Japan’s Defense Diplomacy in South East Asia

Daniel Foulkes Leon*

Abstract: Through an empirical case study analysis, this article analyses Japan’s defense diplomacy in the South East Asian nations of Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam during the period from 2006 to 2016. Defense diplomacy is an element of statecraft that uses a nation’s military and security institutions in a non-coercive, peaceful manner to enhance military cooperation and to seek military reform with another nation. This article traces the evolution of Japan’s defense diplomacy in its evolving security environment and identifies its character based on See Seng Tang and Bhubhindar Singh’s typology of “pragmatic” or “transformative” defense diplomacy, contributing important elements in the study of Japan’s defense diplomacy strategy and engagement in South East Asia.

Keywords: Defense Diplomacy, Japan, South East Asia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines.

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Introduction

In May 2017 Japan’s largest naval vessel in the Maritime Self Defense Forces, the JS Izumo, arrived in Vietnam as part of the Pacific Partnership naval exercise, focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR). This multilateral naval exercise led by the United States with Australia, the United Kingdom and Japan as participating countries, involved a series of host nations in professional training opportunities, workshops and field training exercises. In March 2017, the Philippine Navy had also received two patrol aircraft from Japan with the purpose of aiding its future maritime patrol and HA/DR capabilities. Philippine Navy pilots undertook training in Japan from November 2016 to March 2017. Additionally, at the beginning of 2017, Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Indonesia and met with President Joko Widodo to discuss the deepening of political and economic ties between the two nations. During this meeting, they declared their intention to deepen their defense cooperation and military exchanges,

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specifically addressing the issues of maritime security and the territorial disputes with China. These developments occurred alongside the political and strategic debate about the need for Japan to increase its regional defense activities amidst China’s growing influence in South East Asia.

Against this background, Japan’s defense diplomacy in South East Asia is seen to be prominent, but with what character? This article examines the evolution of Japan’s defense diplomacy in South East Asia between 2006 and 2016 and aims to contribute to two critical academic debates. The first is the study of Japan’s defense diplomacy. This is done by taking an empirical approach to Japan’s defense diplomacy activities in South East Asia, a region where Japan has vital security interests. The second debate concerns itself with academic theories of defense diplomacy. Much of the literature on defense diplomacy delves into its effects and composition, yet fails to provide a theoretical base that would elevate the level and scope of research on the subject. Different conceptualizations of defense diplomacy translate into different approaches of how it is used by nations as a tool of statecraft, and how its results are measured.

This article conceptualizes defense diplomacy as a tool of statecraft specifically oriented towards the foreign policy goals of creating cooperative relations with other states and promoting military reform. The other contesting view of defense diplomacy sees it as a tool of statecraft that can be used in foreign policy for any particular objective. This different view may seem very similar initially, but given its broader applicability of defense diplomacy, it loses focus and precision in determining certain activities can produce expected results.

Japan’s security policy has been the subject of study and debate in various fields of study. From a perspective of international relations and security studies, it is recognized that Japan is undergoing significant changes in its approach to its national security. Evidence of this can be seen in Japan’s changing involvement in its regional and global security agenda, as it is confronted with an evolving and continuously challenging regional security environment.

Scholars focused on Japan’s security have adduced varying competing explanations for Japan’s behavior, and their theses can range from diagnosing Japan with a remilitarisation

5 Kei Koga, “Beyond the Horizon? Japan’s Strategic Interests over the South China Sea (Draft),” (South China Conference: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017).
7 For a comprehensive take on Japan’s history and trajectory towards the twenty first century, see the seminal work of Kenneth B. Pyle, Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose, First Edition ed. (Massachussetts, United States of America: Public Affairs, 2007).
agenda,\textsuperscript{10} as a nation seeking a resurgence to a leading role in the region,\textsuperscript{11} to one seeking to normalize itself through different paths and opportunities.\textsuperscript{12} These different results are all seeking to provide an answer to the question of: What will be Japan’s role in the security of Asia?

Through an empirical study of Japan’s defense diplomacy in a region vital to its security,\textsuperscript{13} this article employs as an analytical tool a typology of “transformative” or “pragmatic” defense diplomacy as developed by See Seng Tan and Bhubhindar Singh.\textsuperscript{14}

This article showcases the general trends in Japan’s defense diplomacy and continues to build independently on the results of its relationship with Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

**Importance of Research and Objectives**

The situation in East Asia is one of the ongoing transformations in the geopolitical order and the power balance established by the United States after the Second World War and the Korean War.\textsuperscript{15} China’s recent actions in the South China Sea, specifically its land reclamation and militarisation projects,\textsuperscript{16} and territorial disputes,\textsuperscript{17} pose a risk not only to the comparatively smaller nations in South East Asia, but to the rules-based order that has held in the region.\textsuperscript{18} These developments affect Japan too, since its energy and trade supplies are dependent on the Sea Lanes of Communication in the South China Sea.\textsuperscript{19}

A sign of the mounting challenges to the region’s security is the rate at which South East Asian nations have experienced an exponential increase of their military spending. South East Asia has seen a 67 percent increase in military expenditure during the ten-year period studied in this dissertation;\textsuperscript{20} this is a significant increase compared to the previous decade’s increase of 17 percent. Parallel to how the nations of South East Asia are faced

\textsuperscript{13} Koga.
\textsuperscript{15} Overholt.
\textsuperscript{18} Renato Cruz De Castro, “China and Japan in Maritime Southeast Asia: Extending Their Geo-Strategic Rivalry by Competing for Friends,” *Philippine Political Science Journal* 34, no. 2 (2013).
\textsuperscript{19} Koga.
with an ongoing process of militarization and insecurity towards a potential arms race, there has been an increase of diplomatic competition in the region as the United States, with Japan as its main Asian ally, focuses its efforts to gain influence over the region of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) whilst China seeking to do the same regarding ASEAN.

Given the scenario of increasing international tensions and the region’s continued increase of military capabilities, defense diplomacy in South East Asia has grown in prominence and pertinence. Defense diplomacy has long been an element of international relations and with the end of the Cold War, the uses and opportunities for it have expanded significantly. This expansion in scope and activities gave way to an “old” and “new” defense diplomacy that does not supplant each other, but instead function in an overlapping manner. Before the end of the Cold War, defense diplomacy was used as a way to enhance the capabilities of allied nations or to facilitate weapons exchanges between friendly states. After the Cold War ended, a “new” defense diplomacy appeared, providing a new avenue of diplomatic relations and military cooperation between nations that were former enemies or were in need of support to transform the structure of their military.

Defense diplomacy, with its focus on the activities between military and security institutions of different nations in times of peace, offers a much-needed insight into the study of the region’s security. Much of this study is focused on “big issues”, regarding China’s rise, territorial tensions and military build-up, but not on how its growing military forces are used. Defense diplomacy offers a complementary lens to study what types of relations are being forged amongst nations and with what characteristics.

The case studies were selected based on a criterion of value diversity. This is a selection of cases that represent a broad range of values in the particular outcome or the specific assumption to investigate. For this research, this meant selecting countries with different

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27 Ibid.
28 Bellamy and Hughes.
29 John Gerring, “Chapter 28: Case Selection for Case-Study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative
levels of engagement with Japan in terms of defense diplomacy: Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia. Indonesia is the country in South East Asia with the largest population and has had a moderate defense diplomacy engagement with Japan. The escalation of tensions and clashes with China in the South China Sea by Vietnam and the Philippines has drawn more attention to the nature and character of their military activities. In contrast, Indonesia’s tensions with China regarding South China Sea territorial claims have been less intense. The selection of these three countries therefore offers a wide range of defense diplomacy activities conducted with Japan.

This research tests, via backward oriented process tracing case studies, the assumption that Japan’s defense diplomacy in South East Asia is gradually changing from a transformative to a pragmatic defense diplomacy in reaction to China’s actions in the South China Sea. For this, defense diplomacy is understood as a tool for the specific foreign policy objectives of promoting a reform of another nation’s military and the institution of cooperative relations with other states.

The primary sources for this research are Japan’s government reports on the activities and exchanges that Japan has taken part in with Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. These primarily are the Ministry of Defense White Papers and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Diplomatic Blue Book, along with other official reports. Additionally, a wide range of secondary sources such as academic journals, research center publications and Asian security defense oriented news outlets will provide additional information and aid in contextualizing Japan’s defense diplomacy activities. These sources contribute to the assessment of Japan’s defense diplomacy activities, as proactive or reactive, vis-à-vis China’s disruptive activities in the region.

Pragmatic Versus Transformative Defense Diplomacy

There are two main conceptualizations of defense diplomacy in security studies. The first considers defense diplomacy a tool of foreign policy for multiple objectives. The second defines defense diplomacy as a tool for two specific objectives: the promotion of military reform and the establishment of cooperative practices with militaries of other states. Following this last definition, Cottey and Forster list the different activities that can be conducted in defense diplomacy. Based on this definition of defense diplomacy, Tan and Singh developed a typology of defense diplomacy as being either “pragmatic” or “transformative.” This typology and its framework are the main analytical tools in

31 Cottey and Forster, 365.
32 Cottey and Forster, 365.
33 Tan and Singh.
34 Tan and Sing first describe how modern diplomacy has taken these facets. The usage of these particular terms is based on the initial coinage of them by Wesley. Michael Wesley, “Session 3: Defence
this research, applying it with the objective of characterizing Japan’s behavior through its defense diplomacy activities.\textsuperscript{35}

Tan and Singh\textsuperscript{36} expose two contrasting ways of conceptualizing defense diplomacy from which they give meaning to their transformative and pragmatic categories. They link the term transformative to the conceptualization by the Ministry of Defense of the UK’s policy paper on defense diplomacy\textsuperscript{37} where the defense diplomacy activities by the armed forces can be employed to advance democratic values and aid in the process of security sector reform. The term pragmatic is associated with the explanation offered by former Major General Ng Chee Khern, director of Singapore’s external intelligence agency (the Security and Intelligence Division) and former chief of the air force of Singapore, who sees cooperation between ASEAN nations and their militaries as contributing elements for stability in the region.\textsuperscript{38}

The transformative or pragmatic character of a country’s defense diplomacy is defined by the type of effects each activity has on the nature and capabilities of the participating militaries. Exchanges that improve interoperability, preparedness and joint operations are pragmatic whilst those that seek to change the civil-military relations of a nation, the enhancing of humanitarian capabilities, promoting democratic ideals and other western values, and security sector reform are transformative activities.\textsuperscript{39}

Tan and Singh utilize the terms pragmatic and transformative based on their considerations of modern diplomacy. Their concept of pragmatic diplomacy comes from Hedley Bull’s view of the international system and its practices as oriented towards preserving its status quo of a system with an anarchic nature.\textsuperscript{40} The notion of transformative diplomacy is explained by Tan and Singh as one “…that seeks to revise the domestic political order within states while fundamentally keeping the international order more or
The lack of a theory of defense diplomacy has not stopped its evolution nor its execution. The adoption by the UK Ministry of Defense of the term in 1998 was the first time the term was defined as a priority for national defense. Defense diplomacy was given a strategic value as a core mission of the armed forces. According to Sending, Pouliot and Neumann, the advent of globalization has meant an expansion of the traditional ways of political interaction in state centered diplomacy. Whilst it is possible to track the practice of defense diplomacy to Napoleonic times, the end of the Cold War is recognized as a turning point for the practice of defense diplomacy; breaking with a model that considered defense diplomacy as only applicable to friendly or allied nations and providing an avenue to establish some sort of military based dialogue with former enemies and nations considered previously as antagonists.

The existing literature on Japan’s defense diplomacy is limited, focusing on the evolution of Japan’s diplomacy and the role of the Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF). Study of its defense diplomacy is contemporary, as it is only after 2007 that Japan’s newly established Ministry of Defense became involved in Japan’s foreign policy. Research on the execution of defense diplomacy in South East Asia, which is the area of interest for this study, has focused mostly on the multilateral initiatives in the region, namely the relations that ASEAN has with the non-member actors of China and the United States. This emphasis follows what Bellamy and Hughes call an obsession over certain issues in the study of the region’s security, great power relations, balances of power and the risks of future wars. Japan’s defense diplomacy in South East Asia has been analyzed at this multilateral level, not focusing specifically on the bilateral defense diplomacy Japan has in the region.

Japan’s Defense Cooperation and Exchanges

The literature on Japan’s defense diplomacy is limited, being composed mainly on the study of measures and activities executed by Japan that are considered defense diplomacy by other scholars. This means that generally, the study of defense diplomacy activities executed by Japan does so without directly employing the conceptualizations of defense diplomacy. The most direct analysis of its defense diplomacy comes from Tsuruoka, he

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41 Tan and Singh, 223.
44 Cheyre.
45 Cottey and Forster, 365.
46 JSDF refers to Japan Self Defense Forces, also identified as Self Defense Forces. MSDF refers to Maritime Self Defense Forces.
47 Tsuruoka.
48 Bellamy and Hughes.
49 Tsuruoka.
examines the activities that Japan has had and the potential opportunities with the UK. Tsuruoka explains how the government of Japan uses the term defense exchange and defense cooperation instead of defense diplomacy.50

Tsuruoka acknowledges that outside Japan, the term defense diplomacy is used interchangeably with defense engagement, military cooperation and military engagement. He explains that defense diplomacy has no single international definition of the term, and thus allows for a highly inclusive concept.51 The loose terminology regarding defense diplomacy is addressed by Baldino and Carr, who note how military diplomacy and defense engagements are synonymous with defense diplomacy.52 Cottey and Forster also provide insight on how terms like military cooperation and military assistance were used to describe what is now considered defense diplomacy, and its synonym, defense engagement.53 Tsuruoka considers it a tool for foreign relations that Japan use albeit with a limited use due to its own political restrictions: “Defense diplomacy, after all, wholly depends on the country’s political willingness to remain engaged in international security.”54

Japan changed the structure of its security institutions, upgrading from a Defense Agency to a cabinet-level Ministry of Defense in 2007. After this, Japan increased the intensity in its approach to external security policy.55 Japan increased its involvement in multilateral meetings on security issues, high-level meetings amongst defense personnel, capacity-building assistance programmes and defense equipment transfers,56 all elements of defense diplomacy.57

Dennis Yasutomo explores Japan’s involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq as a way of understanding the transformations of Japan’s Defense Policy.58 He addresses Japan’s defense diplomacy activities through the framework of civilian power.59 In this sense, Yasutomo explores the origin and nature of Japan’s civilian power diplomacy, which he defines as a type of diplomacy based on persuasion and the use of non-military diplomatic instruments, mainly through development mechanisms (like the Official Development Assistance programmes) with a “reluctance and resistance to utilizing the SDF except as a residual or last result instrument in environments defined as military operations other than war.”60

51 Tsuruoka.
52 Baldino and Carr, 140.
53 Cottey and Forster, 365, 6, 34.
54 Tsuruoka.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Cottey and Forster, 365.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
When analyzing Japan’s involvement within the framework of ASEAN and its spaces related to security, opposing views are found in the appraisal of Japan’s role. Nguyen Hung Son posits that Japan’s cooperation with ASEAN around maritime security has no clear goal nor strategy. He considers this to be so despite Japan’s assistance to littoral states through capacity building, training exercises, and the conducting of seminars by Japan’s Coast Guard. Son considers that Japan needs to extend maritime cooperation into areas such as terrorism and maritime crimes but also non-traditional security issues like environmental protection and disaster relief.

Contrasting Son’s view, Tomotaka Shoji considers that Japan has approached multilateral arenas to include the issue of maritime security and highlighting the importance of upholding the rule of law as a peaceful way of resolving conflicts. He considers that Japan’s active engagement in ASEAN has oriented security dialogues to include these aspects, and the proposal at the East Asia Summit of 2011 to establish a forum of maritime security are evidence of Japan’s broader objectives. Shoji recognizes that Japan faces mixed reactions with this approach, with some ASEAN nations cautious about interference on issues like the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, where Japan as a non-claimant sees its efforts hindered as an actor at the sidelines.

Shoji has continued to develop the opportunities and strategic options for Japan’s relation with ASEAN. He analyses the growth in qualitative and quantitative terms of its security cooperation, paying special attention to its participation in the ADMM-Plus process and its capacity building assistance programmes. These programs, along with the increased bilateral support that includes transfers of defense equipment and technology with the ASEAN nations of Vietnam and the Philippines are considered by Shoji as part of the diversification of Japan’s growing involvement with the region.

Although these scholars effectively study and analyze the impact of activities that are elements of defense diplomacy, they still hold an action-oriented focus. De Castro tackles the evolution of Japan’s security involvement with ASEAN not as an exercise of defense diplomacy but as Sino-Chinese competition for influence in the region. He considers the evolution of Japan’s policy towards South East Asia as focused on balancing the growing power of China by the creation of economic partnerships with nations in the region and joint military activities and confidence-building measures with multilateral institutions.
like the ASEAN Regional Forum.  

**Case Studies**

**Japan’s Changing Security Environment**

Japan’s security structure is one of a series of peculiarities, exceptional situations and contradictions. In its post-World War II constitution, Japan renounced the right to wage war and established a pacifist orientation for the whole state. Japan’s Yoshida Doctrine, named after its first Prime Minister, was based on its pacifist constitution and its reliance on the United States for national security. This set the baseline for a series of policies that carefully limited the use of force by Japan and the exceptional situations under which it can be used. Nevertheless, the United States shifted its approach to Japan during the early years of the Cold War, seeking an ally against Soviet and Communist expansion in Asia.

In 1954 Japan established its Self Defense Forces (SDF) and gradually, through a series of constitutional reinterpretations and several revisions of its Defense Guidelines with the United States, underwent a process of remilitarisation and transition to a nation with considerable military power. Japan underwent a period of economic and political stagnation after the end of the Cold War, labeled the “lost decade”, where the opportunity for Japan to rise as a top global player faded. The extent of Japan’s changing defense diplomacy and defense engagement became evident at the turn of the century, with Japan’s deployment of Self Defense Forces to peace keeping operations and anti-piracy efforts, and the SDF deployment to non-combative support roles in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Joint US-Japan declarations signaled the commitment to evolve the nation’s partnership to one that is actively engaged in global security issues, participating in initiatives that go beyond humanitarian relief operations and support, and into missile defense and maritime security.

Currently, Japan is faced with a deteriorating security environment. The main reasons for this are the continued expansion of the North Korean nuclear programme and the rise of China as a geopolitical competitor, asserting power over regional neighbors both through political and economic means, and by seeking military superiority. Japan has

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70 Ibid.
72 Kapoor, 80.
73 Pyle, 3.
74 Yasutomo.
76 Oros provides a deep analysis of the changes in Japan’s security identity in Andrew L. Oros, “Japan’s Strategic Culture: Security Identity in a Fourth Modern Incarnation?,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 2 (2014). And Easley analyses Japan’s evolving defense policies and posture in Easley.
77 Tellis et al.
reacted to these challenges internally by enhancing the capabilities of its Self Defense Forces and by strengthening the security relationship with the United States.\textsuperscript{78}

In particular, developments in North Korea and China contributed to Japan’s current uncertainty and shifts in its security policy. North Korea’s first nuclear test and subsequent missile tests in the Sea of Japan in 2006 escalated Japan’s threat perception of North Korea and its environment. This led to Japan to perform a series of upgrades to its missile defense systems and accelerated the upgrade of its Defense Agency to a Ministry of Defense in 2007. This provided Japan with greater control over the direction of its defense operations.\textsuperscript{79} The other situation was the territorial crisis over the Senkaku-Diaoyu Islands in 2010, where fishing vessels from China clashed with Japan’s Coast Guard. This led Japan to take measures to defend its outermost territories, to take a stronger stance on maritime security\textsuperscript{80}, and for the first time, address China as a “threat” in its Defense White Paper of 2011.\textsuperscript{81} This territorial incident is seen as the trigger for the incremental shift in Japan’s balancing strategy against China.\textsuperscript{82}

China’s actions in South East Asia during the same time period have also been a source of concern for Japan. China’s ongoing land reclamation and militarisation projects in the South China Sea since 2013\textsuperscript{83} pose a growing threat to Japan’s security. The building and deployment of military equipment in this area threaten the security of Sea Lines of Communication that Japan’s economy and energy depend on.\textsuperscript{84} The building of artificial islands comes in hand with territorial claims that go against the UN Convention on Law of the Seas, undermining the rule-based order that Japan has promoted and backed in the region.

Japan increased its efforts to ensure maritime security in South East Asia through cooperation with ASEAN in 1998. It continued to increase the capabilities of nations in South East Asia beyond anti-piracy efforts, such as the gifting of patrol vessels to Indonesia in 2006 as a way to balance against China’s naval expansion.\textsuperscript{85} As part of the aftermath of the Senkaku 2010 crisis and the rising of tensions in the South China Sea during this same period,\textsuperscript{86} Japan’s Prime Minister Abe promulgated his policy of “proactive peace

\textsuperscript{79} Easley, 73.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.
\textsuperscript{84} Koga, “Beyond the Horizon? Japan’s Strategic Interests over the South China Sea (Draft).”
\textsuperscript{86} Celine Pajon, “Japan and the South China Sea: Forging Strategic Partnerships in a Divided Region,” \textit{Asie Visions} 60 (2013).
diplomacy.”87 This policy from 2014 describes the abandonment of a passive security policy of over-relying on the United States by having a stronger military and security policies, with a greater focus on Japan’s contribution to regional stability.88 In 2015 Japan changed its Official Development Assistance charter to include training and equipment of other nation’s coastguards and their HA/DR operations.89 Japan’s defense diplomacy has been affected by this changing security scenario, and the adoption of a “proactive peace diplomacy” is evidence of its changing profile.

**Case Studies’ Historical Perspective**

Japan currently enjoys positive relations with Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, with post-war relations improving due to Japan’s extensive economic cooperation in the region, it’s support for the ASEAN formation and consolidation process, and its involvement in the Cambodian peace process.90

After Japan’s defeat in the Second World War, the attitudes of Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam were shaped initially by the damages left by Japan’s colonial and military occupation. Japan’s rule in Indonesia fuelled its independence movement, the Philippines developed a security partnership with the United States and Vietnam had separate governments in the South and North of the country.91 Japan signed reparations agreements with the Philippines in May 1956, with Indonesia in January 1958 and with South Vietnam in 1959. These reparations were specified in the San Francisco peace treaty and provided Japan with an opportunity to expand its economic influence with these countries.92

The reparations and further economic involvement by Japan in the region, in the shape of Official Development Assistance (ODA) programmes, was deemed as aggressive by the nations of South East Asia, leading to protests during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka to Thailand and Indonesia in 1974.93 South East Asian nations considered at the time that Japan’s economic ODA programmes would cause an economic and technological dependence to Japan. Although the Fukuda Doctrine, initiated in 1977, sought a more balanced approach94, the economic dependency on Japan continued to deepen, reaching a point of dependency for nearly all the nations in the region by the end of the Cold War.95

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87 Reinhard Drifte, “Japan’s Policy Towards the South China Sea – Applying “Proactive Peace Diplomacy”?” (Frankfurt, Germany: Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, 2016), 2.
88 Ibid.
89 Easley, 77.
90 Pajon, 6.
93 Pajon, 14.
94 Ibid.
95 Dewi Fortuna Khaidir-Anwar, *Indonesia and the Security of Southeast Asia*, ed. Centre for Strategic
In South East Asia overall, the relationship with Japan had been based on the pursuit of joint economic prosperity. Japan had a relatively smooth transition in recognizing the government of North Vietnam after the Vietnam War, but those relations reached a stalemate with Vietnam’s involvement in Cambodia. Vietnam’s removal of the Khmer Rouge government, and deployment of mines in the Cambodia-Vietnam border were some of the reasons for Japan to fully suspend aid to the country in 1979.  

Japan-Vietnam relations improved after the signing of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords of Cambodia. These accords provided Japan with an opportunity to engage in the security of the region, where for the first time it took part in Peacekeeping operations.

In 2002 Japan’s Prime Minister Koizumi started a larger engagement with ASEAN, looking to create an economic partnership and an “East Asian Community”. This was a reaction to three main causes, the expectation of a larger involvement by Japan after the late 1997 ASEAN economic crisis, China’s approach and establishment of a Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN, and the focus by the United States to approach the region on anti-terrorism issues.

**Japan’s Defense Diplomacy**

Through a comprehensive analysis of Japan’s annual Defense White Paper, the Diplomatic Bluebook, and Official Development Assistance White Paper for the years of 2006 to 2016 it was possible to determine the defense diplomacy activities that Japan had with the nations of Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam for that period. The data gathered was also cross-checked with the East Asian Strategic Review publications for the same time period. This is the main publication by the National Institute of Defense Studies, the principal policy research and study institution within the Ministry of Defense of Japan.

The data for this study was compiled during 2017, results for 2016 are tentative as they do not include the international editions of the Ministry of Defense’s White Paper. Nevertheless, the 2016 Diplomatic Bluebook by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides rich data on the state of Japan’s defense diplomacy and evolution for that year. The 2016 Diplomatic Bluebook’s data evidences new defense diplomacy activities compared to the

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97 Pajon.
99 These efforts are not to be confused with the 2009 efforts of Japan’s then Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama towards an East Asian Union modelled after the European Union. Kevin Brown, “Japanese Pm Pushes for East Asian Union,” *Financial Times*, 24 October 2009. For more on these efforts see: Yukio Hatoyama, “Japan’s New Commitment to Asia - toward the Realization of an East Asian Community,” ed. Speeches and Statements (Tokyo, Japan: Primer Minister and Cabinet of Japan, 2009).
100 Pajon.
101 The international editions of the White Paper had not been published by September 30th, 2017.
Japan’s defense diplomacy has been categorized in eight different types of activities:

- Defense Equipment Transfers
- Working Level Meetings
- Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA-DR)
- Bilateral Relations - Partnership Status and International Relations
- Port Calls
- High-Level Meetings (Heads of State as well as Chief Ministerial and Military representatives)
- Military Exercises
- Training and Capacity Building activities

These activities can occur in a multilateral setting (e.g. within the ASEAN structure or a multi-nation military exercise) or a bilateral one. This allowed the consideration of multinational activities where Japan and only one or two nations were participant.

The discerning factor for selecting multilateral activities was based on the consideration of how much value did the event have on the bilateral process of defense diplomacy instead of a multinational process. As all the nations selected in this study are part of ASEAN, many of the multinational activities studied come from this structure, but others have been excluded as they fall outside the scope of research of the case studies and fall into Japan’s defense diplomacy process with ASEAN. Each action was analyzed to determine its pragmatic, transformative or mixed profile based on the typology framework posited by Tan and Singh.

Japan conducted a total of 241 defense diplomacy activities during the 2006-2016 period. These show a sharp increase for the year 2011, just after the Senkaku Crisis of 2010.

Table 1. Japan’s defense diplomacy activities per year.

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<td>2016*</td>
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102 These include the tentative results of the defense diplomacy activities during 2016.
103 See Annex 1.
The turning point in Japan’s defense diplomacy was in 2011, with a sharp increase of defense diplomacy activities conducted with all three countries. The total number of defense diplomacy activities for this period was 107 with Indonesia and the Philippines and 101 with Vietnam. These include the specific instances that Japan had an engagement with each of the countries, including activities in a multilateral setting where more than one country was involved in. For example, these types of activities can be multilateral exercises or high-level meetings where Japan interacted through one action with all countries, thus counting once for each country.

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>2016*</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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The increase in the number of activities corresponds primarily to bilateral activities, with the number of multilateral activities increasing gradually over time and peaking in 2014 with 12 multilateral activities. These changes are consistent with Japan’s efforts on strengthening relationships with other nations in the aftermath of the Senkaku Crisis with China. Japan increased relations with countries in the region with the purpose of creating a consensus on maritime security and freedom of navigation issues. This is exemplified in the February 2012 speech given by Japan’s Parliamentary Senior Vice Minister of Defense at the Shangri-La Dialogue titled “Protecting Maritime Freedoms,” where he emphasized Japan’s value of freedom of navigation, good seamanship and practical cooperation for the region.

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid. 94.
These changes are consistent with Japan’s efforts on strengthening relationships with other nations in the aftermath of the Senkaku Crisis with China. Japan increased relations with countries in the region with the purpose of creating a consensus on maritime security and freedom of navigation issues. This is exemplified in the February 2012 speech given by Japan’s Parliamentary Senior Vice Minister of Defense at the Shangri-La Dialogue titled “Protecting Maritime Freedoms,” where he emphasized Japan’s value of freedom of navigation, good seamanship and practical cooperation for the region. This multilateral defense diplomacy action is transformative since it is utilizing an existing institution to seek policy change and the promotion of democratic values. All three nations are considered in this action, as the Shangri-La Dialogue is a space for high-level meetings and the outlining of national security interests and policies. Japan’s prioritizing of the aforementioned values was further extended with Abe’s 2014 policy of “Proactive

106 This chart does not show the tentative results for 2016. The Linear (Total Activities) series is the trendline for the total activities. Ibid.
107 This chart shows tentative results for 2016, Ibid.
108 Ibid. 94.
Japan’s defense diplomacy engagement with Indonesia is characterized by a baseline of shared multilateral military exchanges. The multinational annual military exercise held in Thailand, Cobra Gold, provides a constant opportunity for Indonesia’s and Japan’s personnel to interact. The number of military exercises where these nations interact rose significantly in 2011 with the Second ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise held by Indonesia and Japan. Indonesia and Japan conducted three high-level meetings in 2012 and ten in 2013, this presented the sharpest rise in this category of all nations during the 2006-2016 period. The rise in Japan’s number of high-level meetings is present in all three countries, but not at the same time for all of them. Indonesia was the last country to have this increased rate of activities.

In 2013 Japan’s Prime Minister Abe traveled to Indonesia on his first trip overseas since returning to office. During his visit, he emphasized on the importance of Japan’s relations with ASEAN states, singling out Indonesia as a key partner to secure peace in the region. Following Abe’s visit, Japan’s Ministry of Defense informed US media that it had planned to double the budget of military aid to Indonesia for 2014.

Japan’s two defense equipment transfers to Indonesia occurred only at the beginning of the studied time frame, in 2006 and 2008, as Official Development Assistance Loans and Grants. The first was a grant for the construction of patrol vessels, and the second one a loan that supplied climate change and maritime security countermeasures. The last defense diplomacy activity conducted with Japan related to the transfer of defense equipment was the start of negotiations for a new exchange in 2016, these negotiations discussed broader areas of cooperation, namely cybersecurity, and search and rescue operations.

109 Drifte, 2.
110 Annex 1, activities 4, 25, 30, 38, 51, 66, 95, 154, 187 and 222.
111 Ibid 67.
114 Annex 1, activity 5.
115 Ibid 33.
116 These included the deployment of weather radar stations, which have the ability to also detect aircrafts. Svetlana Bachmann et al., “Techniques for Detecting and Tracking Airplanes Using Weather Radar Wsr-88d” (paper presented at the Asilomar Conference on Signals, Systems and Computers, 2004).
117 Annex 1, action 224.
Regarding the type of defense diplomacy that Japan and Indonesia have in terms of its transformative, pragmatic or mixed value, the changes during the 2006-2016 period show a shift towards a pragmatic defense diplomacy. During the 2006-2010 period, the number of activities was balanced between mixed and pragmatic activities. The permanent change happened from 2013 onwards, where the activities became primarily pragmatic.

119 This chart shows tentative results for 2016, see Annex 1.
120 Ibid.
The number of transformative-only activities never exceeded more than two activities per year.

*Chart 4. Japan’s type of defense diplomacy activities with Indonesia*\(^{121}\)

Japan’s relationship with Indonesia coincides with the distribution of defense diplomacy activities by type, showing an orientation towards a pragmatic defense diplomacy. Japan’s participation in military exercises with Indonesia increased substantially in 2011, with the execution of five activities, in comparison with only one the previous year. The aforementioned military exercises in 2011 were all part of multilateral events. During the increase of defense diplomacy activities between both nations in 2011, the character of their exchanges aligned with the previous years.

The character of their defense diplomacy relationship has been one where Japan sought to strengthen pragmatic cooperation and defense exchanges through military exercises. Indonesia has welcomed these activities over time, with its cooperation gradually increasing. In 2014 both countries held “2+2” foreign and defense ministerial talks to strengthen their comprehensive strategic partnership, signaling an intent to counter Chinese actions in the Pacific.\(^{122}\)

The pragmatic character of Japan’s defense diplomacy with Indonesia prioritized cooperation on maritime security, with the main risks being piracy, maritime terrorism and weapons smuggling, and strengthening the resilience to climate change and environmental hazards. Indonesia received disaster relief support from Japan in the aftermath of the 2006 earthquake.\(^{123}\) Japan also provided Indonesia with several instances for training and capacity building in humanitarian assistance efforts.\(^{124}\)

Japan’s defense diplomacy with Indonesia reflects a process of bilateral pragmatic cooperation.

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\(^{121}\) This chart shows tentative results for 2016, Ibid.
\(^{123}\) Annex 1, action 6.
\(^{124}\) Ibid 91.
exchanges that have expanded to include transformative activities. These activities occurred after their transformative objectives had been explored first at multilateral spaces, such as ASEAN.

Gradual changes in the character of Japan’s defense diplomacy with Indonesia gained strength after the signing of a memorandum between the two countries on further defense cooperation in 2015. In 2016 Japan and Indonesia started negotiation rounds on the matter of new transfers of defense equipment. To this point, Indonesia had largely remained at the side-lines of the South China Sea territorial disputes with China for most of the 2006-2015 period. Indonesia’s President Joko Widodo attempted to mediate these disputes and continued Indonesia’s general posture of taking a moderate, non-conflicting stance on territorial disputes with China.

In 2016 Indonesia adopted a more assertive stance on the protection of its territorial waters, with its Foreign Minister refusing to acknowledge the validity of China’s territorial claims and stated that they could only be made on the basis of international law. This led to a more active response in the protection of its territorial waters from Chinese fishing boats, arresting illegal fishermen and firing on their boats. Japan and Indonesia announced at the end of 2016 their intention to create a Maritime Forum, and supporting Jakarta’s actions to safeguard its maritime sovereignty.

### Japan’s Defense Diplomacy with the Philippines

Japan’s defense diplomacy with the Philippines is distinguished from the exchanges with Vietnam and Indonesia, by the clear shift in the character of its defense equipment transfers during the period of study. In 2007, the Philippines received funds in the form of ODA from Japan to improve the infrastructure of the Philippines Coast Guard’s communications systems. The focus on maritime security is consistent in all the defense equipment transfers from Japan to the Philippines. The remaining defense equipment transfer activities occurred at the end of the study period, in 2013 and 2016, where Japan signed the transfer of patrol boats, established a transfer agreement that places

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125 Ibid 195.
126 Ibid 224.
132 Annex 1, action 14.
133 Ibid 147.
134 Ibid 223.
defense transfers with the Philippines at the same level as transfers with the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and France, and on naval aircrafts to be transferred to the Philippines’ Navy. The 2016 defense equipment transfer agreement marks a considerable change in the Philippines’ defense transfers with Japan. Before this exchange, Japan’s defense equipment transfers with the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam had been directed to their coast guard.

Japan’s interaction with the Philippines in military exercises increased in both rate and number of activities between the years of 2011 and 2013. The rate of these activities remained constant throughout the following years. In 2012 Japan participated for the first time in the Balikatan table top military exercises. Japan continued to increase its presence in multilateral exercises with the Philippines, such as PHIBLEX 15, but also with a bilateral military exercise between the Navy of the Philippines and the Maritime Self Defense Forces (MSDF) in May 2015.

Chart 5. Japan’s defense diplomacy activities with the Philippines.

Table 4. Japan’s defense diplomacy activities with the Philippines

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<td>11</td>
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136 Ibid 99.
137 Ibid 172.
138 Ibid 197.
139 This chart shows tentative results for 2016, Ibid.
The type of defense diplomacy that Japan has with the Philippines is predominantly pragmatic, with only three years presenting more mixed activities than pragmatic ones, 2009, 2010 and 2014. The Philippines experienced an increase in the number of defense diplomacy activities in 2011, transformative-only activities became constant in 2012 and never accounting for more than 2 activities per year. An example of these activities is the multilateral 2012 Shangri-La dialogue where Japan’s Parliamentary Senior Vice Minister of Defense delivered a speech emphasizing the importance of freedom of navigation, good seamanship and practical cooperation amongst nations.140

Chart 6. Japan’s type of defense diplomacy activities with the Philippines

In 2006 Japan sent experts to the Philippines’ island of Mindanao, to monitor the ceasefire established in 2004 between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.142 This was in tandem with the creation of the Japan-Bangsamoro Initiatives for Reconstruction and Development later in the year.143 These activities show the transition from defense diplomacy activities to foreign aid by Japan, and contained both pragmatic and transformative elements. This action is a clear example of the level of closeness that these two nations have reached in their relationship over time, despite the level of interaction decreasing during the first years of the time period. The character of Japan’s defense diplomacy engagement until 2012 was focused mostly on sustaining bilateral exchanges and matching of priorities in anti-piracy efforts and capacity building for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

140 Ibid 94.
141 This chart shows tentative results for 2016, see Ibid.
142 Ibid 7.
143 Ibid 13.
With the security environment changing for Japan in 2010 and its push for a broader security engagement with South East Asian nations in the years that followed, the character of Japan’s defense diplomacy with the Philippines changed. An early indicator of this shift was the declaration of their relationship as a “Strategic Partnership” in 2011, and the agreement to deepen their exchanges. Japan became the second country to have such level of partnership with the Philippines, after the United States. In 2012, Japan and the Philippines held discussions on defense equipment transfers, oriented to assist the modernization process of the Philippines’ coast guard. The Philippines had voiced its intent to modernize its coast guard capabilities since 2008.

The first of the military exchanges between the two countries after enhancing their relationship to a strategic partnership occurred in 2012, when Japan took part for the first time in the Balikatan exercises conducted by the Philippines and the United States. During the visit of Japan’s foreign minister to Manila in 2013, both countries expressed their desire to strengthen security affairs due to tensions in the South China Sea. Additionally, in December 2013 Japan implemented an ODA project for patrol vessel procurement by the Philippines.

Japan’s defense diplomacy with the Philippines refocused in reinforcing the maritime security and capabilities of the Philippines. Japan’s highly pragmatic engagement was enhanced by the relationship both countries have with the United States. 2014 saw the first trilateral good will exercises between these nations, as well as Japan’s participation in the PHIBLEX 15 exercises as observers. In 2015 Japan held for the first time a bilateral military exercise with the Philippines and in April 2016 for the first time in 15 years, MSDF destroyers made a port call at Subic Bay with following visits later in the year.

During the period of study, the strengthening of the defense diplomacy relationship between Japan and the Philippines was intended to counter China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea. The Philippines’ relationship with Japan emerged as a complement for its relationship with the United States. Philippines President Aquino’s declarations

144 Ibid 76.
146 Jon Grevatt, “Philippines Politicians Call for Coastguard Modernisation,” in *Jane’s Defence Industry* (Jane’s IHS, 2008).
147 Annex 1, action 99.
148 Ibid 115.
149 Ibid 147.
150 Ibid 173.
151 Ibid 172.
152 Ibid 179.
153 Ibid 228.
following the Japan-Philippines summit in Tokyo in 2015 highlighted the Philippines interest in signing a Visiting Forces Agreement with Japan, allowing for JSDF personnel to visit and use its military bases. The Philippines has similar accords with the United States and Australia.

**Japan’s Defense Diplomacy with Vietnam**

Japan’s defense diplomacy relationship with Vietnam presents a clear focus on training and capacity building activities. This type of activity from between the two countries became constant in 2011 and increased in the following years, peaking in 2013 with 5 different training and capacity building activities. The areas of focus for these activities are range from diving medicine, oceanography, flight safety, and training in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief response. Unlike the Philippines and Indonesia, Vietnam’s defense diplomacy relationship with Japan does not include humanitarian assistance or disaster relief activities during the 2006-2016 period.

Japan signed a defense cooperation memorandum with Vietnam in 2011, after that, both nations raised the profile of their partnership in 2014 to an “Extensive Strategic Partnership”. This gradual upgrading of their partnership was done in tandem with an increase in the number of annual high-level meetings between the two countries since 2010. Japan’s defense diplomacy with Vietnam shows the largest overall transformation of the case studies. The visit of high-level officials from Japan to Cam Ranh Bay in 2013, and the 2016 port calls to the Cam Ranh Bay by the MSDF are evidence of this.

The strengthening of Japan’s relationship with Vietnam has served a dual purpose for Japan. It has helped Japan become a partner for Vietnam in curbing China’s influence in the South China Sea, with both nations sharing the position that territorial disputes must be resolved without violence and in the basis of international law. Additionally, Japan’s stronger defense diplomacy relationship with Vietnam has been used as an argument by Japan’s Prime Minister Abe in his push towards a change in Japan’s policies and legislation. Prime Minister Abe has highlighted the delays in executing its defense

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155 Annex 1, action 205.
156 Jon Grevatt and James Hardy, “Japan, Philippines Sign Defence Trade and Technology Deal,” in *Jane’s Defence Industry* (Jane’s IHS, 2015).
157 Ibid.
158 This is not to say that Vietnam has not suffered from any natural disasters. Vietnam’s Prime Minister Dung communicated in 2012 that on average 430 people have lost their lives in Vietnam each year due to natural disasters between 2007-2011. Reuters Editorial, “Landslides, Floods Kill 29 in Vietnam,” (Reuters, 2012).
159 Annex 1, action 83.
161 Ibid 140
162 Ibid 231.
equipment transfers to Vietnam as a consequence of the increased surveillance burden on Japan’s Coast Guard in the region, and the need for Japan to expand its capabilities.\textsuperscript{165} Vietnam’s interest in defense cooperation with Japan interlocks with Prime Minister Abe’s goal of “normalizing” Japan’s defense posture.\textsuperscript{166}

\textit{Chart 7. Japan’s defense diplomacy activities with Vietnam.}\textsuperscript{167}

![Chart showing defense diplomacy activities with Vietnam]

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
Defense Equipment Transfer & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & \\
\hline
Working Level Meeting & 0 & 2 & 2 & 0 & 2 & 2 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \\
\hline
HA-DR & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \\
\hline
Bilateral Relations and Partnership Status - International Relations & 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 3 & 1 & 3 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\
\hline
Port Call & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 3 & \\
\hline
High Level Meeting & 0 & 2 & 0 & 2 & 2 & 6 & 6 & 6 & 6 & 11 & 0 \\
\hline
Military Exercises & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 4 & 3 & 1 & 3 \\
\hline
Training and Capacity Building & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 2 & 1 & 5 & 3 & 3 & 3 \\
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\end{tabular}
\caption{Japan’s defense diplomacy activities with Vietnam}
\end{table}

Japan’s overall engagement with Vietnam has a majority of pragmatic activities, with only two instances of a majority of mixed type activities happening in 2013 and 2014. The activities between these countries doubled from 2009 to 2010 with an equal number of mixed and pragmatic activities. The single transformative-only action that involved Vietnam for the years between 2006 and 2011 was the multilateral ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security where Japan assumed the joint chair along with Indonesia.


\textsuperscript{166} Hiep.

\textsuperscript{167} This chart shows tentative results for 2016, see Annex 1.
in 2008.\textsuperscript{168} Japan and Indonesia’s transformative-only defense diplomacy activities increased during the following years, with 2015 having three exchanges of this type. 2015 saw the lowest number of mixed defense diplomacy activities since 2007 and the highest number of pragmatic-only activities with 12.

\textit{Chart 8. Japan’s defense diplomacy activities with Vietnam.}\textsuperscript{169}

Although Japan’s relationship with Vietnam shows a high frequency of pragmatic exchanges, the character of their exchanges has been shaped by highly effective and influential transformative activities. The relationship between these two nations shifted its character to a more active engaging in defense and security-related matters after the signing of a memorandum on defense exchanges, and after establishing a “Strategic Partnership” in 2009.\textsuperscript{170} This made Japan the second nation to have this level of partnership with Vietnam after Russia.\textsuperscript{171}

The establishment of Vietnam and Japan’s strategic partnership was followed by annual “Strategic Partnership Dialogues”, with the first one occurring in December 2010.\textsuperscript{172} The relationship between these two countries improved quickly, in 2011 at the Shangri La Dialogue, both countries agreed to increase their cooperation due to the tensions surging in the South China Sea.\textsuperscript{173} In October 2011, Vietnam’s Minister of Defense visited Tokyo, 13 years since the previous official visit.\textsuperscript{174}

Vietnam’s attempts to secure a weapons transfer agreement from Japan in 2013\textsuperscript{175} are a clear example of the transformative power in Japan’s defense diplomacy. Due to Japan’s ODA regulations at the time, defense equipment transfers could not be received

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{168} Ibid 28.
  \item \textsuperscript{169} This chart shows tentative results for 2016, see Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{170} Ibid 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{171} Thayer.
  \item \textsuperscript{172} Annex 1, action 61.
  \item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid 71.
  \item \textsuperscript{174} Ibid 83.
  \item \textsuperscript{175} Ibid 140.
\end{itemize}
by another nation’s military. Vietnam decided to remove its coast guard from the direct administration of the ministry of defense and modified its composition to add responsibilities to the government and legislative bodies. Even though Vietnam’s minister of defense still exercises considerable power over the nation’s coast guard, this changing of the security structure of another nation is a clear example of transformative defense diplomacy.

**Conclusions**

Japan’s defense diplomacy with Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam has changed significantly in recent years. An analysis of Japan’s 241 defense diplomacy activities with the three selected countries during the 2006-2016 period shows a change in the strategic use of defense diplomacy. Japan’s core strategy is to position itself as a nation committed to regional security and the upholding of international law, freedom of navigation and rule-based behavior amongst nations in South East Asia, and to counter China’s disruptive role in the region. These strategic goals are sought through activities that enhance the defensive and maritime monitoring capabilities of countries in the region, and signal a common understanding of the security challenges of the region, seeking to balance against common threats. The use of defense diplomacy for this strategic purpose coincides with Cottee and Forster’s definition of an “old” defense diplomacy focused on the countering of enemies and realpolitik ethos. A deeper analysis of the activities that Japan has with Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam evince how the “new” defense diplomacy that supports human rights, good governance and security self-sufficiency on a national level is also pursued, but not as its principal approach.

During the first years of the 2006-2016 period of study, Japan’s involvement with the case studies was composed by a reduced use of pragmatic or mixed defense diplomacy activities. These activities were focused mainly on Humanitarian Assistance-Disaster Relief activities, and capacity building and training in areas like prevention of piracy and maritime terrorism. Prime Minister Abe reconfirmed Japan’s commitment to the security of the region on these aspects in his 2007 visit to Indonesia. Indonesia had received the previous year an Official Development Assistance grant for the construction of non-military vessels. The change in Japan’s defense diplomacy strategy occurred in 2011, a year after the Senkaku Crisis with China, and shows a clear reformulation in Japan’s use of defense diplomacy.

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178 Cottee and Forster, 365, 8.
179 Ibid.
180 Annex 1, action 27.
181 Ibid, 5.
of defense diplomacy. Japan’s changes to its defense diplomacy have been in response to China’s growing assertiveness, but the changes amount to more than a balancing effort from Japan in the region, Japan’s defense diplomacy is oriented towards strengthening the existing rules-based order in the region.

The changes in Japan’s use of defense diplomacy go beyond the sharp increase in the number of defense diplomacy activities. Japan opted for a deepening in scope and reach of both defense diplomacy objectives. By increasing the instances of high-level meetings between defense and security officials, Japan managed to expand the SDF’s involvement in multilateral military exercises as well as expanding the scope of the training and capacity building activities with the nations in South East Asia. Seminars and other courses held by Japan’s Ministry of Defense in diving and submarine medicine, oceanography and aviation law complemented courses and seminars already given in areas such as the enhancement of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts and peacekeeping operations. This transition is also indicated in the manner that Japan’s bilateral defense diplomacy activities increased at a higher rate than the multilateral ones.

Indications of Japan’s deepening involvement with ASEAN are inferred through the research data despite being outside the scope of study in this research, this is seen in the progression of activities such as the continuation of the ASEAN-Japan Counter Terrorism Dialogue and the ASEAN Defense Minister Meetings Plus field training exercises on HA-DR. Japan’s participation in multilateral exercises evidences a strategy of projecting broad and ambitious goals for regional security in multilateral scenarios first, and exploiting the opportunities to develop on those goals with receptive nations on a bilateral level at a later stage. This two-tiered approach provides a greater degree of transparency and accountability to Japan’s defense diplomacy, as other countries in the region are aware of the priorities and intentions of Japan. Japan received declarations of support from countries in ASEAN in 2007 with the creation of a Ministry of Defense, confirming regional awareness and support to the changes occurring in Japan’s security structure.

Japan’s limitations on the use of force, the transfer of military equipment and other policy regulations create important distinctions in the type of defense diplomacy employed. Vietnam’s changes to its coast guard’s organizational structure and institutional hierarchy to secure an ODA cooperation of patrol boats is a clear example of this. In this exchange, a mostly pragmatic defense diplomacy activity became highly transformative, requiring Vietnam’s reform of elements in its security sector to receive defense equipment from Japan.

Japan’s start of negotiations for a new defense equipment transfer with Indonesia in

182 Ibid 165.
183 Ibid 131, 232.
February 2016 follows the placement of bilateral relations between these nations on a “Strategic Partnership” level in late 2015. Indonesia was the last case study to reach this level. These activities hold a mixed value since Japan’s transfer of defense equipment and bilateral partnership status are done in a framework of understanding of regional security threats. It is during this period that Indonesia becomes more involved in the South China Sea disputes between ASEAN nations and China. Japan’s growing involvement in military exercises with the Philippines also holds a transformative dimension, as they are mostly oriented towards gaining interoperability capabilities in HA-DR.

The aforementioned activities show the varying degree in which Japan has pursued transformative objectives in its defense diplomacy. They showcase the considerable influence that Japan wields in transforming the defense and security elements as its defense diplomacy partners, despite its limited involvement. Japan’s pragmatic defense diplomacy activities serve a dual purpose: First in enhancing the effect of the transformative aspects in the defense diplomacy relations with the case studies, and second in strengthening Japan’s role as a reliable partner in regional security. Pragmatic defense diplomacy seeks to improve cooperative relationships amongst nations, including the capabilities for cooperation in a state of crisis.

The accumulation and increased frequency of capacity building efforts and military exercises by Japan, whether in anti-piracy, disaster relief, and maritime security, amongst others, are evidence of a clear desire to create a series of customs and joint practices with each of the countries studied. The addition of new variants in these types of engagements helps identify the broader security objectives in Japan’s defense diplomacy. The expansion of pragmatic exchanges to include bilateral military exercises and port calls by Japan’s MSDF vessels are clear indicators of Japan’s intent in improving the image of its security forces in the region and deepening the level of cooperation with other countries.

These actions have a balancing effect on China’s activities in the South China Sea. Japan’s support to the stances from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam of resolving territorial disputes through the mechanisms of international law and the enhancement of its maritime security capabilities are a “calibrated escalation” in the region. Japan’s involvement in the region is significant, since it has larger resources and maritime security capabilities than Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam combined. It is also an involvement in the region’s security by an ally of the United States, a status no country in the region has.

Although each of the case studies holds a different level of closeness and security

185 Annex 1, action 224.
187 Vietnam upgraded its relationship with Japan to this status in 2009 and the Philippines in 2011. Ibid 41, 76.
188 IBRU, “Japan Strengthens South China Sea Ties with the Philippines and Vietnam,” in Boundary News (United Kingdom: Durham University, 2015).
189 SIPRI.
cooperation with Japan, the pathway of cooperation is the same. The high-level meeting led process of progressively upgrading to a “Strategic” or “Extended Strategic” partnership is consistent across all cases. This provides Japan with an opportunity to standardize its defense diplomacy with South East Asian countries in a way that it takes advantage of multilateral security initiatives. In South East Asia, Japan’s defense diplomacy engagement is thus seen as a consistent and equally accessible process for all countries, oriented in reaching a consensus on the security challenges and threats for the region and enhancing the maritime security capabilities of each nation.

This research reveals that Japan’s defense diplomacy with the Philippines is oriented towards enhancing and complementing the security relationship that the United States has with the Philippines. The results in this article challenge the possible assumption that Japan has prioritized its defense diplomacy engagement with the Philippines over the other countries in the region. This assumption is based on the fact that both countries share the same stance of upholding the rule of law in resolving the South China Sea territorial disputes and that the Philippines has already sought UN arbitration on the issues. Instead, Japan’s defense diplomacy with Vietnam has seen the largest transformation and intensity over the 2006-2016 period. Japan has been the main ODA donor of Vietnam for several years, reaching 148.5 billion Yen in 2012. Additionally, no other country in the region has upgraded its relationship with Japan to an extended security partnership. Japan’s defense diplomacy with Indonesia started gaining prominence in 2015, as Indonesia started taking a stronger posture regarding the South China Sea disputes. Japan’s defense diplomacy is mainly oriented on the parameters of the “old” defense diplomacy, based on the realpolitik reasoning of enhancing the capabilities of allied states against a common enemy or threat.

This article’s initial assumption was that Japan has changed from a transformative to a pragmatic defense diplomacy in response to China’s actions in the South China Sea. However, the results prove instead that Japan’s defense diplomacy is changing from an infrequent, mostly pragmatic defense diplomacy to a frequent defense diplomacy engagement that is mainly pragmatic with strong transformative characteristics. This change was provoked as a response to the Senkaku 2010 crisis and China’s assertive actions in the South China Sea, but is oriented towards a broader objective than just seeking to balance China’s power. Japan’s defense diplomacy is oriented towards the promotion of Japan as a reliable and transparent partner in regional security affairs and securing in the region a rules-based system that subscribes to international law.

High level meetings and bilateral partnership agreements are at the cornerstone of Japan’s defense diplomacy, gradually widening the types of activities to military exercises,

191 Cottey and Forster, 365, 14.
capacity building and training, and defense equipment transfers. Japan’s increased execution of these activities at a bilateral level indicate the orientation that Japan has taken. Japan’s changes in its use of defense diplomacy evince that it has committed to this resource of international statecraft in a broad, ambitious and calculated manner. Japan has a carefully executed defense diplomacy that is coherent with Japan’s security interests and priorities in the region, but that it is, at the same time, also conscious of its own limitations.

The study of a nation’s security through their execution of defense diplomacy provides results that aid in the assessment of a country’s changes in its defense and security policies. Defense diplomacy has limitations in its theoretical grounding and its concept holds diverse interpretations by prominent scholars. Nevertheless, the analysis of a country’s defense diplomacy based on empirical data helps understand the uses and limitations not only of the country’s defense diplomacy activities, but also of its process of conception, its capacity as an influence wielding action and the power relationships with other nations.
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Annex 1

Matrix of Defense Diplomacy Activities.

You can download the data at this link:
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