

PERSPECTIVE

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Arena or Partners? Japan's New Security Consensus and Southeast Asia

*Malcolm Cook*¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Since the turn of the millennium, successive Japanese governments have been developing a new, bipartisan security consensus that will increase Japan's security presence and interactions in Southeast Asia for the foreseeable future and well beyond Prime Minister Abe's term in office.
- The National Defense Program Guidelines released in 2010 by the only left-leaning, non-Liberal Democratic administration in the last six decades is the key document institutionalizing this new consensus.
- So far, Japanese security partnerships with the U.S., Australia and India in general and with regards to maritime Southeast Asia have advanced more than Japan's security relations with any Southeast Asian state.
- Given such a scenario, Southeast Asia runs the risk of becoming primarily an arena for Japanese security cooperation with other major powers. This would limit the ability of states in the region to shape the new consensus' impact on their neighbourhood.

¹ Malcolm Cook is Senior Fellow, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. He would like to thank Vandana Prakash Nair from the Institute for her patient research support.

INTRODUCTION

Superficially, it appears that Japan's security policy and engagement with Southeast Asia has changed significantly since Shinzo Abe returned as Prime Minister in late 2012. A number of post-war firsts for Japanese security engagement support this perception. Abe became the first Japanese prime minister to visit all ten Southeast Asian capitals, and in the first year of his term. Japan's response to the super-typhoon that hit the Philippines in November 2013 was the largest deployment by far of Japanese military personnel in the post-war period.² In September 2014, two Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) ships made the first post-war visit to Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia's main naval base for its disputes in the South China Sea.³ In April 2016, two different MSDF ships became the first Japanese warships in the post-war era to dock at Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay.⁴

The Abe administration's "proactive contribution to peace" policy, which all of these firsts come under the rubric of, and Abe's political persona mask a decade-long, bipartisan process of redefining Japanese security interests and policy responses in the Asia-Pacific region. These mentioned firsts are signs that a new security consensus has emerged in Japan and is being implemented. Evolution and continuity, not revolution and change.

Southeast Asia should expect many more Japanese firsts of this type after Prime Minister Abe steps down. The region has always been a primary region of concern for Japanese security consensus. In the wartime consensus, maritime Southeast Asia was the main arena of Japanese colonial expansion after Northeast Asia. In the post-war consensus, maritime Southeast Asian countries were the main beneficiaries of Tokyo's economic and development-based comprehensive security policy, and the sub-contracting of Japanese external security to the U.S. through the asymmetric U.S.-Japan alliance.⁵

Southeast Asia is now once again a central region of concern after Northeast Asia for Japan's new security consensus. This will provide Southeast Asian states with similar security concerns with more opportunities to partner with a more proactive Japan. For states in the region who want to avoid Southeast Asia again becoming an arena of major power contestation, this new consensus could be more foreboding.

THE NEW CONSENSUS

The growing number of Japanese security documents since the turn of the millennium reflects that a new, more worried and proactive security consensus has taken root. This brooding consensus is based on one major forward-looking assumption about the regional security order and five connected policy responses. This systemic judgement and the consequent policy responses are present in the National Defense Program Guidelines released in December 2004 and further developed in the National Defense Program

² See <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/11/27/japanese-troops-return-to-the-philippines/>

³ See http://www.my.emb-japan.go.jp/English/bilateral/E_SDFKK2014.html

⁴ See <http://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/japanese-destroyers-visit-vietnam-port>

⁵ For more information on the Japanese idea of comprehensive security, see Tsuneo Akaha, "Japan's comprehensive security policy: a new East Asian environment," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1991), 324-340.

Guidelines released in December 2010, the National Defense Program Guidelines released in December 2013, Japan's first National Security Strategy released the same day, and the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation released in April 2015. This same sobering systemic judgment and the attendant policy responses are equally absent from the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation released in October 1997, the National Defense Program Outline released in December 1995, the original Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation released in November 1978, and the original National Defence Program Outline released in October 1975.

- *Order under stress*

Japanese security policymakers present their security environment as one that is becoming "increasingly severe" and beset with "complex and grave national security challenges." At the core of this gnawing sense of threat is a view that the regional security order, for so long so stable during the Cold War period, is under growing stress. The 2004 Guidelines, understandably, focus on the challenge posed by global terrorism. The subsequent Guidelines focus primarily on the redistribution of power globally and regionally, with Japan in relative decline, China and India rising, and the U.S. facing the gravest structural challenge to its regional predominance.

The 2004 document has very little discussion of China as a security challenge (the 1996 predecessor has no mention of China in this context). From the 2010 Guidelines onwards, the security challenges posed both by a nuclearizing and recalcitrant North Korea and a rising and militarizing China are a growing focus in Japanese security pronouncements with the language used to describe the China challenges becoming more robust. The National Security Statement states that;

"China has been rapidly advancing its military capabilities in a wide range of areas through its continued increase in its military budget without sufficient transparency. In addition, China has taken actions that can be regarded as attempts to change the status quo by coercion based on their own assertions, which are incompatible with the existing order of international law, in the maritime and aerial domains, including the East China Sea and the South China Sea."(12)

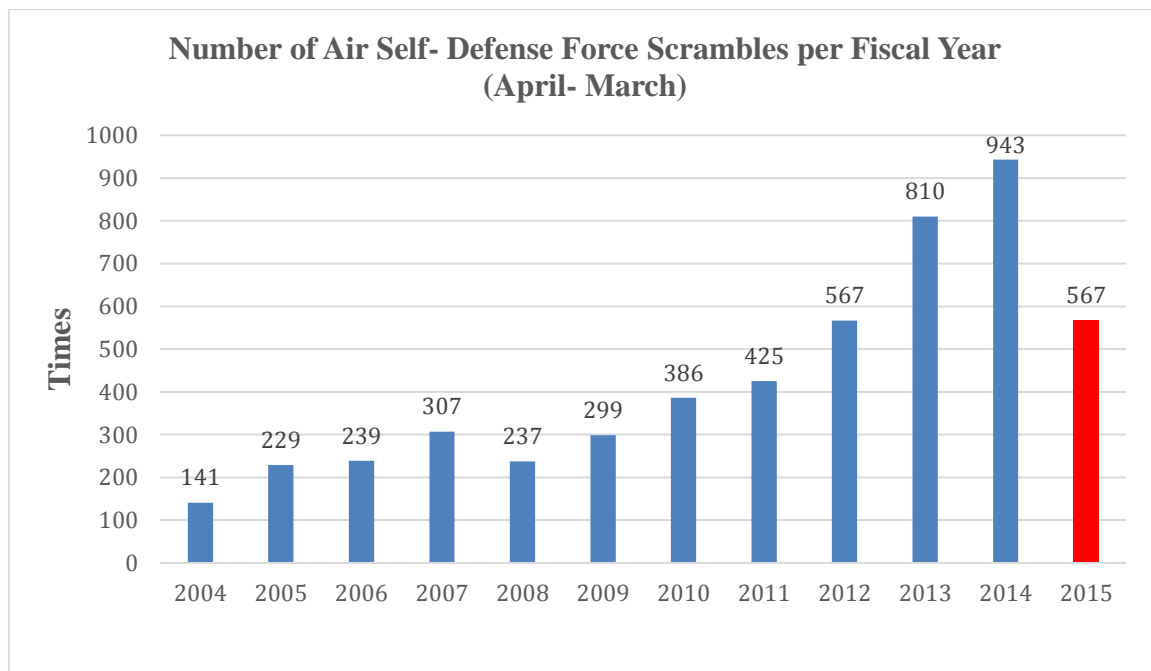
China contributes in three ways to the increasing stress on the unbalanced regional security order that Japan seeks to maintain. China is the only peer competitor able to pose a structural challenge to U.S. regional predominance, China is taking actions that increasingly challenge this order and its alliance and international legal underpinnings, and China poses a direct and increasingly aggressive threat to Japanese territorial integrity.

- *Five responses*

The sum of the five Japanese policy responses to the growing stress on the regional security order is greater in import and impact than each response individually. Together, they represent a very different approach to securing Japan; one that demands more of Japan, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and Japan's security relations with Southeast Asian states and beyond. The **first** change is geographical and addresses China's mounting challenge to Japanese territorial integrity. The 2004 National Defence Program Guidelines identify a new function for the Japanese defence forces, i.e. 'responding to invasions of Japan's offshore islands.'

In the succeeding 2010 Guidelines, this new feature becomes one of the two main categories for the primary role to be played by the Japanese Self-Defense Force, i.e. ‘effective deterrence and response.’ These Guidelines and accompanying mid-term defence program shift the distribution of Japanese military assets from land-based ones concentrated in the north to air- and sea-based ones in the south. Undoubtedly, the standoff between Japan and China off the Senkaku islands in September 2010 after a Chinese trawler rammed a Japanese Coast Guard vessel informed this elevation of threat.

The succeeding 2013 Guidelines call for Japan to achieve ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), and maritime and air superiority over Japanese territory as part of the Self-Defense Force’s primary duty of deterrence and response. The recent opening of the radar station on Yonaguni island (an undisputed part of Japan near the Senkaku islands) is a step in this direction.⁶ The 2013 Guidelines were undoubtedly affected by the sharp and sustained increase in Chinese (and to a lesser extent Russian) incursions into Japanese airspace since 2010.



Source: Japan Ministry of Defense

*The number for 2015 is only until the third quarter of the fiscal year.

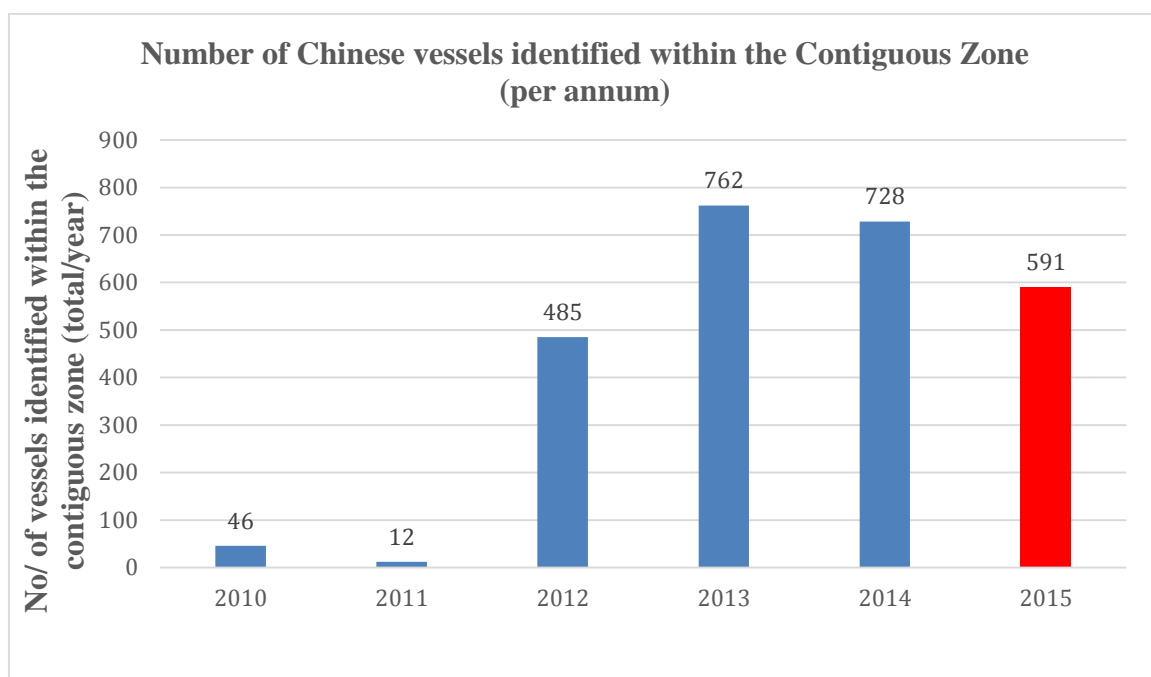
Second, the 2004 Guidelines introduced another role for the Japanese defence forces, i.e. ‘patrol and surveillance in the sea and airspace surrounding Japan, and response to the violation of Japan’s airspace and the intrusion of armed special-purpose ships and other similar vessels.’ This new focus on armed special-purpose ships became a conceptual centrepiece of the 2010 Guidelines with the introduction of the new term ‘gray-zone disputes’ – “confrontations over territory, sovereignty and economic interests that are not to escalate into wars” – in the first paragraph of the section on Japan’s security environment.

⁶ Jesse Johnson, “China fumes over Japan’s radar base near disputed isles,” *Straits Times*, 29 March 2016.

The 2013 Guidelines elaborate on gray-zone disputes and the proper operational preparation and response:

“Amid the increasingly severe security environment surrounding Japan, the SDF, in addition to its regular activities, needs to respond to various situations, including “gray zone” situations which require SDF commitment. The frequency of such situations and the duration of responses are both increasing. Therefore, Japan will regularly conduct persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (hereinafter “ISR”) activities. Moreover, the SDF will conduct strategic training and exercises in accordance with the development of the situation and swiftly build a response posture including advance deployment of units in response to the security environment and rapid deployment of adequate units. Thus Japan will demonstrate its will and highly developed capability to prevent further escalation. In dealing with situations, depending on their development, minimizing damage by effective response through achieving maritime supremacy and air superiority is essential in safeguarding the lives and property of the Japanese people, and the sovereignty of Japan’s territorial land, waters and airspace.”

Undoubtedly, the mounting number of incursions into the waters claimed by Japan in the East China Sea by Chinese white-hulled maritime surveillance vessels and their growing size and lethality are behind this elevating focus on gray-zone disputes.



Source: National Security Policy Division, Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

*The number for 2015 is only until October 31st.

Third, building on these two responses, the 2010 Guidelines state that:

“Japan should no longer base its defense on the traditional defense concept, “Basic Defense Force Concept,” which places priority on ensuring deterrence through

the existence of defense forces per se. More specifically, Japan will develop a Dynamic Defense Force that possesses readiness, mobility, flexibility, sustainability, and versatility. These characteristics will be reinforced by advanced technology based on the trends of levels of military technology and intelligence capabilities.”⁷

The Dynamic Defence Force concept moves away from Japan’s minimal, land-based defence posture announced in 1975. The new concept calls for the most radical shake-up of the Self-Defense Forces,

“Japan will drastically rationalize and streamline the SDF overall through fundamentally reviewing, in light of its difficult fiscal condition, the equipment, personnel, organization and force disposition, including the equipment and personnel that have been maintained as preparation to defend against a full-scale invasion. Moreover, by implementing a drastic review of the SDF personnel management system, Japan will seek to curb personnel costs and improve efficiency as well as increase the strength of SDF personnel by lowering its average age. These initiatives will lead to improving the structure of the defense budget, which has a high proportion of personnel cost that currently suppresses the expenditure for the SDF’s activities.”

The 2013 Guidelines go further, calling for a ‘Dynamic Joint Defense Force’ that “emphasizes both soft and hard aspects of readiness, sustainability, resiliency and connectivity, reinforced by advanced technology and capability for C3I, with a consideration to establish a wide range of infrastructure to support the SDF’s operation.”⁸ The Abe administration’s modest increases in the annual defence budgets in nominal yen terms, after more than a decade of decline, are signs that this new, more robust and diverse defence posture is being realised.

Fourth is a change of balance and focus. Japanese defense policy is still based upon the U.S.-Japan alliance. With Japan’s security environment becoming more complex and severe and Japan’s unilateral ability to respond to it challenged by its increasingly severe fiscal situation, Japan has no other credible response than strengthening the alliance and trying to re-orient it to this new environment.

On one side, as exemplified by Japan’s active and growing role in the U.S. regional ballistic missile defense system, Japan is accepting more burden in the alliance relationship in a way other allies like South Korea and Australia have shied away from for financial and diplomatic reasons.⁹ As detailed in the 2010 Ballistic Missile Defense Review, the U.S. sees

⁷ The 2004 Guidelines state that, “The Basic Defense Force Concept espouses the idea that, rather than preparing to directly counter a military threat, Japan, as an independent state, should maintain the minimum necessary basic defense forces lest it becomes a destabilizing factor in the region by creating a power vacuum.”

⁸ C3I stands for Communications, Command, Control, and Intelligence

⁹ See Andrew Davies and Rod Lyon, “Ballistic missile defence: how soon, how significant, and what should Australia’s policy be?” *ASPI Insights No. 71* (Canberra, ASPI, May 2014) and Karen Montague, “A review of South Korean missile defense programs”, *Policy Outlook* (Arlington, George C. Marshall Institute, March 2014)

the development of global and regional missile defense systems with the support of allies and partners as being essential to the defense of the U.S. homeland, the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, and to the countering of the anti-access area-denial capabilities of states seeking to limit the freedom of navigation and overflight.¹⁰

Japan's contribution to U.S.-led ballistic missile defense is an important pillar of the new security consensus. The 2004 Guidelines were instigated by the December 2003 Cabinet Decision "On the Introduction on Ballistic Missile Defense System and Other Measures."¹¹ These Guidelines introduced a new procurement category 'Assets for Ballistic Missile Defense' and identified response to ballistic missile attacks as a key function of the defence forces. Since this Cabinet decision, successive Japanese administrations have taken four steps to support the U.S.-led regional ballistic missile defense system beyond the defence of Japan:

- The 2004 Guidelines called for the purchase of four Aegis-capable destroyers able to track ballistic missiles, share the intelligence with other ballistic missile defense assets, and even shoot at the missiles. The 2010 Guidelines added two more of these destroyers, as did the 2013 Guidelines.
- In 2006, Japan became the first Asian ally or partner of the U.S. to host an X-band radar system essential to tracking ballistic missiles. In 2014, a second X-Band radar site was established in Japan to fill in holes within the regional radar coverage.
- In July 2014, the Abe Cabinet passed a decision re-interpreting the Japanese constitution to allow for the limited right to collective self-defense, with the necessary implementing legislation passing in September 2015. Prior to this, Japan could only shoot at missiles directly targeting Japan and only help track others. As noted by the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Defense Akihisa Nagashima in 2011, this limitation was "one of the largest outstanding issues in US-Japan relations." Prime Minister Noda, Abe's predecessor, supported the re-interpretation that allows Japan, conditionally and with limitations, to track and shoot ballistic missiles threatening the United States and potentially other security partners of Japan.¹²
- The 2015 Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation includes a new subsection, namely 'actions in response to an attack against a country other than Japan'. In this section, both allies commit to "cooperate in intercepting ballistic missiles, as appropriate, in accordance with their respective capabilities. The two governments will exchange information to ensure early detection of ballistic missile launches."

¹⁰

http://archive.defense.gov/bmdr/docs/BMDR%20as%20of%2026JAN10%200630_for%20web.pdf

¹¹ http://japan.kantei.go.jp/tyokan/2003/1219danwa_e.html

¹² See Ian Rinehart, "Collective self-defense and US-Japan security cooperation", *East-West Center Working Papers No. 24*, (Honolulu, East-West Center, October 2013), 3.

On the other hand, these 2015 Guidelines broaden the alliance in a way that directly addresses Japanese concerns with Chinese gray-zone activities around the Senkaku islands involving nominally civilian assets on the Chinese side. The Guidelines state that:

“In this increasingly complex security environment, the two governments will take measures to ensure Japan's peace and security in all phases, seamlessly, from peacetime to contingencies, including situations when an armed attack against Japan is not involved. In this context, the two governments also will promote further cooperation with partners.”

Fifth is the change that most directly affects Southeast Asian states. Japan is now proactively seeking closer security and defence relationships beyond the alliance as a new means to help shape Japan's regional security environment. The 2004 Guidelines include a new role for the Japanese defense forces, involving ‘proactive efforts to improve the international security environment’, that include the call to “establish necessary infrastructure to quickly dispatch defense force units overseas and to carry out missions continuously; and, make necessary arrangements to include the promotion of international peace cooperation activities in the Self-Defense Forces mission priorities.” The 2010 Guidelines elevate this new focus further and give primacy to cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region and with South Korea and Australia and then with ASEAN member-states and India. The 2013 Guidelines elevate the ‘stabilization of the Asia-Pacific and improvement of global security environments’ to the second role of the defense forces.

All five changes in Japan's defence policy have been introduced in this millennium, and each one has been deepened, broadened and more clearly defined in successive Japanese defence policy documents. The 2010 Guidelines are the most important and revolutionary of these and the only one to be released during the Democratic Party of Japan's period of rule. This underlines the strong bipartisan nature of the new security consensus, its likely durability, and its roots in Japan's reconsideration of its security environment and not in ideological differences between parties and leaders.

ARENA, PARTNERS, AND CHALLENGES

Under this new consensus, Japan's security interests in Southeast Asia have deepened, broadened and become potentially more challenging for the region. As with previous Japanese security consensuses, Southeast Asia is of great interest to Japan both as a security arena and as a set of bilateral and regional security partners. Some Southeast Asian states have positively responded to Japan's new security consensus and benefitted from it.

The Philippines, after President Aquino took power in 2010, is the regional state that has reacted the most positively with the two sides to negotiate a status of forces agreement. The Philippines is the first Southeast Asian state to take advantage of Japan's relaxing of its decades-old ban on arms exports in 2014 with Manila committed to leasing five reconnaissance planes from Japan to enhance Philippine domain awareness in its part of the

South China Sea.¹³ This follows on from the first Japan-Philippines joint naval exercise in the South China Sea in May 2015, and Tokyo's 2013 commitment to provide the Philippines 10 more maritime surveillance vessels on concessional terms. Foreign Secretary Del Rosario went as far as to agree that "The Philippines would strongly support a rearmed Japan shorn of its pacifist constitution as a counterweight to the growing military assertiveness of China."¹⁴

To lesser extents, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia have also responded positively to Japan's more proactive security stance in the region. Indonesia, in 2006, was the first regional country to receive coast guard vessels under the Japanese aid programme, and Vietnam the latest. In March 2014, Vietnam and Japan elevated their strategic relationship to an 'Extensive Strategic Partnership' and began discussion about future bilateral exercises. In December 2015, Japan held its first ever 2+2 ministerial (foreign and defense ministers) meeting with a Southeast Asian state, and that was with Indonesia.¹⁵ There, the two sides agreed to start negotiations on a defense technology transfer agreement similar to the one Japan signed with the Philippines in February 2016. In May 2015, Japan and Malaysia agreed to start negotiations on the same type of agreement at the bilateral summit where both leaders agreed to elevate their 'Enhanced Partnership' to a 'Strategic Partnership.'¹⁶

Japan's efforts to develop closer security partnerships with Asia-Pacific states to shape the regional security environment have fared much better with Australia over the past decade, and more recently with India. Japan's burgeoning security partnerships with these two powers that bracket maritime Southeast Asia from the south and west are also enmeshed with Japan's alliance relationship with the U.S.. Japan is now a regular participant in the annual India-U.S. Malabar naval exercises. In 2016, these exercises will be held in Southeast Asian waters north of the Philippines.¹⁷

The operational ties between Japan, the U.S. and Australia are much closer and the trio more frequently use maritime Southeast Asia as their exercise arena. Chinese media reported a trilateral naval exercise among these three Asia-Pacific powers in the South China Sea in April 2016.¹⁸ Japanese and Australian integration into the U.S.-led regional ballistic missile defense system and the essential radar facilities based in Australia and Japan for this system provide all three militaries better maritime domain awareness of maritime Southeast Asia than the littoral states possess themselves. Southeast Asia is becoming an increasingly active arena for U.S.-Japan military exercises and coordination as well as between the U.S., Japan and Australia, and the U.S., Japan and India.

¹³ "Philippines to lease Japanese planes to patrol disputed sea", *The Philippine Star*, 9 March 2016.

¹⁴ David Piling, Roel Landingin, and Jonathan Soble, "Philippines backs rearming of Japan", *The Financial Times*, 9 December 2012.

¹⁵ Michiyo Ishida, "Japan, Indonesia agree to strengthen security, economic ties", *Channel NewsAsia*, 17 December 2015

¹⁶ http://www.mofa.go.jp/sa/sea2/my/page3e_000342.html

¹⁷ Niharika Mandhana, "U.S., India, Japan plan joint naval exercises near South China Sea," *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 March 2016.

¹⁸ "US, Japan and Australia hold joint exercises in South China Sea," *CCTV News*, 25 April 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP4qnyBrT6I>

Southeast Asia and its states face three size-related problems when it comes to partnering with the more proactive Japan and in not simply seeing the region used as an arena by Japan and its other Asia-Pacific partners:

- With the exception of Singapore, all Southeast Asian states are more potential recipients of security from Japan than security partners with Japan, as shown by the transfer of low-end Japanese equipment to Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines on concessional terms. Defence spending in the region, outside of Singapore, is low and, outside of Singapore and Vietnam, focussed on equipment that is not suitable for exercises beyond land and coastal defense. The Philippine navy's most advanced naval vessels are recently donated decommissioned U.S. coast guard cutters.
- The four states that have shown the greatest willingness to partner with Japan have maritime boundary disputes with China with the Philippines (under President Aquino) and Vietnam taking the firmest positions against China in these disputes, and being the most welcoming of Japan's new security advances. Outside of the Philippines under Aquino, Southeast Asian states are very sensitive to any forms of cooperation with major powers other than China which may lead to a Chinese backlash. India, Australia and the U.S. are not hindered by this extreme sense of asymmetry in relation to China. Hence, Japan, India, Australia and the U.S. are willing to take actions in maritime Southeast Asia, and make comments on Chinese actions in maritime Southeast Asia and the Philippine case against China at the Arbitration Tribunal (and absorb China's ripostes) where the littoral Southeast Asian states and ASEAN are not.¹⁹
- Many Southeast Asian states see that their consensus-making in and collective voice through ASEAN provide a 'strategic lifeline' in their relations to major powers, in particular China, the U.S. and Japan.²⁰ This makes many ASEAN member-states, even in their own individual statements about issues that ASEAN has taken a position on, unwilling to go beyond what was agreed upon at the low common-denominator ASEAN level. Likewise, the importance placed on ASEAN centrality makes many member-states very sensitive to any perceived attempts by any major power to divide ASEAN or to use ASEAN in their contests with other major powers.

Prime Minister Abe's call for reform of the East Asia Summit during his 2014 keynote speech at the Shangri-la Dialogue and the Japanese (and Chinese) calls for annual ASEAN+1 defence minister meetings aggravate these fears and weigh against positive responses to Japan's proactive approaches to Southeast Asian states and ASEAN. This fear of the strategic lifeline fraying or being severed could even lead to collective pressure against individual ASEAN member-states deepening their security partnership with Japan. There was opposition to the Philippines even

¹⁹ A good example of this from Japan is, Shinzo Abe, "Asia's democratic security diamond", *Project Syndicate*, 27 December 2012.

²⁰ "Asean consensus is a strategic lifeline", *The Straits Times*, 1 May 2016

joining ASEAN some fifty years ago due to its pre-existing alliance relationship with the U.S.

Japan's new security consensus and its focus on strengthening security relations with the U.S., Australia, India and willing Southeast Asian states and pushing back against China's more proactive approach to territorial and maritime boundary disputes is deeply-rooted and unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Japan's broadening alliance relationship with the U.S. will continue to use Southeast Asia as an arena, as will the U.S.-Japan-Australia trilateral relationship and the developing U.S.-Japan-India one.

Southeast Asian states (or their governments of the moment) that have a similar strategic judgement about the stresses on the regional security order and views on the threats to their security posed by China will likely continue to seek closer security ties with Japan. They will likely be the minority in Southeast Asia and less predictable and useful security partners for Japan. On one hand, this aggravates the risk that Southeast Asia will be primarily an arena for Japan's new security consensus and cooperation with non-Southeast Asian partners rather than a set of partners able to shape Japan's security actions in the region in ways that meet the interests of Southeast Asian states. On the other hand, growing security relations between Japan and some Southeast Asian states could strain ASEAN consensus-making and member-states' support for ASEAN centrality.

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