

Abe's Coast Guard Diplomacy in Southeast Asia

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Since 1969 Japan has relied on Japan Coast Guard in ensuring that its sea trade route in Southeast Asia is safe, clean, and protected. Unlike other developed countries, Japan's pacifist constitution and imperialist legacy made it difficult for Tokyo in employing Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) to perform such roles in the region. As a result, Japan has innovatively formulated "coast guard diplomacy" in three phases: maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement. However, the security landscape in the region has changed due to the rise of China. Beijing had been very assertive in justifying its territorial claims in the South China Sea. This paper argues that such development compelled Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to once again relied on the established coast guard diplomacy, but he defined its new phase, the maritime security. Accordingly, there are four salient actions that set the maritime security phase of JCG as initiated by Abe: JCG's institutional reforms; the utilization of official development assistance (ODA) to support the coast guard organizations in Southeast Asia; the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) funded Maritime Safety and Security Policy Program (MSP) for coast guard officers in Asian countries ; and the utilization of unilateral approach in strategizing Abe's maritime security phase of coast guard diplomacy.



Introduction

For a resource-scarce country that is dependent on sea not just for its economic growth but even for its survival, the protection of its trade routes has always been its priority. However, unlike other highly developed states which can rely anytime on its navy, Japan has to be innovative in ensuring that its sea trade routes are safe, clean, and secure. Japan's pacifist constitution coupled with the wary Japanese public opinion are the reasons why nobody among its leaders in post second world war had been fundamentally dependent on Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) for protection of its trade, despite its potent capabilities. Moreover, Japan's imperialist past made it as well more complicated to deal with the sovereign sensitive Southeast Asian countries, whose maritime domains serve as the nautical highway for its commerce and energy requirements. Nonetheless, Japan was able to safeguard its sea trade routes creatively, and convincingly establish strong cooperation with the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam since the 1960s.

In almost fifty years, Japan has relied on Japan Coast Guard (JCG) to protect its trade routes by basically performing its functions on maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement. It is on these three JCG functions that Japan has anchored its "coast guard diplomacy," meaning that they have used JCG to establish maritime cooperation to protect Japan's sea trade routes, through maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement. Conversely, it is important to stress that Japan's "coast guard diplomacy" became successful in stimulating cooperation with these Southeast Asian countries since then and now because such approaches did not just serve the interests of Japan, but it benefits the region as well.

The employment of JCG to spearhead the maritime diplomacy of Japan to ensure the protection of the sea trade routes was not a clear-cut plan when it was initially tapped in the beginning. Nonetheless, the initiated and established cooperation of Japan with these countries is continuously evolving and has always been demarcated by various factors domestically and internationally. JCG's initial role started by improving the safety of navigation of the Strait of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS), since it was the main concern in the 1960s. Likewise, the grounding of Showa Maru in the SOMS in 1975 and the alarming oil spill incidents in the different parts of the globe added marine environmental protection as another critical function that needs to be given importance. Moreover, the piracy incidents and armed robbery at sea in the 1990s have also triggered Tokyo to shift JCG's focus to maritime law enforcement. Despite these evolving roles that were developed throughout the years, JCG is still performing these three roles simultaneously depending on a specific scenario.

Moreover, the monumental success of JCG in engaging Southeast Asian countries with these evolving roles is their changed perception that Japan's imperialist past is not linked to its current interest in establishing a maritime order. Japan was not just triumphant in protecting their trade; it has also been victorious in establishing the trust and cooperation of Southeast Asian countries to the point that it has influenced these countries in setting a new norm of establishing their respective coast guard organizations. For more than two decades, coast guard organizations in Southeast Asia have been emerging particularly in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. These organizations are independent from the navy and are considered to be civilian agencies since they are not under the supervision of the military. Nevertheless, it has to be emphasized that these individual states have their motivations and rational choices to build their coast guard, which are not just absolutely subservient to the interest of Japan.

However, since the return of Shinzo Abe as Prime Minister in the time of China's continuous rising and indisputable assertiveness, the fourth phase for "coast guard diplomacy" is being uncovered — maritime security phase. Learning from his predecessors and acting in line with Japan's pacifist constitution, Abe has recognized that utilization of gray ships cannot be the best course of action in responding to the threats within its maritime jurisdiction and along sea trade routes. The established coast guard cooperation of Japan in the region, which was laid down before he even became the prime minister in the past decades, became the critical foundation of Abe's maritime diplomacy — that is, using the combined approaches of maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement to advance Japan's interests to maintain a rules-based maritime order.

Maritime security, though such concept remains vague, refers in this article to the approach of Japan for the sea trade routes to be safe, clean and protected under the rule of law, without prejudice to the domestic laws of other states; and not only limited to non-traditional security threats. To sum it up, it integrates the first three phases of Japan's coast guard diplomacy for positive cooperation, and it is also being used to respond to other state actors that may disrupt maritime order in accordance with the rule of law without elevating it to armed aggression.

Though Shinzo Abe followed the "coast guard diplomacy" template of his predecessors, he made some tweaks and changes to ensure that JCG will still address the current challenges and perceived threats to Japan's sea trade routes. There are four striking actions that defined the maritime security phase of JCG as initiated by Abe: JCG's institutional reforms; the utilization of official development assistance (ODA) to support coast guard organizations in Southeast Asia; Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)-sponsored education and training; and the utilization of minilateral approach to strategize Abe's maritime security phase of coast guard diplomacy.

Japan's Sea Trade Routes and Three Phases of Coast Guard Diplomacy

The sea trade routes of Japan can be divided into three: the first one is “southwest stream” which traverses Southeast Asia to reach Europe and the Middle East, via the Indian Ocean; the second route is the “southern stream” which crosses eastern seaboard of the Philippines and Indonesia, to be connected to Australia and Southern Pacific; and the third one is the “Great Circle” route that connects Japan to America via the Pacific Ocean.¹ Although all of these trade routes are important, more value has to be given to the “southwest stream” since this is the shortest and cheapest shipping route of its energy requirement. Conspicuously, this route falls within the maritime jurisdiction of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam as shown in Figure 1.

The first crucial maritime cooperation that Japan started is maritime safety. According to Eiichi Kato, the Executive Director of Malacca Strait Council, Japan was the predominant user of the SOMS in the early 1960s, and there were many maritime incidents when passing through the said strait.² The Japanese shipowners decided to establish the Malacca Strait Council (MSC) in 1969 to spearhead the improvement of navigational safety. Such strategy of the Japanese government to utilize the ship owners as private entities can be understood since it is apprehensive of the adverse reaction of those littoral states regarding Japan's intervention in the strait during that time.³ The MSC, with the technical support of the Japan Maritime Safety Agency (name of JCG then) and cooperation of the littoral states, conducted hydrographic surveys to map the SOMS, Lombok and Makassar Straits.⁴

The next phase of cooperation that Japan established is the protection of the marine environment particularly in combatting oil spill. The grounding of Japanese tanker Showa Maru in 1975 inside the SOMS, which spilled almost 4,500 tons of crude oil that reached the shorelines of Singapore, set another phase for Japan's maritime cooperation.⁵ This incident beckoned the JCG's phase for marine environmental protection. JCG experts who have competencies in maritime search and rescue, maritime disaster prevention and oil spill prevention had started to be deployed in Southeast Asian countries as technical advisers and trainers.⁶

After the Cold War, the piracy and armed robbery in the SOMS triggered the maritime law enforcement phase of JCG. In 1991, the Southeast Asian region became the most piracy-prone region in the world with a total reported of 501 attacks specifically in the Malacca Strait.⁷ The piracy incidents involving the Japanese freighter MV Tenyu in 1998 and Japanese cargo ship MV Alondra Rainbow in 1999 prompted Japan to initiate counter-piracy cooperation in the SOMS.⁸ This trend has reconfigured the approach of Japan. Instead of just financing projects with technical experts, it helped the littoral states to build a coast guard of their own that would be JCG's counterpart. In this set-up, the maritime law enforcement patrols and pirate apprehensions will be executed by their own coast guards; thus, Japan will not be criticized for intruding the sovereign waters of other countries.

As discussed, even before the return of Abe in 2012, JCG has already been deeply embedded with the maritime cooperation of Japan in these four countries.



Figure 1. Japan's Sea Trade Routes
Source: Illustration made by the author

1 - Graham, E. (2005). Japan's Sea Lane Security: A Matter of Life and Death? Routledge.

2 - Interview with Mr. Eiichi Kato and Mr. Seiji Sasaki of the Malacca Strait Council on July 5, 2018

3 - Heng, Y. K. (2018). Smart power and Japan's trouble-shooting approach to Southeast Asia. *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Foreign Policy*.

4 - Vertzberger, Yaacov, *The Malacca-Singapore Straits: of South-East Asia*, London, Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1982.

5 - "Singapore Menaced By a Vast Oil Slick As Tanker Groups" *New York Times* article accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/01/07/archives/singapore-menaced-by-a-vast-oil-slick-as-tanker-grounds.html>

6 - Maekawa, M., Terashima, H., & Higuchi, E. (2018). Sustainable ocean management and the role of the Japan Coast Guard. *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Foreign Policy*.

7 - Grundy-Warr, C. (1998). Grey-Area Phenomena in Southeast Asia: Piracy, Drug Trafficking and Political Terrorism. *Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defense*, No. 123. 8

8 - Kotani, T. "Maintaining Good Order at Sea in Asia: Opportunities and Challenges," *EU Asia Dialogue Research Paper* accessed at http://www.eu-asia.eu/index.php?eID=tx_nawsecured1&u=0&file=fileadmin/KAS_Files/documents/Paper_Kotani.pdf&t=1519064574&hash=d4b14d05bc857a926d24a9294cebae0923268d0a



Source: Japan Coast Guard

The training that JCG conducted, which the Japanese government sponsored, focuses on the three areas: maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement. These courses were tailored to address the need of Japan during these periods. Figure 2 illustrates the categories of the training in which Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam participated from 1971 until 2012. The graph shows that JCG since 1971 has supported these Southeast Asian countries by providing them training related to maritime safety to ensure that the sea trade route is safe and navigable.

Moreover, the marine environmental protection training started in the 1980s to develop the capacity of these countries to combat oil spill, which is the primary risk that Japan has to address since its oil tankers are passing through the waters of Southeast Asia. Lastly, maritime law enforcement training is Japan's response to counter the alarming number of piracy incidents and armed robbery at sea. The training courses show that Japan employed JCG in capacity building measures aimed at these countries for its sea trade routes to be safe, clean, and protected.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the regional security landscape during the assumption of Abe is different from what it was in the previous decades. China has already overtaken Japan's economy and had been more assertive in pushing for its historical nine-dash line claim in the South China Sea. Moreover, Japan and China had a territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which was exacerbated by the Democratic Party of Japan's decision to nationalize the said islands in September 2012.⁹ With these developments, Japan requires a new brand of leadership who will be proactive in ensuring that the maritime order that had long been established will be maintained, through the combined approaches of the previous administrations coupled to a new preemptive approach.

9 - Green, M., Hicks, K., Cooper, Z., Schaus, J., & Douglas, J. (2017). *Countering coercion in maritime Asia: The theory and practice of gray zone deterrence*. Rowman & Littlefield.



JCG's Institutional Reforms

Though it can never be denied that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has also given importance to JCG as a vital agency during his incumbency, especially in addressing the piracy and armed robbery issue in Malacca Strait, Abe's institutional reforms of JCG overshadows the transformations that the former carried out. The reforms that Abe executed have entirely revolutionized the JCG's customary set-up since its inception, and the support that he has given to JCG is beyond comparison to any Japanese Prime Minister.

When the Japan Maritime Safety Agency (JMSA) was established in 1948 some of its members came from the abolished Japanese Imperial Navy;¹⁰ thus, the occupying Allied Forces decided that its Commandant will not be coming from its officer corps. Since then, the JCG Commandants who have been appointed by the Prime Ministers are civilians from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism (MLIT). However, on Abe's first year, the JCG Commandant came from the JMSA's officer corps for the first time. Since 2013, Abe kept on appointing graduates of the Japan Coast Guard Academy as Commandant. This institutional reform has spurred the morale of the JCG, which exuberantly accepted such change.

Relatedly, the clear evidence of how Abe valued JCG is shown by how much money he poured into it for its annual budget. Before he returned to power in 2012, JCG's budget had been deteriorating for the past years. However, it was during his time that the JCG was given a substantial budget increase annually, with the primary objective of developing its capability specifically in maritime domain awareness and maritime patrols. Figure 3 shows that since 2014, JCG budget has been steadily increasing every year. Though it is noticeable that 2013 budget was the lowest since 2007, it is essential to consider that such budget preparation was carried out by his predecessor.

10 - Auer, J. E. (1973). *The postwar rearmament of Japanese maritime forces, 1945-71* (Vol. 3). Irvington Pub.

Figure 3. JCG's Annual Budget from 2007 until 2019



Source: Japan Coast Guard

The biggest jump of the budget started in 2017, which was the result of the first “Ministerial Council on the Strengthening of the Maritime Security System” in 2016.¹¹ This was the first ever cabinet-level meeting where the importance of JCG was discussed, and the need to increase its budget to support its role in maritime security was highlighted. Abe specified the vital role of JCG in patrolling the Senkaku Islands which, he claims, are being intruded by Chinese government ships. It is through this discourse that he emphasized the need for JCG to increase its budget for additional patrol vessels and human resources. In the past two years every December, this ministerial council had been an annual event for Abe to define his policy direction to strengthen the maritime security system of Japan through JCG.



Japan's Support to Southeast Asian Coast Guards

While it is true that the Japanese government had been supporting the development of coast guards in Southeast Asia since the early 2000s, it is evident that it was during the tenure of Abe that a large amount of Japan's overseas development assistance (ODA) had been used to strengthen the capacity of these organizations. Ostensibly, Abe is strategically utilizing Japan's ODA to improve and strengthen the capacity of these Southeast Asian coast guards — mainly by giving them patrol ships that could support the region's interests in maritime security.¹²

In Southeast Asia, Abe's efforts have focused specifically on the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Vietnam Coast

11 - The Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. Ministerial Council on the Strengthening of the Maritime Security System accessed at https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/actions/201612/21article4.html

12 - Yamamoto, R. (2016). The securitization of Japan's ODA: New strategies in changing regional and domestic contexts. In *Japanese Development Cooperation* (pp. 88-105). Routledge.

Guard (VCG), Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency (Badan Keamanan Laut, BAKAMLA), and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA). It is worth mentioning that the countries of these organizations are located along Japan's major sea trade route, along which its imports of energy resources and raw materials pass. Likewise, all of these countries have a territorial dispute with China in the South China Sea, except for Indonesia – and even Jakarta has concerns about Chinese encroachment on its claimed exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

However, by analyzing the JICA projects related to these four organizations during the time of Abe, it could be inferred that most of it was focused on capacity building for PCG and VCG. Table 1 shows that the first JICA projects related to the transfer of vessels were signed for the Philippines and Vietnam and took place in 2013 and 2014 respectively. It is worth noting that in the case of the Philippines, the signing of the loan agreement for the ten 44-meter Multi-Role Response Vessels (MRRV) took place a year after the Scarborough Shoal incident happened in 2012. While for Vietnam, the commitment of Abe to provide Vietnam with six used JCG vessels also came about after the 2014 China-Vietnam oil rig crisis. Though Japan and the receiving countries do not postulate that these projects are related to the territorial dispute in the South China Sea, Abe had always given credence to the importance of coast guard capability building in warranting a rules-based maritime order.

While it can be argued that these incidents compelled the Philippines and Vietnam to request Japan for ODA loans for vessel procurement, it is worth noting that as early as 2002, when President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo visited Tokyo, she emphasized the importance of securing the sea-lanes against terrorism and asked whether Japan could provide multi-role vessels for PCG.¹³ Even if Koizumi positively responded by subscribing that the cooperation between JCG and

13 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan-Philippines Summit Meeting (Outline). Accessed at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/philippine/pv0212/summit.html>

COUNTRY	JICA PROJECTS		AMOUNT	FISCAL YEAR
Philippines (PCG)	Maritime Safety Capability Improvement Project for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) <i>(Completed)</i>	Ten (10) 44-meter MRRV	USD 168.2 million (Loan)	2013
	Maritime Safety Capability Improvement Project for the Philippine Coast Guard (Phase II) <i>(On-going)</i>	Two (2) 94-meter OPV	USD 147.8 million (Loan)	2016
	Economic and Social Development Programme <i>(On-going)</i>	-Thirteen (13) 7 to 15-meter High-Speed Boats -Eleven (11) radar stations	USD 5.4 million (Grant)	2016
Vietnam (VCG)	Non-Project Grant Aid <i>(Completed)</i>	Six (6) used vessels and equipment related to maritime safety	USD 4.5 million (Grant)	2014
	Economic and Social Development Programme <i>(Completed)</i>	One (1) used vessel and equipment related to maritime safety	USD 1.8 million (Grant)	2016
	Maritime Security and Safety Capacity Improvement <i>(On-going)</i>	Six (6) patrol vessels for VCG	USD 345.6 million (Loan)	2017

Table 1. Abe's Approved JICA Projects for PCG and VCG - Source: JICA and MOFA websites

PCG must be strengthened, Japan never provided the Philippines with any vessels for PCG during his time. Whereas for Vietnam, during the visit of Foreign Minister Koichiro Gemba in 2012, it was also mentioned that they wanted Japan to provide patrol vessels for their Marine Police as well. These previous requests prove that the procurement of patrol vessels had been a long-standing bid but was not implemented before Abe's return.

Notably, even if Japan had been supportive of the capacity building of MMEA since its inception in 2005, it was only in 2016 when former Prime Minister Najib Razak met Abe in Tokyo that the MMEA's was given two JCG used offshore patrol vessels.¹⁴ Furthermore, the bilateral summit meetings between Malaysia and Japan since Abe's return do not pass without highlighting his commitment to assist the development of MMEA not just in the aspect of maritime safety but especially in its role to achieve a free, open and stable sea.

For Indonesia, though Japan had been actively engaging this archipelago since its earliest maritime cooperation, the establishment of a coast guard agency in Indonesia had just started to take off in 2014 when President Joko Widodo formed a new Bakamla¹⁵ under the Coordinating Ministry of Political, Security and Legal Affairs, to replace Bakorkamla. Abe pledged in 2017 during a sideline meeting with Joko Widodo during the ASEAN Summit in Manila that Japan will help with the capacity building of Bakamla.¹⁶

Though the grants and technical cooperation projects of Japan for capacity building measures are supervised and facilitated by JICA, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is essential to highlight that JCG officers are also deployed in these four countries as coast guard attachés. Before Abe's return, the only coast guard attaché with a diplomat position equivalent

14 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Exchange of Notes for the grant of patrol vessels and for the Grant Aid to Malaysia. Accessed at https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001355.html

15 - Badan Keamanan Laut Republik Indonesia or Indonesian Maritime Security Agency.

16 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan-Indonesia Summit Meeting. Accessed at https://www.mofa.go.jp/sa/sea2/id/page3e_000782.html

to First Secretary could only be found in Malaysia. However, in 2015 the First Secretary position was also given to the coast guard attachés in the Philippines and Vietnam. Surprisingly, it was only in 2018 that the JCG deployed a coast guard attaché in Indonesia. These JCG attachés act as a conduit between these coast guard organizations regarding matters that concern not just the projects they intend to request from Japan but also to serve as an intermediary for JCG on issues that are related to training and JCG ship visits.

Additionally, the strategic partnership of Japan with Indonesia and Vietnam was signed by Abe during his first term in 2006. In the case of Malaysia, it was signed in 2015, during the visit of Prime Minister Najib in Tokyo. For the Philippines, such agreement was forged in 2011 between President Aquino and Prime Minister Noda.¹⁷ These agreements have been used by Abe to have a head start in its diplomatic ties with these four countries. Accordingly, by analyzing the recently issued statements or joint declaration to strengthen these strategic partnerships, it can be noticed that the role of 'coast guard organizations' is now evidently being stated, in line with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

This development can be seen in Japan's signed strategic partnership with Malaysia, in which MMEA is mentioned as the agency whose capacity-building will be supported by Japan to achieve a free, open and stable sea.¹⁸ Similarly, President Aquino during his state visit in Japan in 2015 also stated that in order to maintain open and stable seas the PCG should be developed.¹⁹ Such utilization of coast guard was also emphasized

17 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan-Philippines Joint Statement on the Comprehensive Promotion of the «Strategic Partnership» between Neighboring Countries Connected by Special Bonds of Friendship. Accessed at https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/noda/joint_statement110927.html

18 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan-Malaysia Joint Statement on Strategic Partnership. Accessed at https://www.mofa.go.jp/sa/sea2/my/page3e_000342.html

19 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan-Philippines Joint Declaration A Strengthened Strategic Partnership for Advancing the Shared Principles and Goals of Peace, Security, and Growth in the Region and Beyond. Accessed at https://www.mofa.go.jp/sa/sea2/ph/page4e_000280.html

during the Japan-Philippine Summit Meeting between Abe and Duterte, where the JCG was cited as instrumental in developing maritime domain awareness of the Philippines.²⁰ In the case of Vietnam, the issued joint statement of Abe and Prime Minister Nguyen in 2017 to deepen the extensive strategic partnership highlighted the need to strengthen the maritime security and safety cooperation through information exchange between VCG and JCG.²¹ Though Bakamla or JCG is not explicitly mentioned in the recent Japan-Indonesia joint statement to strengthen strategic partnership of 2017, Joko Widodo and Abe both stressed the need to boost the maritime security and safety through cooperation as well.²²

Relatedly, the recognition of coast guard organizations as essential institutions in Abe's coast guard diplomacy paved the way for the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation between JCG and VCG in 2015 and with PCG in 2017. For VCG and JCG the objective of such memorandum is to enhance cooperation in maritime safety and security, in particular search-and-rescue and to deal with non-traditional security threats such as piracy and smuggling. While for the Philippines, the objective of this Memorandum is to strengthen cooperation in human resource development, information sharing, joint exercises, and capacity building measures. Though MMEA has not yet penned the same arrangement with JCG, the Malaysian government has an existing agreement with JICA to make their training center as the educational hub for maritime safety and security in the region.²³ In the case of Indonesia, it was reported by the Indonesian media that the draft of the memorandum is already being discussed between the JCG and Bakamla officials and it is targeted that this will be signed this year when President Joko Widodo meets Abe in Tokyo.²⁴ Further, Indonesia also signed the basic framework for JICA/Japan Coast Guard-BAKAMLA cooperation in October 2017.

Notably, it has been evident that the coast guard exercises between JCG and these organizations since 2015 had been more recurrent. Though these bilateral training had been obscured in the guise of maritime law enforcement, these types of cooperation show the deepening of cooperation and the changing of perception of these countries towards Japan as a partner to address non-traditional security threats. The ODA that Japan spent for capacity building of these coast guard organizations and contracted agreements

20 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2017 Japan-Philippines Summit Meeting. Accessed at https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea2/ph/page3e_000770.html

21 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Joint Statement on Deepening the Japan-Vietnam Extensive Strategic Partnership. Accessed at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000262573.pdf>

22 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan-Indonesia Joint Statement on Strengthening Strategic Partnership. Accessed at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000218457.pdf>

23 - Japan International Cooperation Agency. JICA's cooperation with Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA). Accessed at <https://www.jica.go.jp/malaysia/english/office/topics/181220.html>

24 - Penanegeri Menulis Tanpa Henti, "Bakamla RI – Japan Coast Guard Tingkatkan Kerja Sama Bilateral Keamanan Maritim." Accessed at https://penanegeri.com/bakamla-ri-japan-coast-guard-tingkatkan-kerja-sama-bilateral-keamanan-maritim/39741/?fbclid=IwAR0IbvQJhxAmv5U_HzBmCCKrRbIK83GKh1W305Y46c5_jbbVYt3ISr_JUdA

strengthened the trust and confidence of these countries towards Tokyo's objective of a rules-based maritime order.



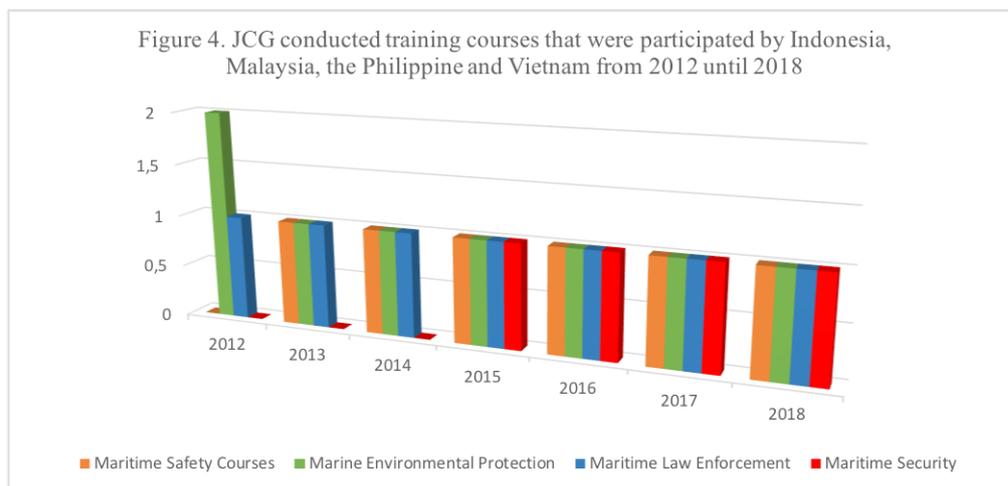
JICA Funded Maritime Security and Security Policy Program

Furthermore, JICA's projects are not just limited to providing hardware for these coast guard organizations. As shown above, JICA has been conducting training related to coast guard functions on maritime safety, marine environmental protection and maritime law enforcement since the seventies. It is worth noting that none among these courses before 2015 has ever included the phrase "maritime security" as part of the English title. Interestingly, it was assumed that Japanese vocabulary does not distinguish between safety and security since these words are both translated into "安全" or "anzen."²⁵ Such presumption was perhaps derived from the Japanese translation of the 1951 US-Japan Security Treaty, that is «日本国とアメリカ合衆国との間の安全保障条約» or "Nipponkoku to Amerikagasshūkoku to no aida no anzen hoshōjōyaku" where it used "anzen." However, it is worth pondering that the Japanese word "保安" or "hoan" means security.²⁶ "Hoan" is also the word used in naming JCG in 1948, that is "海上保安庁" or "Kaijō Hoan-chō," though the English translation that was used is Maritime Safety Agency (MSA). Hence, the word "security" can be found in the Japanese vocabulary and Tokyo's intention to use it or not is a prerogative that it has been carefully considering.

Even if Japanese semantics may be unclear to translate "security", it is still critical to mention that such English word was never used in any of the JICA-sponsored JCG training before 2015. This year, JCG, with the support of JICA and a public policy school in Tokyo, the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), launched a master's degree course designed for coast guard officers in Southeast Asia. The name of the program is the Maritime Safety and Security Policy Program (MSP). This is the first time that JICA and JCG ever used the two words "safety" and "security" separately to emphasize the difference between the two. This course is administered jointly by GRIPS and JCG, and is fully funded by JICA. Figure 4 shows that when the MSP started in 2015, the courses that were conducted by JCG for the four countries are now evenly distributed to four clusters of coast guard functions. Unlike in the previous years, the courses are most of the time concentrated only in one particular field.

25 - Bradford, J. F. (2018). Understanding fifty years of Japanese maritime security capacity building activities in Southeast Asia. National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS).

26 - Interview with Professor Junji Okozuno of Japan Coast Guard Academy on February 2019



Source: Japan Coast Guard

This paper contends that this program can be categorized as a maritime security course, not because of its title but because of its curriculum. It is interesting to note that the academic courses that are taken at GRIPS are: International Relations, International Security Studies, International Law, International Relations in East Asia, and International Law of the Sea, while the required courses that JCGA will teach are: Search and Rescue, Salvage and Maritime Disaster Prevention, and Maritime Law Enforcement Police Policy. It is evident that this master's program intends to educate coast guard officers to understand how coast guard, as a different institution compared with the navy, has to fulfill a significant role in maintaining a maritime order guided by international law. Furthermore, it also intends to establish uniform doctrines and procedures related to coast guard operations among participating countries.

The total number of students per year is only ten, while two slots are reserved for prospective JCG students. The first batch of students was composed of two coast guard officers each coming from the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Japan. This program is not just offered to the coast guard organizations that had a long history of cooperation with JCG, but to the countries that fall within its sea trade routes. Others also argued that the countries who were selected in this program are the countries which have a territorial

row with China. However, such argument may not be plausible since Brunei was not invited to this program and that Indonesia is not a claimant of the South China Sea territorial dispute. The protection of sea trade routes theory is supported by the fact that invited students are now extended to coast guard organizations in the Indian Ocean such as Sri Lanka Coast Guard and Indian Coast Guard. On the other hand, it is puzzling why a member of Taiwan Coast Guard was allowed to take part in the program as an observer for six months, considering that China Coast Guard and Korea Coast Guard have never been part of this program ever since.

Despite such complication, it is clear that Japan would like to educate and indoctrinate the future officers of the coast guard organizations that fall within its sea trade routes regarding the importance of the rule of law and other coast guard functions that require cooperation like sea search and rescue, pollution prevention, maritime safety, and maritime law enforcement. Japan's intention is not only to set the doctrines of coast guard operations in the region, but also to build a strong human network among the future leaders of these organizations. It is exciting that despite the tight schedule of Abe he always finds time to meet the alumni and current students of MSP every year. Moreover, during the said meeting, Abe always emphasizes the importance of the human network created by MSP and the students' critical role to protect a free and open maritime order governed by

Countries	First Batch (2015-2016)	Second Batch (2016-2017)	Third Batch (2017-2018)	Fourth Batch (2018-2019)	Total
Japan	2	1	2	2	7
Indonesia	2	1			3
Malaysia	2	2	3	2	9
Philippines	2	2	1	1	6
Vietnam	2			1	3
Sri Lanka			1	2	3
India				1	1
Taiwan*				1	1
TOTAL	10	6	7	10	33

Table 2. Nationality of Coast Guard Officers who participated the MSP Program
Source: National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies Student Directory

the rule of law. Since the alumni event became a vital engagement of JCG with Abe, the JCG allocates its budget to support the annual event without the funding of JICA or the Nippon Foundation.

Abe has been using education and training as an approach to instill the coast guard officers of Southeast Asia with the idea that the maritime order he is advocating is in line with the rule of law. That encourages these coast guard officers to seek cooperation to counter the states or nonstate actors that choose to undermine the maritime order. This is a long-term planned investment, that seeks to see the coast guard officers educated and trained in Japan take a leading role in defining their countries' respective maritime strategies, which would be in line with Tokyo's interests and for the benefit of the region. This method of indoctrinating and framing the mindset of coast guard officers in Southeast Asia supports the foundation of the maritime security phase of Abe as a long-term goal.



Abe's Minilateral Approach in Pushing for JCG's Maritime Security Phase

Throughout the years, Japan has become successful in employing minilateralism as an approach to get things done to protect its sea trade route in the Southeast Asian region. The ASEAN way, which requires consensus as a principle of collective decision-making, would not just delay the action that Japan needed, but would undoubtedly thwart it. The first three phases of Japan's coast guard diplomacy had been successful because it targeted only the countries that fall within its sea trade routes. The bilateral collaboration of Japan with Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam to ensure that their seas are safe, clean, and protected had been successful since it did not require affirmation from the entire region. Though Japan had difficulty to receive the nod of Malaysia and Indonesia to establish the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), this particular endeavor shows how Japan employed minilateralism to proceed with its maritime law enforcement phase by consolidating supporting states for this new institution.

The first two phases of Japan's coast guard diplomacy had usurped the issue of sovereign sensitivity. As decades passed, the maritime safety and oil spill prevention had been recognized not just by these four states but by the Southeast Asian region as areas that need cooperation since it benefits everyone. In the case of maritime law enforcement, though sovereign sensitivity at first impeded cooperation, little by little the region has also accepted that non-traditional security threats such as piracy and armed robbery can be adequately addressed through a regional approach. Even if the coastal states guard and police their respective maritime zones, Japan played an essential role in training their respective coast guards.

Nonetheless, the adoption of Abe's fourth phase of coast guard diplomacy is not as easy as the first two phases and is more intricate than maritime law enforcement. This is because Southeast Asian countries carefully evaluate their political and security distance from regional powers, including Japan and China, to avoid being entangled into great power politics.²⁷ This has been proven when Cambodia blocked any attempts to include the South China Sea dispute in the closing statement of ASEAN in 2012 and 2016.²⁸ Thus, Abe's maritime security schema would assuredly be challenging to sell to ASEAN if Tokyo were to deal with it multilaterally. Realizing such scenario and learning from the previous phases, Abe has once again used minilateralism to engage only the countries that fall within its sea trade routes as well as the countries that have issues with the creeping nine-dash line claim of Beijing.

Although the Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM), which Japan initiated in 2004, is functional as a multilateral institution with a growing number of memberships, its four pillars only support search and rescue, environmental protection, preventing and controlling unlawful acts at sea and capacity building.²⁹ The issue on how to react on an assertive state actor in a territorial sea row could not be discussed in this forum. The HACGAM is merely an institutional extension of the three phases of Japan's coast guard diplomacy.

Recognizing that no existing institutions can advance and support Abe's maritime security phase, he then hinged on the five-decade maritime cooperation with the four countries that fall within its sea trade route. As discussed, Abe used ODA for capacity building of the coast guard of these four countries. Such gesture tightened the disposition of these countries to support the vision of Abe of a rules-based maritime order. Likewise, it is also easier for Abe to gain their support because the extension of Japan's capability building measures benefits their interests as well. The education, training, and vessels that they received from Japan served their interest in responding to the maritime encroachment of China.

Though these are inferior and smaller white vessels compared to China's superiority, it allows them to challenge the latter's claim while at the same time clinging on to their entitlement guided by international law. The utilization of coast guard ships in maritime security concerns for these four countries is in line with their intention to not provoke China. They no longer want to repeat what had happened in 2012 during the Scarborough shoal standoff, where the economic relations between China and the Philippines had been adversely affected. Economic relations with China are

27 - Koga, K. (2018). Redirecting Strategic Focus in the Age of the Indo-Pacific. *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, 20(1).

28 - Reuters. ASEAN deadlocked on South China Sea, Cambodia blocks statement. Accessed at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-ruling-asean/asean-deadlocked-on-south-china-sea-cambodia-blocks-statement-idUSKCN1050F6>

29 - The Nippon Foundation. The 10th Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting. Accessed at <https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/en/who/message/speeches/2014/12928.html>

an immense factor to explain why these countries would rather use white ships to patrol these contested waters instead of gray ones. Hence, the utilization of much more inferior coast guard vessels is a hedging strategy that President Rodrigo Duterte and the Socialist Party of Vietnam could master.

Moreover, international law expert notes that claimant states should not be provoked to use aggressive actions against Chinese vessels to avoid triggering Beijing's strategy to justify its standby military action. Related to this, none of the Southeast Asian claimants would want to increase the tension in the South China Sea. Even Prime Minister Mahathir supports the idea that the navy ships should no longer be used to patrol the contested area since this could lead to armed conflict if there would be mistakes.

Such line of reasoning explains why these four countries "minilaterally" supported Abe's push for coast guard diplomacy in the context of maritime security. Accordingly, Japan also shares the same motivation, since Abe recognizes that the best strategy to respond to an assertive state actor that impinges maritime jurisdiction is not gray ships. This is not because of a rational understanding of what could have happened but primarily because its pacifist constitution does not allow it. The secondary reason is that Tokyo's imperialist past certainly taught Abe the lesson that the disruption of the sea trade routes of Japan in the eventuality of a war could lead to its defeat even before it has started. It is for these reasons that Abe has been employing coast guard diplomacy for the countries that fall within its sea trade routes. These inferior coast guard vessels are enough to ease the tension and will not eventually lead to destructive conflict. It is in this context that Japan has been educating the coast guard officers to understand the importance of the rule of law and diplomatic means to ascertain that the seas are safe, clean, secure and protected.



Policy Implications

1. Japan's coast guard diplomacy is the best approach to address non-traditional security threats in the porous maritime areas of Southeast Asia. It is crucial to assert that since this approach does not involve a military outfit, countries in the region can resolve its sovereign sensitivities. The coast guard identity that Japan has been espousing for the past decades can serve as the best avenue for cooperation because the booming economy of the region requires the same thing that Tokyo has been protecting, that is a safe, clean, secure, and peaceful sea. With this as an objective of each state, regional cooperation through coast guard diplomacy will undoubtedly be improved. The level of trust among states will be mutually amplified since the coast guard agencies will serve as a medium for their cooperation since they all share the same interest and have the commonality of mandates. Relatedly, the

non-provocative appearance of its white ships can prevent the tension among neighboring states as they patrol waters that are contested in the South China Sea. Furthermore, the cost of constructing white ships and maintaining its fleet is relatively cheaper than the warships; and when it comes to utilization, it can be argued that the former has optimal usage.

2. The discourse that coast guard development is a gray zone tactic being employed by states to patrol contested waters is an oversimplified assertion that is not applicable for the majority of coast guards in the region. Though China is known to have employed its coast guard for such tactic, it is not true that all coast guard agencies are doing the same. Not even the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and JCG, which is comparable to China's vessel inventory, used their white ships for gray zone operations. They still perform the functions that originally defined what they are. This is also true for the emerging coast guard organizations in Southeast Asia, the utilization of the white ships is more embedded on resolving other concerns that are related to maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement. To say that these organizations' role is being used to patrol contested waters is true, but not because it was their gray zone strategy; instead it was constructive compliance to prevent the militarization of the South China Sea. It is also worth noting that the size and capability of the vessels are not designed for such tactics, rather it is intended for operations that encourage cooperation like search and rescue, oil spill response, and other law enforcement duties.

3. Though this paper recognizes the importance of the navy to protect and defend the territorial sovereignty of a state, it is about time that the Southeast Asian countries (except Laos PDR) develop coast guard organizations that do not fall under the military's chain of command. The coast guard model that Japan has championed with mandates that ensure a peaceful maritime order is what these countries should aspire to. It is not only because it catalyzes maritime cooperation, but this particular institution can be the only means where countries could downplay the tension that surrounds the territorial conflict among its neighbors.

4. Since Japan never had any other options but to send JCG to protect its sea trade routes, Tokyo had been the first country to support the development of coast guard organizations in the Southeast Asian region. JCG did not just redefine the perception of Southeast Asian countries towards Japan, but it was able to set the norm that white hulls can only be attributed to maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement. Thus, in response to China's rise, Abe started to define the maritime security phase. The pushback among the Southeast Asian countries is not as high compared to how the US proposed Regional Maritime Security Initiative has been rejected in 2003. This is what other developed countries like the United States and European countries should learn from Tokyo. Though its allies accept the naval capability building measures, the region will remain polarized between those who support Washington and Beijing. If they need to maintain a free and open sea in the South China Sea

without elevating the tension and with the cohesive support of ASEAN, great powers like the United States and the European Union should start following the template that Japan has been using since then and now. It is an open book that none among ASEAN are willing to go to war with China, yet nobody among its claimants is willing to recant their claims. As a break-even solution to maintain the regional maritime order that is stable and lower chances of armed conflict, coast guard diplomacy may be the only best answer.



Conclusion

The maritime security is the last phase of Japan's coast guard diplomacy in Southeast Asia, which is being carried out by Abe in four measures. The first one is through JCG's institutional reforms, not just in terms of its annual increase of budget but also by changing the customary means of selecting its commandant. Moreover, JCG has been given a seat in the annual cabinet deliberation to discuss the ways to address and improve the maritime security of Japan domestically and internationally. The second one is through capacity building measures of coast guard organizations of those countries that fall within its sea trade route; Abe is the first Prime Minister that used ODA to provide coast guard vessels to Southeast Asia. This arrangement did not just improve the capability of these coast guard organizations, it also boosted the trust and cooperation of these countries towards Japan. The third one is to build a human network of people in the region who received the same indoctrination and education in their respective roles as coast guard officers. Lastly, Abe 'minilaterally' pushed for the maritime security through the revitalization of coast guard diplomacy. He still engaged the original four countries with which past Prime Ministers had been dealing, not just because they cover the sea trade routes of Japan, but he strongly hinged his cooperation on the response to a common threat. However, Japan's alluded retort to utilize coast guard ships has strengthened deeper cooperation since military action is not something that Tokyo can choose as an option, while for Southeast Asia it is an option that they will not choose.

It can even be argued that the utilization of JICA funds can best justify why Abe has employed JCG as an instrument for Japan's maritime diplomacy. Conclusively, there are three plausible reasons behind such a claim. First, due to Japan's pacifist constitution, it restricts many areas of defense cooperation. However, it does not prohibit Tokyo from providing coast guard vessels to other countries using ODA. Relatedly, it is easier for Abe to justify to the Japanese public that the coast guard vessels that they are funding are needed to support the safety and security of Japan's trade. Second, the long-established cooperation of the JCG, particularly in Southeast Asia, in the context of maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement, provides the most robust foundation

for maritime cooperation. The recipient Southeast Asian countries trusted that Abe's coast guard initiatives had no hidden agenda and that the maritime order they are encouraged to support is for the benefit of the region. The final reason is that strengthening coast guard cooperation is beyond security context, it does not undermine either side's interests and addresses significant concerns of the region, from search and rescue to pollution prevention, counterpiracy operations, and the safety of life and property at sea.

The employment of JCG's role in Southeast Asia has genuinely evolved. From a mere agency which constructs lighthouses and conducts the hydrographic survey to an oil spill cleaner and eventually a trainer for maritime law enforcement specifically addressing piracy concerns, JCG had become a diplomatic tool for Japan to strengthen its cooperation and forget its imperialist past. Without a doubt, Abe is now galvanizing these three phases of coast guard diplomacy to define his maritime security phase. However, it should not be interpreted as a confrontational challenge against China's assertive behavior, rather an indirect strategy to set the norm in the region that maritime order can better be maintained through coast guard cooperation and not through military provocation.