

¹⁴ MOFA, "Nichi-Asean Tokubetsu Shuno-Kaigo (Gaiyo) [Outline of the Japan-ASEAN Commemorative Summit]," December 14, 2013, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/page3_000594.html (accessed on June 15, 2015).

defense ministers of ASEAN countries with a regular venue to talk about and cooperate on security-related issues. In 2010 the ADMM “Plus” was established as the enlarged version of the ADMM, which is composed of ASEAN members and its eight dialogue partners including Japan.

The ADMM-Plus pursues going beyond a “talk shop,” as its predecessors such as the ARF have often been criticized of being, by promoting practical cooperation in nontraditional security. Currently, the ADMM-Plus is convened every two years, while in the intervening years the ADMM-Plus Senior Officials Meeting (ADSOM) and the ADMM-Plus Working Group (WG) are held to implement decisions made in the ADMM-Plus. Moreover, Experts’ Working Groups (EWGs) function by supporting the ADSOM and WG for facilitating practical cooperation. The EWGs aim to address six priority areas pertaining to nontraditional security: maritime security, counter-terrorism, HA/DR, peacekeeping operations, military medicine, and demining.¹⁵

Clearly, Japan is very active in participating in the ADMM-Plus. The defense white paper of Japan describes the framework as “highly significant from the perspective of encouraging the development and deepening of security and defense cooperation” in the Asia Pacific region, since “until the establishment of the ADMM-Plus, there had been no official meeting for defense ministers in the region.” In this regard, Japan’s Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Self-Defense Force (JSDF) are “providing active support” for the ADMM-Plus to become “a major pillar of security cooperation in the region” to address a wide range of common security concerns.¹⁶

Japan’s activeness in the ADMM-Plus was first demonstrated by its consecutive EWG co-chairmanships: the country served as a co-chair of the EWG on military medicine with Singapore in the first term of 2010-2013. In the ensuing term until 2017, Tokyo is again serving as co-chair, this time with Laos, of the EWG on HA/DR. With regard to joint exercises, in June 2013 Japan co-hosted the first field training exercise on HA/DR and military medicine held in Brunei. Moreover, in 2013 JSDF troops were dispatched to participate in a tabletop exercise on counter-terrorism hosted by Indonesia as well as a field training exercise on maritime security held in Australia.¹⁷

Japan’s proactive involvement in the ADMM-Plus can be explained by four reasons. First, the country is keen to reinforce security cooperation with ASEAN by supporting the strengthening of its “centrality” in multilateralism. In pursuing a “comprehensive” relationship with ASEAN, Tokyo needs to forge security ties with ASEAN. Within this context, the importance of the ADMM-Plus is obvious because it is the only official meeting among defense ministers in the Asia-Pacific region. Reinforcing ASEAN’s centrality through this framework leads Japan to enhance relations with all of Southeast Asia and seek political backing from the region.

Second, in terms of confidence building, it is in Japan’s interest to keep contact with regional countries including China through this channel.¹⁸ In this regard, the ADMM-Plus, which gives defense ministers of regional countries opportunities to gather and talk, proved its relevance through an informal meeting between Japan and China. On the sidelines of the first ADMM-Plus

¹⁵ ADMM, “About the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus),” January 14, 2015, <https://admm.asean.org/index.php/about-admm/about-admm-plus/2013-01-22-10-59-35.html> (accessed on June 15, 2015).

¹⁶ *Defense of Japan 2014*, p. 268.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Bhubhindar Singh, “Japan’s Perspectives of the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM)-Plus,” RSIS Policy Brief, December 2012, p. 4.

in 2010, Japan had talks with China for the first time after the Senkaku incident that happened in September of the same year, and the bilateral talks created an atmosphere to improve their strained relations.¹⁹ However, so far it is not possible to expect a “spill-over” effect in the sense that confidence-building activities in the ADMM-Plus ameliorate the overall atmosphere of the region's security environment including sensitive maritime issues. It is not easy to find any causal relationship between continuing multilateral cooperation in nontraditional security and resolving or alleviating tensions concerning traditional security issues. Rather, multilateral cooperation seems to be working separately from the ongoing tension regarding maritime issues.²⁰

Third, in addition to cooperation on a bilateral basis, Japan is seeking capacity building assistance through multilateral cooperation within the ADMM-Plus. Japan's capacity building assistance led by the Ministry of Defense is compatible with ASEAN's endeavor to form a political-security community, since the 2007 three-year work program of the ADMM emphasized the importance of capacity building in disaster relief and peacekeeping.²¹ Tokyo positions capacity building assistance in its overall strategy to promote multilateral security cooperation.²²

Fourth, in a broader sense, active participation in multilateral settings such as the ADMM-Plus is to establish a network of “multilayered” security cooperation promoted by the Japanese Government. Multilayered security cooperation functionally consists of bilateral/trilateral security alliances/partnerships as well as multilateral frameworks, aiming at establishing a “liberal and open” order in the international community. It is vital for Japan to seek to form an “open and multilayered” network in the Asia Pacific for establishing a prosperous and stable order based on democratic values. This network is expected to be formed by accumulating experiences of multilateral cooperation in various forms. In terms of regional security, the salience of forming the network stems from the recognition that tensions heightening in politics and security enhance the risk that possibly reduces commercial and political activities of regional actors. Furthermore, regional cooperation will enhance the predictability of regional actors' behaviors and establish a more stable strategic environment.²³ In this regard, Japan fully acknowledges the importance of active participation in multilateral cooperation by regional players, including ASEAN.

In addition to the ADMM-Plus and relevant bilateral “PM-MM” dialogues, Japan's Ministry of Defense has worked on various multilateral fora with ASEAN. Tokyo established an annual meeting at the defense vice-minister level in 2009. In February 2014 the fifth meeting was held in Okinawa, where cooperation on defense equipment and technology to address nontraditional security was put on the agenda.²⁴ Furthermore, following the initiatives of China and the US, the Japanese Government succeeded in holding a Japan-ASEAN Defense Ministers' Roundtable

¹⁹ Tomotaka Shoji, “ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus: A Japanese Perspective,” *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security*, No. 14 (December 2013), p. 15.

²⁰ Tomotaka Shoji, “Japan's Perspective on the Security Environment in the Asia Pacific and Its Approach toward Multilateral Cooperation: Contradictory or Consistent?” *Prospects of Multilateral Cooperation in the Asia Pacific: To Overcome the Gap of Security Outlooks*, NIDS International Symposium on Security, October 2014, p. 96.

²¹ ASEAN, “ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Three-year Work Program,” <http://www.asean.org/archive/21214.pdf> (accessed on June 17, 2015).

²² *Defense of Japan 2014*, pp. 273-276.

²³ Shoji, “Japan's Perspective on the Security Environment in the Asia Pacific and Its Approach toward Multilateral Cooperation,” pp. 92-93.

²⁴ *Defense of Japan 2014*, pp. 271-272.

Meeting in November 2014. At the meeting, Defense Minister Eto emphasized Japan's activeness in reinforcing security cooperation with ASEAN in capacity building and military technology.²⁵ These concerted efforts can be relevant in terms of developing multi-dimensional security cooperation with ASEAN.

Capacity Building Assistance: Bilateral Approach

Capacity building assistance is defined as initiatives to support regional countries on enhancing capabilities to address security issues, aiming to be proactive in creating not only regional stability but also the stability of the global security environment. In this respect, support for capacity building on nontraditional security issues such as HA/DR, demining, military medicine, maritime security, and PKO is significant. For these reasons, the Ministry of Defense of Japan embarked on the implementation of projects on capacity building assistance, initially by establishing the Capacity Building Assistance Office within the Ministry in 2011.²⁶ Currently this new initiative led by the Defense Ministry is considered to be one of the important strategic options for the Japanese Government to promote peace and stability in the region and the country's national interests, as the NSS states that Japan should promote capacity building assistance for implementing "seamless assistance in security-related areas."²⁷

Within the context of Japan-ASEAN security cooperation, the Japanese Government has conducted capacity building assistance as one of the effective measures to forge ties with ASEAN. In fact, ASEAN countries have clearly been the main targets for Japan's projects on capacity building assistance. From 2012 to the first half of 2015, Japan's MOD implemented capacity building projects for a total of eight countries, of which five were ASEAN Member States (see Table) and three were non-ASEAN countries.²⁸ In addition, supporting ASEAN-centered frameworks is compatible with capacity building support to individual ASEAN nations.²⁹ Interestingly, the Japanese MOD regards the support as being part of Japan's endeavor to promote "multilateral" security cooperation, although all the activities have so far been conducted on a "bilateral" basis.³⁰ This suggests that ASEAN is a nexus to link multilateralism with bilateral security cooperation in Japan's security policy, indicating that a strategic goal for Japan's security multilateralism is to reinforce cooperation with ASEAN.³¹

²⁵ MOD, "Eto Boei-daijin no Nichi-ASEAN Boei-daijin Raundo Teburu heno Shusseki Oyobi Nikokukan Kiadan-to Nitsuite [Regarding Defense Minister Eto's Participation in the Japan-ASEAN Defense Ministerial Roundtable Meeting and Bilateral Meetings]," November 2014, http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/dialogue/others/round_table.html (accessed on July 6, 2015).

²⁶ *Defense of Japan 2014*, pp. 273-274.

²⁷ NSS, p. 30.

²⁸ MOD, "Noryoku Kochiku Shien [Capacity Building Assistance]," http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/cap_build/about/index.html (accessed on June 17, 2015).

²⁹ MOD, "Defense Posture Interim Report," p. 5.

³⁰ *Boei Hakusho 2013*, pp. 227-230.

³¹ Shoji, "Japan's Perspective on the Security Environment in the Asia Pacific....," p. 98.

Table: Japan's Capacity Building Assistance to ASEAN Countries

Cambodia	Engineering (2013-4)
Indonesia	Maritime security (2013-4), international aviation law (2015)
Myanmar	Underwater medicine (2014), aviation meteorology (2015), HA/DR (2015)
Philippines	Air transport (2015)
Vietnam	Underwater medicine (2012-5), PKO (2013), aviation safety (2013-4), HA/DR (2014), international aviation law (2015)

Source: MOD Homepage

Tokyo clarifies its intention to further promote capacity building assistance as well as joint exercises and training in order to bolster cooperative relationships with Southeast Asian countries.³² In fact, projects on support for capacity building are expanding in fields and targets. In 2015, Japan agreed with Malaysia and the Philippines to cooperate on maritime security, including maritime domain awareness and coastal defense.³³ A memorandum on defense cooperation between Japan and Indonesia, which was concluded in March of the same year, also stipulates further cooperation in capacity building.³⁴ Projects on capacity building assistance will be more effective by utilizing a new policy of transfer of defense equipment and technology as leverage to reinforce bilateral ties with ASEAN Member Countries. ASEAN seems to expect from Japan more active cooperation in defense equipment and technology according to the new “three principles of transfer of defense equipment,” issued in April 2014.

Pursuing Maritime Security: Active Participation in Multilateral Fora and Bilateral Support

Multilateral Fora: Attempts to Establish Rules and Coordination Mechanisms

As the NSS identifies, territorial disputes in the South China Sea cause concern over the rule of law and freedom of navigation, which might greatly affect peace and stability in Southeast Asia as well as Japan's economic activities such as energy supply and trade.³⁵ Moreover, the South China Sea is a serious security challenge for the country in terms of how to deal with a powerful and assertive China in the East China Sea. With regard to addressing the South China Sea issue, Tokyo should cooperate with ASEAN, both multilaterally and bilaterally, to demonstrate their unified will to jointly tackle China's assertiveness and check its unilateral and aggressive behavior. In this regard, the Japanese Government has utilized multilateral security dialogues to try to establish rules and coordination mechanisms to manage maritime issues including the South China Sea. Since 2010, Japan has consistently expressed its concerns in multilateral settings and emphasized the need to maintain the current maritime order.³⁶

Tokyo's basic approach in multilateral arenas is to put maritime security on the agenda,

³² MOD, “National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2014 and beyond,” December 17, 2013, p. 11.

³³ MOFA, “Japan-Malaysia Joint Statement on Strategic Partnership,” May 25, 2015, “Japan-Philippines Joint Declaration: A Strengthened Strategic Partnership for Advancing the Shared Principles and Goals of Peace, Security, and Growth in the Region and Beyond,” June 4, 2014.

³⁴ MOD, “Memorandum between the Ministry of Defense of Japan and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia on Cooperation and Exchanges in the Field of Defense.”

³⁵ NSS, pp. 8-9, Shoji, “The South China Sea,” pp. 127-128.

³⁶ Storey, “Japan Maritime Security Interests in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea Dispute,” p. 151.

reiterating the importance of resolving territorial disputes in a peaceful manner and securing freedom of navigation based on the rule of law, as universal rules that every country should observe. This approach aims to check China's unilateral behavior in the South China Sea by garnering support from as many regional countries as possible, including ASEAN members. It also implies an attempt to encourage China to refrain from taking assertive actions in the East China Sea.³⁷

According to this strategy, at multilateral dialogues, Japan has repeated, and sometimes suggested, rules and principles to manage maritime issues. For example, at the 11th Shangri-La Dialogue held in June 2012, Shu Watanabe, Parliamentary Senior Vice-Minister of Defense, raised the concept of "good seamanship" to ensure the observance of international maritime laws and norms on the "front lines." This concept was "truly universal in nature," aiming to "lessen the degree of unpredictability and prevent unnecessary tensions from emerging" in the sea. In his presentation, Watanabe referred to a Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) compiled at the 2003 Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS). He stressed the importance of the CUES since it included basic rules to enable managing incidents at sea such as "maintaining safe separation between vessels" and "avoiding actions which could be misconstrued as attacks."³⁸ Since then, Japan has repeatedly stressed the importance of good seamanship in multilateral security dialogues, as mentioned in a presentation by Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera at the following 2013 Shangri-La Dialogue.³⁹ Finally, the WPNS held in 2014 decided to adopt the CUES as basic rules for navies of regional countries including the US and China. Currently, regional countries including Japan should be proactive in applying the code to specific situations such as joint exercises in order to develop the CUES into genuine rules to manage maritime incidents, not only between navies but also maritime law enforcement agencies.

Moreover, Tokyo tried to formulate basic principles at sea based on international law and the rule of law. In the keynote address of the 13th Shangri-La Dialogue held in May 2014, Prime Minister Abe proposed "three principles" of the rule of law at sea: first, "states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law"; second, "states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims"; and third, "states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means." For the purpose of checking China's aggressiveness in the maritime domain and challenging the existing regional/maritime order, he reiterated with regard to maritime and territorial issues that relevant countries should make claims in accordance with international law and should not resort to force or coercion.⁴⁰ At the Japan-ASEAN bilateral summits, the two parties issued joint statements to repeatedly confirm the three principles of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and peaceful

³⁷ Shoji, "The South China Sea," p. 132.

³⁸ Shu Watanabe, "Protecting Maritime Freedoms," Shangri-La Dialogue 2012, Second Plenary Session, June 2, 2012, <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/sld12-43d9/second-plenary-session-25b4/shu-watanabe-f1d2>, (accessed on June 22, 2015).

³⁹ Itsunori Onodera, "Defending National Interests; Preventing Conflict," Second Plenary Session, June 1, 2013, <http://www.iiss.org/-/media/Documents/Events/Shangri-La%20Dialogue/sld13/Speeches/Onodera.pdf> (accessed on June 22, 2015).

⁴⁰ "The 13th IISS Asian Security Summit – The Shangri-La Dialogue – Keynote Speech by Prime Minister Abe," May 30, 2014 http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_000086.html (accessed on June 22, 2015).

resolution of disputes.⁴¹ Thus, whether Japan and ASEAN can afford to translate these general agreements into practice remains a critical question.

Japan also made efforts to establish coordination and dialogue mechanisms on maritime issues based on the existing regional frameworks. For the 6th East Asia Summit (EAS) held in November 2011, Japan worked on member countries to agree on its proposal to establish a forum for maritime security in East Asia. This forum was intended to be a sub-organization of the EAS, aimed at discussing basic rules concerning maritime security, including the observation of international laws and freedom of navigation. The *Yomiuri Shimbun*, a Japanese daily newspaper, suggested that Tokyo's intention was to check China's assertiveness in the South and East China Seas.⁴² Although none of the member countries at the summit opposed Japan's proposal, no agreement was reached either. The official summit statement also did not include any reference to the forum.⁴³ It is likely that Japan's proposal was not widely supported by the EAS members, including ASEAN countries, and they agreed to discuss maritime issues within the framework of the existing ASEAN Maritime Forum. This case shows a limitation of Japan's initiatives for regional security.⁴⁴

However, Japan continues to try to create a new mechanism for addressing maritime issues. At the latest Shangri-La Dialogue held in June 2015, Defense Minister Gen Nakatani proposed a "Shangri-La Dialogue Initiative (SDI)," which would promote cooperation in security, including maritime issues. According to Japan's proposal, the SDI aims to address three acute issues pertaining to maritime security: first, "advancing knowledge for securing safety and freedom of navigation / overflight, and actively promote joint exercise using CUES"; second, enhancing "capabilities for maritime domain awareness and ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance)"; and third, improving disaster response capabilities.⁴⁵ Whether Japan's initiative for the SDI will succeed depends on if it garners wide support from regional countries including ASEAN members, avoiding unnecessary duplications with the existing cooperative frameworks.

Bilateral Support Centering on Vietnam and the Philippines

Compared to activities in multilateral dialogues, Japan's bilateral support to ASEAN countries focuses more on the strengthening of their coastal defense capabilities. Since the re-intensification of the South China Sea disputes, ASEAN claimants such as Vietnam and the Philippines have sought to reinforce security cooperation with external powers. Whereas the foremost partner

⁴¹ MOFA, "Joint Declaration for Enhancing ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for Prospering Together (Bali Declaration)," November 18, 2011, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/conference/pdfs/bali_declaration_en_1111.pdf, "Implementation Plan of the Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation: Shared Vision, Shared Identity, Shared Future," Tokyo, December 14, 2013 <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000022447.pdf> (accessed on July 7, 2015).

⁴² MOFA, "Dai-6-kai Higashi-Ajia Shuno Kaigi (Gaiyo) [Sixth East Asia Summit (Overview)]," http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/eas/shuno_6th.html (accessed on November 4, 2014); *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 28, 2011.

⁴³ MOFA, "Declaration on the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations," Bali, November 19, 2011, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/eas/pdfs/state111119.pdf> (accessed on November 4, 2014).

⁴⁴ *Asahi Shimbun*, November 6, 2011, *The Japan Times*, November 21, 2011.

⁴⁵ Gen Nakatani, "New Forms of Security Collaboration in Asia," Second Plenary Session, May 30, 2015, <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/shangri-la-dialogue-2015-862b/plenary2-a5ab/nakatani-ecb0> (accessed on June 24, 2015).

might be the US, Japan is also considered to be a reliable partner. These ASEAN claimants need substantial support from Japan for modernizing equipment as well as promoting capacity building.

Under the previous administrations of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Tokyo's attitude toward their requests was relatively noncommittal, although some low profile cooperation was underway. However, since the re-inauguration of the Abe administration in December 2012, Japan has become remarkably active in providing substantial support to Hanoi and Manila. This support contributes to further reinforcing Tokyo's bilateral relationships with these two countries and also demonstrates Japan's will to form a unified stance between Japan and the ASEAN claimants for checking China's assertiveness in maritime areas.

Defense cooperation between Japan and Vietnam has been institutionalized since the launch of bilateral politico-military (PM) and military-military (MM) dialogues in 2001. The cooperation mechanism was further consolidated in 2004 when the foreign ministers of the two countries agreed that the PM/MM dialogues should be regularly held.⁴⁶ In 2011 Tokyo and Hanoi agreed to diversify their security cooperation by eventually concluding a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on defense cooperation and exchange. The MOU set forth the regular holding of talks at the vice-minister level, working level visits on a regular basis, and practical cooperation on HA/DR.⁴⁷

Japan-Vietnam cooperation on maritime security has been intensified since the re-emergence of the South China Sea disputes around 2011.⁴⁸ In dealing with China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea, Japan's support to Vietnam encompasses two dimensions: the provision of equipment and capacity building assistance. During the visit of Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba to Vietnam in July 2012, Japan and Vietnam agreed that the former should support the latter in enhancing coastal defense capabilities, implying a request from Hanoi to provide patrol vessels.⁴⁹

However, Japan faced a difficulty in providing Vietnam's Marine Police with patrol vessels. The Marine Police was a military institution under the auspices of the Vietnam People's Army, and according to its guidelines, Japanese ODA could not be used for military-related purposes then. Likely due to coordination between the two governments, in August 2013 the Vietnamese Government embarked on changing the organizational structure of the Marine Police by amending part of the institution's regulations. These changes removed the Marine Police from direct administration of the Ministry of National Defense, and the government and national legislature were given responsibility for the institution. Moreover, the "Marine Police," its name in English, was renamed to "Coast Guard."⁵⁰

Seeing the organizational changes of Vietnam's Coast Guard, the Japanese Government officially expressed its intention to begin talks with Hanoi on the provision of patrol vessels at a

⁴⁶ MOFA, "Japan—The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement Toward a Higher Sphere of Enduring Partnership."

⁴⁷ MOD, "Japan – Vietnam Defense Ministerial Meeting (signing of Memorandum of Understanding)," *Japan Defense Focus*, No. 24, December 2011 <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/jdf/no24/leaders.html> (accessed on June 26, 2015).

⁴⁸ Carlyle Thayer, "Vietnam's Extensive Strategic Partnership with Japan," *The Diplomat*, October 14, 2014.

⁴⁹ *Sankei Shimbun*, July 15, 2012.

⁵⁰ National Institute for Defense Studies, *East Asian Strategic Review 2014*, p. 156.

meeting between the prime ministers of the two countries in December 2013.⁵¹ Subsequently, in August 2014 Japan signed with Vietnam an exchange of notes concerning Japan's Non-Project Aid to Vietnam, in which the Japanese Government pledged to provide six used vessels and equipment related to maritime safety, aiming at enhancing Vietnam's maritime law enforcement capabilities.⁵² According to this agreement, the first vessel arrived in Danang in February 2015, and was handed over to the Vietnamese Coast Guard.⁵³

As the second dimension of Japan's bilateral support to Vietnam, capacity building assistance is being strongly promoted by the MOD. In fact, Japan's MOD is implementing projects on capacity building assistance to Vietnam most intensively. In addition to PKO and HA/DR, the two countries are keen to cooperate on underwater medicine. According to the MOD's website, five seminars on the field have been conducted so far in Japan and Vietnam.⁵⁴

Capacity building assistance in underwater medicine might not seem to be directly related to Vietnam's efforts to deal with China in the South China Sea. However, it could have significant implications for Vietnam's coastal defense in terms of the country's purchase of Russia's *Kilo*-class submarines, the first four of which have already been deployed in Cam Ranh Bay. Overall, Vietnam's reaction to Japan's support is extremely positive. A Vietnamese scholar argues that currently Japan is perhaps "the most important strategic partner" for Vietnam.⁵⁵ When Japanese Defense Minister Onodera visited Vietnam in September 2012, the Vietnamese side invited Onodera to the naval base in Cam Ranh Bay, indicating that Vietnam treated Japan as one of its most important security partners.⁵⁶

Bilateral cooperation on maritime security between Japan and the Philippines has significantly developed in these years. Collaboration between Tokyo and Manila reflects their shared concern converging on the South China Sea, or more broadly, security concerns about maritime issues against the backdrop of China's assertiveness. The bilateral security ties have been further reinforced by the initiatives of two top leaders, Prime Minister Abe and President Benigno Aquino III, and their strong personal connection.

During the former Noda administration, Japan already agreed with the Philippines to cooperate on maritime security. The joint statement issued on the occasion of President Aquino's visit to Tokyo in September 2011 clarified their shared interest in securing sea lanes, including the South China Sea, and the two countries' decision to forge cooperative ties both on their navies and

⁵¹ MOFA, "Japan-Viet Nam Summit Meeting," December 15, 2013, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000033.html (accessed on July 14, 2015).

⁵² MOFA, "Signing on Exchange of Notes concerning Japan's Non-Project Grant Aid to Viet Nam," August 1, 2014, http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000386.html (accessed on June 26, 2015).

⁵³ *Jiji Tsushin*, February 19, 2015.

⁵⁴ MOD, "Noryoku Kochiku Shien: Koremade no Torikumi [Implemented Projects on Capacity Building Assistance]," http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/cap_build/torikumi.html (accessed on July 14, 2015).

⁵⁵ Le Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Alliance Politics in the South China Sea (Trends in Southeast Asia No. 6)," ISEAS, 2015, p. 18.

⁵⁶ MOD, "Onodera Boei-daijin no Betonamu-Tai Homon (Gaiyo) [Defense Minister Onodera's Visit to Vietnam and Thailand (Overview)]," http://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/youjin/2013/09/19_gaiyou.html (accessed on July 14, 2015).

their coast guards.⁵⁷ The incumbent administration is more active in strengthening diplomatic and security relations with its Southeast Asian partner, clearly exemplified by the visits of Foreign and Defense Ministers (January and June 2013), as well as the Prime Minister himself to the southern neighbor within just eight months following his re-inauguration.

Under the Abe administration, Tokyo has vigorously supported Manila's efforts to enhance its coastal defense capabilities in various aspects. First, the provision of patrol vessels should be noted. At the first Abe-Aquino meeting held in July 2013, Abe pledged to provide ten patrol vessels through a yen loan, as a "strategic use" of ODA for enhancing the capabilities of the Philippine Coast Guard.⁵⁸ On the occasion of Aquino's visit to Tokyo in June 2015, the Philippine Government signed a contract with the Japan Marine United Cooperation to build the vessels. Moreover, the two countries have expressed their will to further reinforce cooperation on defense equipment and technology.⁵⁹

Second, capacity building assistance has been implemented. In February 2015 Japan's MOD started support for the Philippine Air Force with a project on air transport, inviting Filipino military officers to SDF bases.⁶⁰ Projects on capacity building between Japan and the Philippines will be further accelerated and diversified since the June 2015 joint declaration on the occasion of the Abe-Aquino summit meeting highlighted the strengthening of security cooperation. The annex "Action Plan" to implement the strengthening of the strategic partnership mentioned items of cooperation including information sharing, HA/DR, maritime security, cooperation on defense equipment and technology, and capacity building assistance.⁶¹

Third, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Philippine Navy have embarked on bilateral joint exercises. In January 2015, the Defense Ministers of Japan and the Philippines signed a MOU on defense cooperation and exchanges. Based on this MOU, the two navies conducted their first bilateral joint exercise in the South China Sea. In June of the same year, they also conducted a joint ISR exercise in Palawan Island facing the South China Sea, using P3C patrol aircraft. In addition to participation in US-Philippine joint exercises such as "CARAT" and "PHIBLEX," Japan reinforces cooperation between "spokes" based on the system of US alliances in the Asia Pacific. Moreover, the Philippines Air Force participated in the "2015 Cope North Guam," a joint exercise between Japan, the US, and Australia.

Currently the Philippine side is reacting very positively to Japan's approach to strengthen security ties between the two countries. Furthermore, the Philippine Defense Department said that Manila and Tokyo would consider the feasibility of pursuing a status of forces agreement to enable Japanese Self-Defense Forces to participate in joint military exercises conducted in the

⁵⁷ MOFA, "Japan-Philippines Joint Statement on the Comprehensive Promotion of the 'Strategic Partnership' between Neighboring Countries Connected by Special Bonds of Friendship," September 27, 2011, http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/noda/joint_statement110927.html (accessed July 14, 2015).

⁵⁸ MOFA, "*Nichi-Firipin Shuno-kaidan (Gaiyo)* [Japan-Philippines Summit Meeting (Overview)]," July 27, 2013, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/page3_000326.html (accessed on July 14, 2015).

⁵⁹ MOFA, "Japan-Philippines Joint Declaration: A Strengthened Strategic Partnership for Advancing the Shared Principles and Goals," <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000083585.pdf> (accessed on July 14, 2015).

⁶⁰ MOD, "Heisei-26-Nenndo Firipin-Kugun ni taisuru Noryoku Kochiku Shien Jigyo [Project on Capacity Building Assistance for the Philippine Air Force in FY2014]," http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/cap_build/philippines/h26_kensyu_1.html (accessed on July 15, 2015).

⁶¹ MOFA, "Action Plan for Strengthening of the Strategic Partnership (Annex of the Joint Declaration)," <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000083659.pdf> (accessed on July 6, 2015).

Philippine territories.⁶² It is reported that prior to President Aquino's visit to Japan in June 2015, the Philippine Department of Defense submitted a "wish list" of defense equipment to Japan's MOD, clarifying items to be transferred to the Philippines.⁶³ However, the presidential election and change of administration expected in 2016 might influence Japan-Philippines security cooperation. In a newspaper interview, Vice President Binay, one of the current likeliest candidates, stated that the Philippines should change its China and South China Sea policy by starting bilateral talks with China.⁶⁴ If the Philippines adopts a softer and more reconciliatory stance toward China, it will certainly change the atmosphere to promote security cooperation with Japan within the context of shared security concerns about China and maritime issues.

Conclusion: Beyond the Japan-ASEAN Framework?

Japan has striven to expand security cooperation with ASEAN both in qualitative and quantitative terms. Tokyo's motivations stem from its aspiration to keep relevant as a partner for ASEAN and the increasing importance of ASEAN for Japan's security. Japan's overtures are reinforced by Prime Minister Abe's strong initiative as well. Security cooperation between Japan and ASEAN is both multilateral and bilateral, covering a variety of activities from cooperation on multilateral dialogues to bilateral capacity building assistance on maritime security.

In terms of Japan's activeness in reinforcing security ties, ASEAN's reactions are generally positive, welcoming Tokyo's attitude. In particular, ASEAN countries are interested in cooperation with Japan on defense equipment and technology. Due to converging strategic interests between the two parties, Japan has pledged to provide Vietnam and the Philippines with patrol vessels, and has sought cooperation with other ASEAN members such as Indonesia and Malaysia.

However, among ASEAN Member States, concerns over Japan's ability to play a relevant role in security in Southeast Asia have emerged. The members are worried about uncertainties concerning Japan's economic growth, domestic politics, and relations with neighbors.⁶⁵ The future direction of Japan-ASEAN security cooperation will greatly depend on how Japan can reassure ASEAN by addressing these issues.

Currently, as the US is getting more involved in security in Southeast Asia against the backdrop of its "rebalancing" toward the Asia Pacific, what the US-Japan alliance should/can do for Southeast Asian security including the South China Sea is being put on the agenda. The new defense cooperation guidelines between Japan and the US issued in April 2015 imply more room for cooperation based on the alliance in fields such as joint ISR operation and maritime security, which means that the US-Japan alliance could be a "third" aspect of Japan's security engagement in ASEAN, in addition to multilateral and bilateral approaches. As the strategic environment in East Asia becomes more complex, Japan's security cooperation with ASEAN will become further diversified.

⁶² *The Manila Standard*, June 29, 2013.

⁶³ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Japan Wins New Philippine Defense Deal," *The Diplomat*, April 24, 2015.

⁶⁴ *Manila Standard*, April 26, 2015.

⁶⁵ Ernest Z. Bower, Murray Hiebert, Phuong Nguyen, Gregory B. Poling, "Southeast Asia's Geopolitical Centrality and the U.S.-Japan Alliance," Report of the CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asian Studies, June 2015, pp. v-vi.