

JAPAN AND MARITIME SECURITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A LABORATORY FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC?

Marianne PÉRON-DOISE

Research Fellow on North Asia at IRSEM

ABSTRACT

Southeast Asia lies at the heart of maritime Asia. Its relationship to the sea can be understood through a multitude of issues relating to the securitization of the Straits of Malacca, which is both a bridge and a place of passage between the Indian and the Pacific. Oceans. The rise of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and the increasing weight of China in the South China Sea have reinforced its importance. Since the 1990s, the threat posed by maritime piracy has driven Japan to develop new cooperative tools for the region by relying mainly on civil actors such as the Japanese coast guard and the Japanese Foundation. Tokyo has thus become heavily involved in the establishment of the RECAAP (Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery), a regional accord on the fight against piracy, and its eponymous Centre in Singapore in 2006, both constituted innovative steps in the management of maritime security in the Southeast Asian region.

Seen from Japan, this securitization, in a multilateral context, contributed to the emergence of a vast maritime community. It notably anchored Southeast Asia to external partners such as the United States, India and Australia, anxious to organize themselves in a sustainable manner to protect the rule of law at sea and the freedom of navigation. This research note returns to the genesis of these processes by questioning the place that can be claimed by the new Japanese maritime “narrative” of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” space.

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A DIVIDED ASEAN IN THE FACE OF PIRACY AND MARITIME INSECURITY

According to the different figures published by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB),¹ maritime piracy remains a significant security issue for a large number of States. In 2017, 180 acts of piracy were reported worldwide, mostly affecting large boats transporting chemical, petroleum or gas products. While the phenomenon has shown to be in regression since 2013, Asia is among the three most at risk regions for maritime navigation with East Africa (Somalia), West Africa (the Gulf of Guinea), and Latin America (Columbia and Venezuela).² In 2017, 76 acts of piracy were reported in Southeast Asia, that is 42% of attacks worldwide. However, the most dangerous country for vessels remains the Indonesian archipelago, with 43 acts of piracy, followed by the Philippines with 22 reported incidents.

Historically, the piracy phenomenon gained particular momentum in Southeast Asia following the financial and economic crisis of 1997.³ The year 2000 constituted a peak with 242 attacks, of which 119 occurred in Indonesia.⁴ This piracy accentuated residual maritime crime by multiplying the number of attacks on merchant vessels passing through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, two crucial channels for commerce and international transport. Approximately 30% of the world's annual maritime traffic takes place across this maritime corridor along with an important part of the energy flow originating from the Middle East, on route to the major Asian economies, China and Japan. Southeast Asian piracy quickly began to pose an economic and security threat to coastal States as well as to a growing number of individuals and vessels travelling along these dangerous maritime routes. Here, there was a security issue for all users of the sea which the traditional local approach was not equipped to handle.

Limited national resources

States dispose of various different instruments to fight against maritime piracy. Firstly, there is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS),⁵ and its Article 101 that addresses piracy. These provisions were reinforced by the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation of 1988 (the Rome Convention). In addition to this are measures that individual States may take. It is in this way that coastal States in Southeast Asia, from the early 2000s, began reinforcing and modernizing maritime administrations, naval forces and coast guards, in charge of sea piracy repression. For several years, Indonesia mobilized its security forces in the province of Aceh⁶ to combat terrorism and criminality, including its naval dimension. Singapore and Malaysia proceeded to the rationalization of their maritime security forces. In 2005, Malaysia joined together all governmental agencies competent in the maritime domain into a single entity with a single command, the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA). However, despite efforts to reorganize, the civil and military maritime organizations in ASEAN countries still remains under-financed and under-equipped against the recurrent phenomenon of piracy and maritime insecurity. Indonesia and the Philippines, archipelagic States with vast maritime domain, have always had the most trouble responding efficiently to the resurgence of maritime criminality and its diffuse links to terrorism.⁷

1. International Maritime Bureau. <https://www.icc-ccs.org/reports/2017-Annual-IMB-Piracy-report.pdf>.

2. Neil Thompson, "Asia's deadly Pirates," *The Diplomat*, 21 June 2017. <https://TheDiplomat.com/2017/06/asias-deadly-pirates>.

3. Isabelle Cordonnier, "La piraterie maritime en Asie du Sud-Est," *La Revue Internationale et Stratégique*, 2001/3, p. 48-54. Sam Bateman, Joshua Ho, Jane Chang, *Good order at sea*, RSIS Policy Paper, Singapore, April 2009. https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PRO90427_good_order_at_sea_in_SEA.pdf.

4. International Maritime Bureau, https://peacepalacelibrary.nl/ebooks/files/ICC_InternationalMaritimeBoard_Annual_Piracy_Report2004.pdf.

5. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Montego Bay, 10 December 1982. https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos.pdf.

6. The Indonesian security forces withdrew from the Aceh in 2005 after the disarmament of the separatist militia of the GAM (Free Aceh Movement,) severely weakened and disorganized after the tsunami of 2004.

7. John Bradford, *Southeast Asian Maritime Security in the Age of terror: threat opportunity and charting the course forward*, Working Paper 75, IDSS Singapore, April 2005. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/rsis-pubs/WP75.pdf>.

An embryo of local cooperation

Mindful about mobilizing against piracy, the three coastal States of the Malacca Strait, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, put in place a system of Malacca Strait Patrols in 2004.⁸ This series of bilateral accords also provided a response to criticisms from the international community regarding the countries passivity.⁹ The most well-known are the patrols coordinated between the three countries, also known as MALSINDO (Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia). We may also note the Malacca Strait Security Initiative (MSSI), but this initiative was blocked by Indonesia's refusal to authorize the right to pursuit in its territorial waters and to accept the participation of foreign countries in the management of the Malacca Strait, notably the United States. Serving as an air component, Eyes in the Sky (EIS), was equally established while the exchange of information and intelligence was institutionalized.

These formal provisions between littoral States of the Malacca Strait constituted an incontestable advancement in interstate cooperation in the fight against piracy in Southeast Asia. They remain, to date, one of the rarest operational responses to have been brought against piracy, although they are only a trilateral initiative.¹⁰ The fact that maritime piracy in the zone became concentrated in the Malacca Strait and in Indonesian and Malaysian waters called for the construction of a regional reaction. The response was nevertheless limited to the littoral states of the Strait itself, even if Thailand joined it in 2008. While there may have been an effort to integrate participants in a common structure under a single leadership, we cannot determine its strategic success because of the weakness of the naval assets employed. Generally speaking, this episode reveals both a very clear desire of States to ensure their security as well as their reluctance to rely on initiatives emanating from foreign partners even though the Indian and US navies were on occasion able to conduct escort missions in the Strait. In discourse and in practice, the fight against piracy is considered to be the prerogative of local States.¹¹

TOKYO'S SOFT POWER AND THE RETURN OF DIPLOMACY BY THE SEA

The pusillanimity of ASEAN in managing the issue of maritime piracy created a diplomatic and strategic space which Japan has actively seized. Since the 2000s, the archipelago has organized an international conference in Tokyo and formulated a doctrine of the fight against maritime piracy. Its diplomacy will allocate important financial and human resources through the action of the Japan Agency for International Cooperation. This implication would lead to the creation of a template with cooperation mechanisms relying on the exchange of maritime information and the concept of capacity-building through training, equipment transfers, and assistance with the creation of coast guard forces.¹²

Japan, a reemerging strategic actor in Southeast Asia

In parallel of its involvement in the fight against piracy and maritime insecurity, Japan developed a cooperation on security and defense with ASEAN. More globally, their involvement adds to the progressive internationalization of the role of the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF, Jieitai 自衛隊) and its resumption of responsibility in security and peacekeeping operations via the United Nations. Southeast Asia constitutes the experimental ground in this precautionous return of Japan in a regional context marked by the memory of the expansion of the imperial army, and while the strategic initiatives from Tokyo are scrutinized in light of the limitations imposed by the so-called "pacifist" Constitution of 1947. Southeast Asia revealed itself to be very sensitive to the theme of the "remilitarization" of post-war Japan. Japanese investments from 1950-1980 were perceived to be, at best, elements of an "Apology Diplomacy," and at

8. Koh Swee Lean, *The Malacca straits patrols: finding common ground*, RSIS Commentary, Singapore, 20 April 2016. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CO16091.pdf>.

9. According to the terms of the joint communication of 16 November 1971, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia are responsible for the management and the security of Straits. Since 1971, they proceeded to put in place corridors for navigation and a system of assistance to navigation of the segments judged to be the most dangerous for the transit of ships.

10. This coordinated patrol mechanism was taken back up in 2017 by the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia in the context of the resurgence of the piracy threat observed in the Sulu-Sulawesi region.

11. Éric Frécon, "Piraterie en Asie du Sud-Est : États défaits, États menacés mais États renforcés," *Sécurité Internationale*, 2009/1, p. 41-47.

12. Interview with Japanese experts, Tokyo, November 2017.

worst, a new strategy for domination through the economy and generous development aid. Since 1977, Tokyo has worked to establish new political, economic and cultural ties with the countries of Southeast Asia via the Fukuda doctrine, named after the Prime Minister of Japan from 1976-1978.¹³ Tokyo would send its troops to Cambodia in 1992, then to Timor in 2002. At the same time, the Japanese-American alliance and the increasing support of the archipelago to its strategic American partner would provide a decisive engine for the normalization of the SDF, notably with Japanese support in the fight against terrorism in 2001, and to American operations in Iraq in 2003.

Historically, the Southeast Asian region has always been the most important for Japan. This region connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans is vital for the sea lines of communication (SLOC) of the archipelago heading toward Europe and the Middle East. 85 percent of Japanese energy imports from the Middle East take the Malacca and Lombok Straits. In addition, Southeast Asia is one of the most attractive markets for Japanese commerce. On its end, the region has strong reasons to cooperate with Tokyo, as it is a significant source of development aid. In 2002, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi proposed a global economic partnership. Tokyo found it to be advantageous to maintain a strategically stable and economically dynamic relationship with Southeast Asia, outside the Chinese sphere of influence. Since the late 1990s, Japan has supported the creation for a Code of Conduct between Beijing and ASEAN to put an end to the already growing tensions in the South China Sea, which threaten to compromise freedom of navigation in the zone. Incidentally, Tokyo's promotion of multilateralism at sea toward ASEAN countries did not escape Chinese criticism. The latter firmly opposed the Japanese proposal to create a regional maritime peacekeeping force during an ASEAN summit in 1999.¹⁴

Maritime security, a theme of consensus

The rise of threats to security in multiple forms constitutes another factor that contributed to the rapprochement of Tokyo with Southeast Asia. Japan's involvement in the promotion of the concept of "human security" would bring Tokyo to develop specific cooperation with ASEAN as a regional organization, but also on a bilateral level, notably with Indonesia and the Philippines on the topic of illegal immigration, refugees, drug and weapon trafficking, terrorism and maritime piracy. In 1992, during the ASEAN post-ministerial conference, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Nakayama proposed to add a dialogue on politics and security to the agenda of senior officials. He paved the road for the creation of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as well as those of the *track two* type constituted by the Council on Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP).

Around the same time, the development of piracy – as well as terrorism – drove representatives of the Japanese Defense Agency¹⁵ to multiply contacts with their homologues in ASEAN countries. In 2000, Tokyo organized an international conference on the fight against piracy in which 10 ASEAN nations participated, and which concluded with the adoption of the document *Asia Anti-Piracy Challenges 2000*. The signatory countries committed to share information relating to acts of piracy, to reinforce existing counter-measures, to provide assistance to victims of an attack and to coordinate the activities of their coast guards, and to dedicate resources to providing specific training for personnel. In 2002, Junichiro Koizumi proposed the establishment of a cooperation agreement between the Japanese coast guards and those of ASEAN. This initiative served as the basis for the development of numerous instances of cooperation between regional navies. In April 2002, the Japanese SDF organized the first multilateral submarine rescue exercise, with the participation of Singapore and Indonesia (the latter as an observer). However, it would be the Japanese coast guards corps, civilian in nature, which would be the preferred tool of the policy of assistance of the archipelago to reinforce the capacities of Southeast Asia.¹⁶

Japanese foreign policy continues to make regional maritime security a major part of its influence diplomacy toward Southeast Asia. This strategic Japanese reinvestment via the sea continues today in the context of new tensions in the South China Sea and especially in the East Sea,¹⁷ where the Japan finds itself confronted with situations that it defines

13. Sudo Sueto, *The Fukuda doctrine and ASEAN: new dimensions in Japanese foreign policy*, ISEAS, Singapore, 1992.

14. Victor Huang, *Building maritime security in Southeast Asia: outsiders not welcome*, Naval War College, Winter 2008, p. 89-105. Tokyo's idea was to be part of the patrol organized with contributions from members in the ASEAN plus 3 format (Japan, South Korea, and China), which does not *a priori* exclude Beijing.

15. The Agency had to wait until 2007 to be raised to the level of Ministry of Defense, Bōei-shō (防衛相).

16. Yoichiro Sato, *Southeast Asian receptiveness to Japanese security cooperation*, Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, September 2007. www.Acpss.org/publications/maritime/security/cooperation/japan-SE/Asia/Sato.pdf.

17. Catharin Dalpino, "Both Push and Pull: Japan steps up in Southeast Asia," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 19/1, May 2017. www.cc.csis.org/2017/05/push-pull-japan-steps-southeast-asia/.

as “grey zones.” Employed by the Japanese Minister of Defense, the expression applies to the strategy of tensions created by systematic incursions by the Chinese coast guards, if necessary aided by fishing vessels and maritime militias,¹⁸ in the territorial waters of the Senkaku islands reclaimed by China under the name Diaoyu.¹⁹

MARITIME GOVERNANCE IN JAPANESE COLOURS: THE RECAAP SYSTEM

The magnitude of the piracy phenomenon and the dramatization of its potential links with terrorism, notably by Singapore, implies bringing a large-scale response. It also requires responding to the concerns of the international community by projecting an image of responsible governments, capable of organizing collectively and collaborating. The RECAAP accord, actively promoted by Japan and pushed forward by the Japanese ship-owners, authorizes this shift from local to regional, and even multilateral, formats. In contrast to the process of the Malacca Strait Patrol, which was relatively limited in terms of its actors and objectives, this accord, signed in 2006, offers a framework for regional cooperation between Southeast Asian States in the domain of maritime piracy all the while attracting extra-regional actors. The institutional openness of RECAAP would allowed its geographic expansion and would make Japan an instigator of one of the first multilateral Asian maritime experiences, after the admitted failure of the project to establish a regional coast guard.

RECAAP, a model of governance between regionalism and multilateralism

The accord was first signed by 8 ASEAN²⁰ in addition to 3 South Asian states (India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) and East Asia (Japan, China, South Korea). Major maritime nations then joined beginning in 2012 (Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, The United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States). As of 1 January 2019, RECAAP contains 20 States²¹ and traces the contours of a supra-regional maritime space.

As a regional cooperation accord, RECAAP centers on information exchange between states and on activities of capacity-building in terms of the fight against maritime piracy. The apparatus created nevertheless did not have any repressive capacity enabling it to conduct maritime police operations against those suspected of engaging in acts of piracy.²²

RECAAP relies on two main components. The first defines obligations of signatory States in the domain of the fight against maritime piracy, such as the obligation to cooperate, as stipulated in the Convention on the Law of the Sea. We must note that RECAAP adds to the definition of piracy, which is limited to the high seas, by including armed theft or maritime banditry. This means that signatory States are obliged to cooperate in the fight against both situations of piracy in the high seas and armed robberies against vessels, to the extent of their capacities as well as in accordance with their national legislation. The other component of RECAAP relates to the domain of cooperation between signatory States: information exchange, maritime capacity-building and collaboration with other international maritime actors such as the International Maritime Organization (OMI), the maritime industry and shipping companies.

18. Marianne Péron-Doise, “La mer de Chine du Sud, une géographie maritime à la conflictualité latente,” Research Paper No. 44, IRSEM, July 2017.

19. Céline Pajon, “Faire face aux situations de ‘zone grise’ : la stratégie japonaise en mer de l’Est,” *Revue de Défense Nationale*, Summer 2018, p. 74-78.

20. Indonesia and Malaysia, while occasionally collaborating with the Information Sharing Center have signed but not ratified RECAAP because of their opposition to all foreign intervention in the management of the Straits. Moreover, for Malaysia, there is also the fact that Kuala Lumpur has housed since 1992 the Asian antenna of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) with a regional anti-piracy center. Indonesia, for her part, was in competition with Singapore to house RECAAP, as it had proposed its installation of the Island of Java. France, while collaborating with the Information Sharing Center, has not signed RECAAP.

21. See www.recaap.org.

22. Ian Storey, “Addressing the persistent problem of piracy and sea robbery in Southeast Asia,” *Perspectives*, ISEAS, Singapore, No. 30/2016. <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/iseas/perspectives2016/30.pdf>.

A vector of intergovernmental cooperation

RECAAP's originality lies in large part in its intergovernmental identity. It is indeed one of the first Asian security agreements of its type. Its strength resides in the cooperation on information exchange and the coordination of State responses to maritime piracy. To that effect, it created the Information Sharing Center (ISC). Based in Singapore, the Center enjoys the status of an international organization and its leadership bodies are comprised of representatives and liaison officers from each RECAAP Member State. It provides an essential facilitation role between the different security forces and maritime agencies competent in the anti-piracy domain. Indeed, the latter are the theater of numerous rivalries and quarrels over precedence, notably between navies and coast guards. Furthermore, if they are encountering difficulty coordinating at the local level, they have even more difficulty coordinating and harmonizing their actions on the regional level.²³ RECAAP, while calling upon States to cooperate with each other, also makes sure to emphasize the principle of national sovereignty. It is for this reason that it does not contain a single provision in the way of establishing joint patrols or the right of pursuit, to which certain States have opposed.²⁴

As the incarnation of an inclusive regional maritime cooperation headed by Japan, RECAAP and its ISC constitute a reference model for the maritime world. The accord and its Center paved the path for the creation of the Information Fusion Center (IFC) by Singapore in 2009. This Center, which has an operational vocation, relies on the warfare capabilities of 23 countries,²⁵ the majority of which have stationed a military representative. Its objective is to maintain a common vision of the regional maritime situation via regular information exchange with its partners and, if need be, to intervene in situations of crisis. Finally, RECAAP partially inspired the anti-piracy maritime security architecture developed in East Africa, which continues to face residual Somalian piracy, with the creation in 2009 of the Djibouti Code of Conduct, under the auspices of the International Maritime Organization (OMI).²⁶

THE ROLE OF THE JAPANESE COAST GUARDS IN THE EXPANSION OF MARITIME PARTNERSHIP

From the end of the 1990s, while RECAAP was still in the first stages of development, Japan began investing in the reinforcement of agencies and administrations responsible for State activities in the waters of the major ASEAN countries. The archipelago dedicated its coast guards forces to support the fleet of regional coast guards. An important part of its aid is dedicated to development aid, in the form of loans, training and equipment transfers, including new and outdated patrol vessels. However, while it was initiated in the spirit of the fight against piracy, the nature of the maritime cooperation framework developed by Tokyo with ASEAN has changed over the course of the past ten years. It is now viewed by Japanese strategist circles as a tool to counterbalance Chinese attempts to redefine maritime borders in the region.

The increase in power of the "White hulls"²⁷

As a civilian component designed to reinforce State action at sea, the Japanese coast guards (Kaijo Hoan-Cho 海上保安庁) constitute the most active and visible relay of Japan's maritime securitization policy toward Southeast Asia. Established in 1948, this force, initially designated Japan's maritime security agency, was restructured numerous times and saw

23. These difficulties are linked to the different approaches of the actors concerned, according to whether or not they come from the navy or the coast guard. India, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam all possess coast guards corps. Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand use their navies for state action at sea.

24. Victor Huang, *Building maritime security in Southeast Asia*, op. cit.

25. <https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2016/september/2016sep27-news-releases-02341/>.

26. Interview with Japanese experts, Tokyo, November 2017. Signed in 2009 by 20 countries, the Djibouti Code of Conduct concerns the repression of piracy and armed theft in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. It is meant as a coordinated regional response to the Somalian piracy by relying on arrests and trial of pirates, the seizure of suspicious vessels), reinforcing maritime capacities of coastal States and the sharing of maritime information between all public and private actors affected by piracy.

27. Designates the civil component to the State fleet, generally the coast guards or scientific vessels, as opposed to military fleets who have a grey hull.

its role, missions, and capacities expand considerably throughout the years.²⁸ Tasked with surveillance of Japanese waters as a part of maritime police operations, it gave birth to the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force in 1954, all the while maintaining a separate identity. As a civil entity, which facilitates its missions abroad by avoiding having to ask permission from the Japanese National Diet, it has positioned itself as an essential tool for maritime cooperation of the archipelago linked to the fight against piracy with Southeast Asian countries.²⁹ In 2014, the lifting of the ban on exporting equipment and defense technologies, which had been weighing down Japan, allowed for a more military cooperation between Tokyo and its ASEAN partners to blossom.

Since 1998, Japan has supported the development of the Philippian coast guards, with the transfer of equipment to combat pollution and the establishment of a program for the transfer of equipment specialized in maritime security. After offering 10 multipurpose patrol boats financed by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) from 2016 to 2017, Tokyo endeavored to finance the construction of two patrol boats for sovereignty missions in the South China Sea, notably in response to Chinese intrusions in the disputed waters of the Scarborough archipelago. The Japanese coast guards equally conducted joint training exercises with its Indonesian homologue, the Bakorkamla, whilst Tokyo worked to construct three patrol boats for Jakarta in 2003. The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) benefitted, since its establishment in 2005, from the assistance of the Japanese coast guards in training personnel. The following year, Tokyo gifted Malaysia two patrol boats to support its efforts in the fight against piracy. This relationship continues to thrive today. The Vietnamese coast guards have also benefitted from aid and training since 2012. In 2014, it received an additional six Japanese reconditioned patrol boats. Furthermore, during his visit to Vietnam in April 2017, Shinzo Abe promised to deliver six more new units.³⁰

These multiple instances of cooperation between Japan and ASEAN countries were subject to an effort of synthetization and transparency by Tokyo with the Vientiane Vision, an official document published on the occasion of the second informal reunion of Japan and the ministers of ASEAN countries in November 2016. The document notably served the purpose of notifying Chinese critics despite the fact that, since 2014, the new Japanese legislation pertaining to the ban on the export of arms made Tokyo its direct competitor, and that China is looking to export its own defense equipment to ASEAN countries.

The construction of the Indo-Pacific concept

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's return to power in 2012, after a brief first mandate from 2006 to 2007, brought about intensified cooperation between the Japanese and Southeast Asian coast guards, due to the implicitly expanded maritime defense interests of these countries in the face of increasingly aggressive Chinese demands.³¹ In 2012, Shinzo Abe took advantage of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of relations between Tokyo and ASEAN, by visiting all of the countries in the association. He developed a narrative centered on the diplomacy of values and respect for the international order where the principle of freedom of navigation gained new resonance. Beyond Southeast Asia, Japan became closer with India and Australia in 2007 with particular emphasis placed on the construction of an arc of liberty and prosperity,³² and the much-proclaimed concern for the protection of maritime spaces extending from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. The notion of the Indo-Pacific appeared for the first time during Shinzo Abe's State visit to India in 2007,³³ a visit that was coupled with ones to Indonesia and Malaysia. While India appears reluctant to fully adopt this concept, which nonetheless makes India a central figure, Australia fully adhered to it in its White Book in 2013.³⁴ Apart

28. Government of Japan, *Japan Coast Guard: justice and humanity*, March 2018. <https://www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/e/english.pdf>. Global Security "Japan Coast Guard". <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/Japan/jcg.htm>.

29. Lindsay Black, *Japan's Maritime Security Strategy, the Japan Coast-Guard and maritime outlaws*, Palgrave, 2014.

30. Mai Nguyen, My Pham, "Japan's pledges boats to Vietnam as China dispute simmers," Reuters, 16 January 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-japan-idUSKBN150150>.

31. Prashanth Parameswaran, "Japan's ASEAN charm offensive," *The Diplomat*, 22 January 2013. <https://thediplomat.com/2013/01/japans-asean-charm-offensive/>.

32. *Japan Diplomatic Bluebook 2007: a new pillar for Japanese Diplomacy, creating an Arc of Freedom and Prosperity*. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2007/index.html>.

33. Shinzo Abe, "Confluence of the two Seas," speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India, 22 August 2007. The Japanese Prime Minister refers to the joint responsibility of both India and Japan, as maritime democracies, in securing regional sea lines of communication, *Sea-lines of Communications, SLOCS*. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

34. *Defending Australia and its National Interests*, Defence White Paper 2013, Department of Defence, Australian Government. http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/wp_2013_web.pdf. Rory Medcalf, "The Indo-Pacific Pivot," *The Indian Express*, 10 May 2013. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/the-indo-pacific-pivot/1113736/>.

from that, the two countries have both adhered to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or “Quad”), spearheaded by Japan with the support of the United States since 2007. This structure superimposes or accompanies various bilateral and trilateral dialogues, security declarations and cooperation agreements in the domain of defense, notably Australia-Japan, Japan-India, India-US, Australia-Japan-India, etc.

Japan’s progressive instrumentalization of the Asian maritime geography now centers around the theme of the defense of a “free and open” Indo-Pacific and adds to the increasingly visible presence of the Maritime Self-Defense Forces of the archipelago in the Southeast Asian waters and in the Indian Ocean.³⁵ This renewed vision of Asia tends to supplant the political/military regionalism that had existed for more than 50 years, thanks to the American initiatives centering on the concept of the Asia-Pacific. It was endorsed by the Trump administration in the national security strategy published in 2017.³⁶ The US Pacific Command, established in Hawaii in 1947, became the US Indo-Pacific Command in May 2018. While the notion of the Asian-Pacific has a strong economic identity all the while embodying political realities, notably with the APEC (Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation), the Indo-Pacific have strategic and maritime resonance. It is thus not surprising that the concept has been taken up by the two largest maritime nations in the region, Japan and the United States, as well as by its major allies.

The significance of the concept of the Indo-Pacific lies in the strategic designs that underpin it, including the masked objective of countering the expansion of the Chinese navy,³⁷ and is already the subject of a substantial body of literature.³⁸ Its institutionalization in the writings and discourses by Japanese, American, Australian, Indian and Indonesian authorities reflects the different realities according to the perspective they have of China. For the moment, these authorities can agree to accept a geographical reality built upon the principle of freedom of the movement of persons, goods and ideas between South and East Asia. One may question whether recognizing this connectivity and the willingness to solidify it may lead to a new regional dynamic that would not be the result of competing development projects.

The Indo-Japanese project on the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC),³⁹ while enhancing connectivity and the construction of infrastructure, does not have the same regional resonance nor the same scale as the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). For that matter, Delhi and Tokyo do not hesitate to denounce and actively counter the perverse effects of massive Chinese investments and the “debt trap” that is closing in on certain partners who find themselves unable to reimburse Chinese loans. The case of Sri Lanka is emblematic, as the country has had to give up Hambantota Port to Beijing for 99 years in exchange for debt cancellation.⁴⁰ After being reassured that the port would not be used for military purposes, Japan signed a maritime partnership accord with Colombo in 2017, to the benefit of the Sri Lanka coast guards.

35. Alessio Patalano, “Commitment by presence, naval diplomacy and Japanese Defense engagement in Southeast Asia,” p. 100-113 in James D. Brown and Jeff Kingston, *Japan's foreign Policy in Asia*, Taylor and Francis, 2017.

36. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, p. 45-46. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-final-12-18-2017-0905-1.pdf>.

37. Chengxin Pan, “The ‘Indo-Pacific’ and geopolitical anxieties about China’s rise in the Asian regional order,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68 (4), p. 453-469.

38. Chitrapu Uday Bhaskar, “Pacific and Indian Oceans: Relevance for the evolving power structures in Asia,” *Queries*, Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), No. 3(6), November 2011, p. 123-128. Patrick M. Cronin, “US alliances and Trump’s ‘free and open indo-Pacific’ Policy,” *Global Asia*, 21 December 2017. https://globalasia.org/v12no4/cover/us-alliances-and-trumps-free-and-open-indo-pacific-policy_patrick-m-cronin. Dossier for *East Asia Forum* “Indo-Pacific: geographic definition or strategy?,” June 2018. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/06/11/indo-pacific-geographic-definition-or-strategy/>. Axel Bercofsky (ed.), “Indo-Pacifique: toward the transformation of Asia’s geopolitics?” Dossier ISPI, Institut italien pour les Études Politiques Internationales, June 2018, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/publicazione/indo-pacific-towards-transformation-asias-geopolitics-20698>.

39. This joint initiative, announced by the Indian and Japanese Prime Ministers, Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe in May 2017 during a reunion of the African Development Bank, works to improve connectivity between the two regions through the construction of infrastructure (Quality infrastructure and institutional Connectivity). The first countries to benefit from this initiative were those with vast maritime domains and where China was the most involved: Djibouti, Kenya, South Africa and Mozambique.

40. Interview with Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, Director General of the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL), Paris, 6 March 2018.

CONCLUSION

Japan introduced the concept of RECAAP, organized it and managed it without any substantial parallel competition in terms of the development of maritime cooperation between the coast guards and their Southeast Asian homologues. Tokyo stands with Singapore as one of the main financial contributors to the organization, whose director is from the Japanese diplomatic corps. However, while carrying the RECAAP program has helped Japan's soft power,⁴¹ positioning itself as a pacifist and normative power, Prime Minister Abe continues to look to add more strategic content to its predominantly maritime partnerships that the accord engendered. Tokyo is now endeavoring to create a global maritime alliance to ensure the failure of the Chinese policy of the "*fait accompli*,"⁴² in Southeast Asia just as in the Pacific.

Alongside the Philippian coast guards, the Japanese coast guards must face the incessant incursions of Chinese fishing vessels and coast guards in their territorial waters, near the Senkaku Islands, over which Beijing contests Japanese sovereignty, which some Japanese authorities have described as a "hybrid war."⁴³ The promotion of the Japanese concept of the "free and open" Indo-Pacific now mobilizes all the resources of Japanese public diplomacy and constitutes a major effort for its civil and military forces in particular. Expanding the horizon of Tokyo's strategic maritime assets appears to be the most obvious solution to increasing Chinese power and ambitions in Asian waters⁴⁴ and to the development of the project for a maritime Silk Road. Beyond the regular presence of the Japanese coast guards in Southeast Asia, Japan regularly deploys its navy in the Indian Ocean where, thanks to the 2011 Djibouti agreement, they have logistical installations. However, these tools are limited, hence Japan's call to Asia's maritime nations including, above their American allies, India, Australia, and more recently France to rally around a catchy geopolitical concept and its insistence on freedom of navigation.

At the waterfront of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, France holds an important position in the Indo-Pacific, which was qualified as the "New World" in a recent Senate report.⁴⁵ France practices naval diplomacy and remains active in maritime politics, not only with Japan but with all major maritime nations of the region, Australia, India, Malaysia, Singapore, New-Zealand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Securing this complex geopolitical space and supporting the Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through the development of partnerships and aid for maritime capacity-building continues to be a major strategic issue for France. It can only join Japan in its vision of an Indo-Pacific region where the freedom of navigation and the fundamental dispositions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea are respected.⁴⁶ Since 2012, this position has been firmly reasserted by French Ministers of Defense who succeeded the Shangri-La annual dialogue on security.

In conclusion, we observe that above the reemergence and the appropriation of the Indo-Pacific concept, of its genesis and the diverse policy stances it entails, the Japanese approach to maritime security returns to the underlying question of the place of the sea and the oceans in international relations and cooperation. In the 21st century, oceans have become increasingly coveted spaces, subject to the development of activities, some of which are illegal, and to intensified interstate competition as regards maritime resources.

(English translation by Mickaela CHURCHILL)

41. Greg Chaikin, "Piracy in Asia: international Co-operation and Japan's role" in Derek Johnson and Mark Valencia (eds.), *Piracy Southeast Asia: status, issues, and responses*, Institute of Southeast Asian studies, 2005, p. 143-163.

42. Céline Pajon, "Le Japon d'Abe face à la Chine de Xi : de la paix froide à la guerre chaude," *Politique Étrangère*, 2014/3, p. 23-34.

43. Admiral Umio Otsuka, Director of the Collège d'état-major des forces d'autodéfense maritime, presentation at the IRSEM, 24 February 2017.

44. Michito Tsuruoka, "Japan's Indo-Pacific engagement: the rationale and challenges," ISPI, Institut italien pour les Études Politiques Internationales, 4 June 2018. <https://ispionline.it/en/publicazione/japan-indo-pacific-engagement-rationale-and-challenges-2069/>.

45. Senate Parliamentary Report, *Quelle place pour la France dans le Nouveau Monde ?*, December 2016. http://www.senat.fr/rap/r16-222_mono.html.

46. Ministry for the Armed Forces, *La France et la sécurité en Indo-Pacifique*, 2018. <https://www.la France et la securite en Indo-pacifique -2018.pdf>.

Marianne Péron-Doise is a researcher on North Asia (the Korean Peninsula, Japan), maritime strategy and security at the IRSEM. Previously a marine officer, she studied at the Aix-en-Provence Institute for Political Studies and also holds a degree in Historical Studies. Her research centers on maritime regionalization and multilateralism in the major oceanic theaters (East Asia, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Horn of Africa), the strategic dynamics of the Korean Peninsula and Japanese foreign and security policy. She held various different positions of authority relating to issues of security in the Asia-Pacific at the Ministry of Defense, including Head of Office for the “Asia Pacific” of the Strategic Affairs Delegation from 2007 to 2011. She was also a political advisor with the NATO Maritime Command in Northwood, United-Kingdom, before joining the IRSEM.

Contact: marianne.peron-doise@irsem.fr