



## EMERGING SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTHEAST & EAST ASIA JAPAN AND ASEAN



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This essay attempts to analyze how Japan's policy towards ASEAN is different or is likely to be different during the Abe Shinzo-II's government. The paper will examine the various drivers in Japan's and in particular Abe's engagement with ASEAN.

After assuming office in December 2012, Prime Minister Abe chose Southeast Asia as his first trip abroad. It is customary for a new Japanese Prime Minister to make the first official trip abroad to the US. Abe had initially sought to make the US the destination of his first overseas trip but was reportedly rebuffed by the White House who said a trip would not be possible until after President Barack Obama's

inauguration in January 2013. As a result, the Japanese leader traveled to Southeast Asia in January 2013 instead, as Tokyo looks to use common concern over China to strengthen ties with ASEAN member nations.

Japan's ASEAN diplomacy can be examined in the parameter of the five principles. Given the changes to the strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific region and ASEAN's economic growth, ASEAN's presence and role in the region have been enhanced considerably. Japan, therefore, feels the importance to further strengthen the cooperation with ASEAN member states, not only on economic issues, but also on the other areas, such as security and political affairs.

With his first trip, Abe kicked off the 40th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. During the visit, Abe outlined the "Five Principles" of Japan's ASEAN Diplomacy, on 18 January 2013. These are:



*This essay was initially presented in a conference titled "Looking Beyond Southeast Asia," organized by the IPCS in Chennai in collaboration with Stella Maris College and SAEA Research Group Singapore.*



Southeast Asia Research Programme (SEARP)



- Protect freedom of thought, expression and speech where two oceans meet. These are universal values that humanity has gained and must be allowed to flower to the fullest. These values are freedom, democracy and basic human rights.
- Ensure cooperation with ASEAN member states that the free and open seas, which are the most vital common assets, are governed by laws and rules and not by might & to welcome US' rebalancing to Asia Pacific region.
- Further, Promote trade and investment, including flows of goods, money, people and services, through various economic partnership networks, for Japan's economic revitalization and prosperity of both Japan and ASEAN member states. The efforts and contributions Japan has made to enhance connectivity in Asia, such as through construction of the Southern Economic Corridor in the Mekong region, are now beginning to bear real fruit for the region. Maritime Asia, has since ancient times, been a place where civilizations blend with one another. Indonesia is a prime example of Maritime Asia's calm and open nature, which brings about not conflict but coexistence among different religions and culture . & Japan is attracted to this.
- Protect and nurture Asia's diverse cultural heritage and traditions.
- Promote exchanges among the younger generations to further foster

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mutual understanding.

## I FORTY YEARS OF ASEAN-JAPAN FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION

Japan has supported the growth of ASEAN member states, particularly in infrastructure and human resource development, the two areas that form the foundation of ongoing development in the ASEAN region. The "heart-to-heart" relationship, an approach first articulated in what later came to be known as the "Fukuda Doctrine" in 1977, is now well established among Japan and other ASEAN member states. Takeo Fukuda, The then Prime Minister of Japan, made three promises thirty six years ago to the members of the ASEAN states : Japan would never become a military power; Japan would forge ties with ASEAN based on "heart-to-heart" understanding; and Japan would be an equal partner of ASEAN and its member countries. Japan has faithfully adhered to the Fukuda Doctrine right up to the present day.

ASEAN and Japan have also established close business ties. In 2011, the total volume of trade between ASEAN and Japan reached \$248 billion. ASEAN is now Japan's second largest trading partner. In addition, Japanese foreign direct investment into the region increased to 1.5 trillion yen (approximately \$18.8 billion), making ASEAN the second most common destination for Japanese enterprises besides the European Union .

2013 marks the 40th year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. Throughout the year, Japan and ASEAN member states will conduct exchange projects in a wide range of fields, including political dialogue, economy, culture, sports and tourism, as well as youth exchange projects, which will be reinvigorated by the "JENESYS 2.0" project. Also, ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit meeting is scheduled to be held in Japan in December 2013.

Six years ago, as the Prime Minister of Japan, Abe launched a project to bring high school, university students and other young people to Japan from throughout the Asia Pacific region, particularly from East Asia Summit participant states. The program was titled JENESYS – the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youth. With a budget equivalent to \$300 million, JENESYS enabled more than 14,000 people to visit Japan from the ASEAN alone. Japan has now decided to re-launch this program as JENESYS 2.0, infusing it with fresh passion and spirit of gratitude. In JENESYS 2.0, Japan intends to invite 30,000 young people from ASEAN and other Asian nations to Japan.

## II STRATEGIC ISSUE AND CHINA FACTOR

China's recent rise and its assertiveness has been sending disturbing signals throughout the Asia-Pacific region. This is leading regional powers in Asia to reorient their own foreign policy priorities and redefine their relationships with each other. On the one hand, China's economic ties with most of the ASEAN member states have deepened over the years. Whether this is a Chinese strategy to develop other countries' dependence on it or otherwise is not important. What is important is any precipitous action by China as indicated by several of its recent actions will disturb not only the economic integration process but also imperil the strategic situation of the region. This is a new challenge for Japan and the ASEAN member states.

Abe's ASEAN trip came at a time when Tokyo is facing a tougher regional security environment. Japan remains locked in a tense standoff with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. There is no sign of resolution in the near future. Abe's visit also took place just a week after North Korea conducted its third nuclear test on 12 February 2013. There are speculations that it will carry out a few more such tests in this year itself.

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Given North Korea's intransigence in the recent years, this is believable.

Abe, the nationalist, visited Washington in late February, thereby suggesting further strengthening US-Japan military relationship. The challenges from China and North Korea are further contributing to deepen the already existing Japan-US alliance relationship. At Japan's request, the two sides announced they would consider revising their military treaty in November, while Abe's predecessor, Yoshihiko Noda, was still in office. At that time, Japan had said that revisions were necessary because of qualitative changes in the security environment since the last time the allies revisited the treaty in 1997.

Indeed, the US has long pushed Japan to increase its security role in the region by upgrading its military forces and loosening restrictions on what types of operations they can participate in. Abe shares such a view. A growing number of Japanese people also tend to hold such a view because of provocations by North Korea and concerns over China's rise. On its side, Abe administration has announced to increase the country's defence expenditure for the first time in a decade. Though some people in the US establishment have reservations on such a role by Japan, the reactions from neighboring South Korea would not be favorable. Thus, relationships among the northeast Asian nations are likely to worsen. The shadow of history cannot

easily be wished away. The risk of a messy situation developing should be avoided.

During his visit to Southeast Asia in January 2013, Abe openly baited Beijing over the disputed Senkaku Islands. In a direct reference to China, Abe declared: "Open seas are public assets, and Japan will do its utmost to protect them by cooperating with the [Association of Southeast Asian nations]". During his three-day trip, in which he visited Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, Abe underscored his key concern by repeatedly voicing Japan's opposition to any changing of the "status quo by force", especially in territorial disputes involving China and its neighbors in East Asia.

Speaking in Jakarta on 18 January 2013, Abe stressed the important role that Indonesia can play in Asia's changing balance of power. Being the de facto leader of the ASEAN, Indonesia has long served as a linchpin of regional order. The concern over China's rise is driving lead countries such as US, Japan, South Korea and Australia to strengthen ties with Indonesia. China is making its own claims to regional leadership, which makes Indonesia uneasy as it poses a direct challenge to its own interests. This concern gathers importance as China develops its own blue water navy and reiterates its claims to virtually the entire South China Sea. Therefore, Abe spoke about the need to maintain tranquility in the Asian seas because like Japan, other ASEAN member countries derive their sustenance from the ocean and

therefore safety of the seas is of paramount importance to all.

After assuming office, Abe has been sending purposeful signals to Beijing. He has spoken about a Japanese military renewal, to include revisiting Tokyo's "pacifist" posture. He even went so far as to propose the establishment of a "democratic security diamond": a strategic alliance of like-minded Indo-Pacific countries that share anxieties about China's growing naval might. Indeed, Japan's recent moves in Southeast Asia suggest that Japan could be seeking to create a new regional security mechanism to counter China's military tactics in the East and South China Seas.

What does this transpire? Abe's recent statements and visits to the US and Southeast Asia suggest that the concerns over China's rise are real and that regional powers must come together to face China's growing maritime assertiveness. This also suggests that Japan has a larger game plan aimed at forging a string of regional strategic relationships in which it can be both a partner and a patron state. The essentials of Abe's plan seem to be to collaborate with its partner countries on joint projects and provide economic support to growing regional nations. What he would expect in return is diplomatic backing in Japan's territorial disputes with China. In other words, Abe envisions a new regional "hub and spoke" model, with Japan at the centre.

A new parameter in this new rebalancing strategy is the newfound interest in regional security diplomacy. Japan is an active member in the robust trilateral strategic dialogue with the US and Australia. Japan is also an active participant in the trilateral dialogue involving the US and India, of which three rounds have already taken place, the last being on October 2012. During his earlier stint as Prime Minister in 2006-07, Abe had floated the quadrilateral arrangement

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involving the US, India and Australia by expanding the Japan-US-Australia trilateral arrangement. This initiative was killed before it took birth because of China's strong and vocal opposition as it saw the grouping as anti-China. Then, the initiative was abandoned. Between 2006-07 and now, new developments in the region with disturbing signals might propel Japan to take another attempt to revive the initiative.

The quadrilateral initiative died in its infancy but trilateral processes are ongoing. Even a new Japan-South Korea-India trilateral Track-II initiative have started, with the first meeting taking place in June 2012 in New Delhi. An important item that figure in the agenda in all such trilateral initiatives is the issue of maritime security. Even Abe has tried to mend fences with Russia, with which Japan has a territorial dispute over the Kuriles Islands. Signing of a formal peace treaty is also in the agenda, which is being negotiated. Indonesia being ASEAN's powerhouse, has agreed to boost defense cooperation with Japan.

While major regional military powers figure in Japan's calculus, the role of smaller powers are also important as their support gives legitimacy to Japan's designs. If Japan can secure support from smaller Southeast Asian countries to its security agenda in East Asia, Japan's position could be strengthened. In return, Japan can return the favour by offering lucrative economic packages. It was with such an objective that Abe announced a \$500 million aid grant to Hanoi for three infrastructure projects. Japan is already Vietnam's largest foreign investor, with investment totaling \$29 billion.

While in Thailand, Abe expressed interest in developing high-speed rail and water management projects. Abe has also reaffirmed Japan's strong support for the Dawei deep-sea port and economic zone in Myanmar, projects of considerable interest to Thailand.

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### III CONCLUSION

Since maritime security is an issue that affects international maritime commerce, securing the sea lanes of communication is of top most priority for all nations. In Japan's case, its dependence on maritime commerce is immense and any disruption at sea will affect its economy adversely. Same is true to the other countries, may be in a lesser scale. Therefore, securing support of the ASEAN member states to address the maritime challenges is another indicator of Japan's new security strategy. With this perspective, the ASEAN Maritime Forum has been discussing issue of maritime security concern.

The first meeting of the ASEAN Maritime Forum was held in Manila in October 2012. The forum has been expanded to include the ASEAN Regional Forum countries as well as nations from the East Asia Summit and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. This means that both the US and China are members. The underlying objective of the forum is to evolve a binding code of conduct to, if not constrain China, at least to hold it accountable for any adventurous moves in the South and East China Seas. If a broader regional institutional architecture finally emerges, the above initiative would have had great relevance.

Japan's initiative for a new regional balancing strategy would not be

prejudicial to US influence in the region. While the Japan-US treaty alliance remains the linchpin of Japan's security strategy, Washington is unlikely to participate in any direct move to contain China. Therefore, Japan's efforts would be limited to conflict avoidance rather than an open conflict and this would suit the US interests. Abhijit Sen observes: "Tokyo's renewed focus on Southeast Asia may also provide the American rebalancing towards Asia the strategic space and time it needs to succeed."

The five principles enunciated by Abe in Jakarta in February 2013, therefore, underpin Japanese diplomacy. The shared values with ASEAN member states will help Japan to have common perception on the issue of global commons, in particular the oceans, which must not be ruled by might. Tranquility in the seas of Asia will help bring peace and safe maritime commerce. Japan and other ASEAN member states aspire for the same.

At times cracks do occur within the ASEAN grouping affecting its cohesiveness. Though Indonesia as ASEAN chair in 2011 was instrumental in producing guidelines to transform ASEAN's nonbinding 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea into a legally binding code of conduct, Cambodia which held the rotating chair in 2012 failed to include the South China Sea dispute on its list of key agenda items, while proposing that China be included in the drafting of procedures to implement the declaration on conduct. For the first time in 45 years, no joint statement was issued at the July 2012 ASEAN meeting because of this open discord. This makes a case for Abe extending support to Indonesia more now than ever before as Indonesia's leadership role in ASEAN is critical to

ensure cohesiveness. Abe needs to work harder to make his ASEAN diplomacy effective for regional security.

