

# Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and its implication for ASEAN countries

Remarks by Mr. Yasuhiro Tanaka, Co-President of Japan AALA  
at Peace and Security workshop of ACSC/APF Bangkok 9/10/2019

## Security Diamond

The rise of China, the decline of the United States, and the hegemonic rivalry between the two countries intensifying in Asia. Under such circumstances, Japan has come up with an aggressive Asian diplomatic and military strategy that breaks the traditional framework characterized by modesty. That is the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" promoted by the Abe administration. Though it is far from complete, the Abe administration has been aggressively implementing the necessary measures in line with this vision. What does it mean for peace in East Asia, especially for ASEAN countries?

The Abe administration first revealed this concept in 2007 during his state visit to India. In his speech at the Indian Parliament titled "Confluence of Two Seas", he emphasized that India and East Asia are united, and called for securing stability and prosperity in Asia based on the cooperation of Japan, the United States, India and Australia.

The outline is listed as a priority policy for Japanese diplomacy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. Its content is to improve the connection between Asia and Africa through a free and open Indo-Pacific and promote stability and prosperity in the region as a whole. It says that to make the "Free and open indo-pacific strategy" into shape, Japan will strengthen strategic collaboration with India which has a historical relationship with East Africa, as well as the US and Australia.

The aim of this strategy is clearly stated in an English-language opinion piece by Abe titled "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond," which appeared on

the website of the nonprofit Project Syndicate at the very day he launched his second administration.

In the essay, Abe states that “peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Pacific Ocean are inseparable from peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean.” And emphasized “the need for the Indian and Japanese governments to join together to shoulder more responsibility as guardians of navigational freedom across the Pacific and Indian oceans”

“Japan’s top foreign-policy priority must be to expand the country’s strategic horizons. Japan is a mature maritime democracy, and its choice of close partners should reflect that fact. I envisage a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the US state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific. I am prepared to invest, to the greatest possible extent, Japan’s capabilities in this security diamond.”

Quite oddly, the article was little informed by the Japanese media. It is said that Prime Minister Abe sealed the term “Security Diamond”, accepting a strong recommendations of his aides who feared the repulsion of the public opinion, as a clear indication of Japan's attempt to play a military role in Asia by breaking the constitutional framework.

**★No ASEAN mentioned at all.**

In fact the paper has the most hawkish tone he has ever expressed in foreign policy, concerning “china’s naval and territorial expansion”

In the paper nothing is touched on the norms of international relation, such as the United Nations Charter, respect for sovereignty, noninterference in domestic affairs, and the right to self-determination, Though emphasizing the universal value system, the most important principle of international relations is ignored that it is the people of their own of each country who decide how to realize those universal values.

It focused geopolitical security and military policy and economic and cultural cooperation is hardly mentioned. It resembles or almost the same as the argument of power politics which US geopolitical expertises are advocating.

He totally ignores ASEAN countries. There is no mention of ASEAN at all, even though it calls for the return of the British and French to the Indo-Pacific.

### ★implementation

Within three years of Abe's controversial "security diamond" proposal, China's aggressive territorial expansion in the South China Sea had accelerated dramatically. In response to these developments, the Abe administration has forcibly realized policies in line with this concept.

The first is strengthening the Japan-US military alliance. In 2015, Abe visited the United States and agreed on a new guideline that renewed the cooperation between the US and Japanese troops. He also started construction of Henoko's Marine Corps base in Okinawa. The functions of the US military bases in Japan have been strengthened with a view to operating in the Indo-Pacific and at a global scale.

The second is strengthening the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. Defense expenses have been increasing every year, but the shift to military forces engaging overseas (strengthening offensive capability) has been rapidly increasing. The symbol is the launch of the helicopter carrier "Izumo". Immediately after commissioned, she performed an escort mission of US military vessel for the first time during the Korean crisis in 2017.

She participated in joint exercises with US and Indian forces in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Now, the renovation got started to convert it to be able to operate the fixed wing aircraft F35.

Third is the enforcement of a new security legislation. The successive administrations have maintained the position that Japan is not allowed to exercise collective self-defense rights under Article 9 of the Constitution, but the Abe administration has changed its interpretation and decided that it can be used in special cases. On top of that, they forced a series of legislation that allowed the Self-Defense Forces to engage in combats outside the territory.

### **ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Outlook**

Under these circumstances, we pay attention to the concept of ASEAN Indo-Pacific Outlook adopted by the ASEAN country leaders at the Summit last June. The document shows the concept of Asian countries creating an order of peace on its own, not allowing any “advantage” of outside powers, not to get caught in the US-China fighting for hegemony.

The principles listed as follows:

(1) ASEAN centered; Create an order with ASEAN's leadership, using multi-layered structure including various economic and security dialogue frameworks that ASEAN has formed with non-regional countries, such as East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ministers in various fields, expert meetings, etc.

(2) Inclusiveness: Multilateral cooperation framework that does not exclude any country

(3) Make Indo –Pacific an area of dialogue and cooperation, not confrontation

(4) Guided by the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) that stipulate mutual respect of sovereignty and solution of disputes by peaceful means.

Prime Minister Prayut of Thailand, the president of the latest Summit emphasized the significance of the concept at the closing conference, saying, “ASEAN has decided to take a common approach in the Indo-Pacific.” “It should be ASEAN-centered cooperation, with inclusiveness, not exclusiveness,” he said.

This is a different approach from Abe's strategy based on military and confrontation.

## **Japanese Pacifism**

China has been flexing its naval muscle while building artificial islands and runways in a bid to control the waters of the South China Sea. The Chinese have either built or are currently building facilities capable of serving as naval ports in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, dramatically expanding their presence around the Indian Ocean.

We know that this hegemonic behavior by rising China has produced the strong concerns of neighboring countries. It is understandable that some of these countries think that in order to compete against China, they should rely on the power of the United States and Japan to balance. Nevertheless, I would like you to pay attention to another aspect of the Abe's strategy

The power base of the Abe administration is nationalists who dream of revitalizing the past Japanese imperial empire. They are characterized by historical revisionism that Japan's past colonial rule and war of aggression were right thing to do. In relation to the United States and China, sealing off this revisionist view, the Abe administration is attempting to play military role without any reflection on the past wars. We are worried that this Abe strategy will create a strong warning or suspicion not only China and the Korean Peninsula but also Southeast Asian countries.

This is clear from the fact that Prime Minister Abe devoted himself with an unusual tenacity in the constitutional revision of Article 9. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which renounce forever a sovereign right of war and prohibits possession of armed force. That is a pledge and determination of Japanese people not to wage a war again. The article 9 has gained the support of the people for 70 years and has become the foundation of Japanese pacifism.

Japanese pacifist forces oppose Abe's Indo-Pacific strategy, insisting Japan should contribute peace and stability in Asia through peaceful diplomacy based on Article 9 of the Constitution as well as sincere reflection of the

past. The foundation of this diplomacy is the spirit of Bandung that has determined peaceful coexistence and mutual respect in different countries, and ASEAN's peace efforts to succeed it. I believe that this direction will open the future of trust and peace in Japan and Asia.

(End)

.