



## **The Geo-Political Situation in the Indo-Pacific Region and Japan's New National Security Strategy**

**TANINAI Ichitomo**

Japan developed and published its new National Security Strategy last December. This paper aims to explain the background, the main contents of the Strategy and the implications of it for the Indo-Pacific region and Cambodia.

### ***The Geo-Political Situation in the Indo-Pacific Region***

First of all, from a positive perspective, the Indo-Pacific region has become one of the world's centers of growth and, as a result, there are many opportunities for greater economic prosperity. In terms of economic growth, most countries in the region are now opening up their borders again after COVID and positive economic growth is predicted. For instance, Cambodia's economy is already growing rapidly once again.

Generally, strong and numerous trade and investment relationships benefit every country involved and, today, most countries in the region are institutionalizing trade and investment liberalization through numerous FTAs/EPAs, such as CPTPP (TPP11), RCEP and AJCEP, and many bilateral trade and investment agreements.

However, from Japan's perspective, if we look at the security environment in the region, the situation is more challenging and complex than it has been since the Second World War. Perhaps the most concerning issue is that some countries are unilaterally attempting to change the status

quo by force, endangering the territorial sovereignty of other countries. Indeed, the security environment in the area surrounding Japan has changed dramatically since 2013, when the previous National Security Strategy of Japan was issued.<sup>1</sup> In fact, one observer recently described the current international order as older geopolitical risks colliding with complex new challenges.<sup>2</sup>

There are numerous examples of these challenges. Firstly, North Korea has recently escalated its ballistic missile launches in clear violation of numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions. Last year, North Korea launched more than ninety missiles, most of them ballistic missiles. One of these missiles flew over Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean.<sup>3</sup> North Korea has been making rapid progress with missile-related technologies and its operational capabilities and it intends to enhance its nuclear capability, both in terms of quality and quantity, at maximum speed.

Secondly, there is China's rapid buildup of its military.<sup>4</sup> Japan's National Security Strategy points out that "China has intensified its attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force in the maritime and air domains, including in the East China Sea and South China Sea".<sup>5 6</sup>

Thirdly, Russia is continuing its aggression against Ukraine in clear violation of international law, including the UN Charter that prohibits the use of force, except when certain conditions have been met. Russia's military activities have shaken the very foundation of the international order. If the international community allows Russia to use force to take what it wants, a precedent would be set and similar things could happen in the Indo-Pacific region in the future.

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1 Adam P. Liff, "Proactive Stabilizer: Japan's Role in the Asia-Pacific Security Order" cited in Yoichi Funabashi and G. John Ikenberry (eds), *The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism* (Brookings Institution Press, 2020).

2 Richard Haass, "The Dangerous Decade", *Foreign Affairs Magazine* (September/October, 2022)

3 [Online]. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/article/north-korea-missile-launches.html>

4 In fact, China's announced national defense budget grew approximately 39-fold in the 30 years from FY1992 and approximately 2.2-fold from FY2012. See *Defense of Japan 2022*, p.33 [Online]. Available: [https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w\\_paper/wp2022/DOJ2022\\_EN\\_Full\\_02.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2022/DOJ2022_EN_Full_02.pdf)

5 "National Security Strategy of Japan", p.8 [Online]. Available: <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>

6 "China's put-upon maritime neighbours are pushing back", *The Economist* (1 February, 2023) and Andrew D. Taffer and David Wallsh, "China's Indo-Pacific Folly", *Foreign Affairs Magazine* (January 31, 2023).

Therefore, although there are great opportunities for the region, we see that the geo-political situation has become increasingly challenging and complex.

### *Japan's New National Security Strategy*

Japan formulated its new National Security Strategy last December. This was the first update in nine years. During those nine years, maintaining security within the region has become much more challenging. With this in mind, the Strategy primarily aims to defend Japan's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, as well as securing the safety of its own nationals.

The new security policy is mainly defined in the National Security Strategy, with supplementary details provided in the National Defense Strategy and the Defense Program.<sup>7</sup> The strategic guidance and policies detailed in these three documents show that there has been a major shift in Japan's security policy since the Second World War.

The Strategy is to be implemented in accordance with a number of fundamental principles, including, among others:

1. a proactive contribution to peace based on international cooperation,
2. supporting universal values, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law,  
and
3. co-existence and co-prosperity with other countries, cooperation with like-minded countries and multilateral cooperation.

Japan will implement the following strategic approaches, including:

1. conducting diplomacy, guided by the vision set out in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),

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<sup>7</sup> The policy documents are available at <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryoku/221216anzenhoshou.html>.

2. fundamentally reinforcing defense capabilities, including introducing counterstrike capabilities,
3. significantly reinforcing maritime security and law enforcement capabilities,  
and
4. strengthening the Japan-US alliance and cooperating with like-minded countries.

The Strategy directs that the Japanese government will allocate national budget equivalent to 2% of the current GDP to defense capabilities and complementary initiatives by FY2027. This is an increase of 1% when compared to the current level of about 1% of GDP and demonstrates the seriousness of Japan's commitment to further contributing to regional and international peace and security.

The Strategy provides guidance on promoting international cooperation, especially through Official Development Assistance (ODA). Under the vision set out in FOIP, Japan will promote ODA in such areas as high-quality infrastructure, human resource development, maritime security, and the rule of law.

The new strategy demonstrates a very important shift in Japan's national security strategy and policies. It is designed to enhance our own capabilities in order to counter the growing security challenges in the area around Japan and within the region. However, it also emphasizes the need for an enhanced diplomatic and multilateral approach, such as FOIP.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Reference to some comments by third parties maybe worthwhile making. Jennifer Lind of Dartmouth College in the USA recently observed that "Japan's moves are good news and signal a greater contribution by a peaceful country to security in Asia". Christopher Johnstone from the Center for Strategic and International Studies also recently wrote that "Japan's commitment to increase defense spending and to invest in new capabilities is among the most significant strategic developments in the Indo-Pacific in decades." (Jennifer Lind, "Japan Steps Up", *Foreign Affairs Magazine* (December 23, 2022). Christopher Johnstone, "To Make Japan Stronger, America Must Pull It Together", *Foreign Affairs Magazine* (January 12, 2023)) It is noteworthy that H. E. Prak Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia, expressed his support when he met with Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa at the Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 24 January 2023 in Tokyo. Available at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000361.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000361.html).

## *The Importance of Diplomacy*

Japan needs to upgrade its national power in a comprehensive manner in order to respond to a severe and complex security environment. This does not mean that Japan is only focusing on the enhancement of its defense capabilities, which is the ‘last resort’ approach to national security. Any strategy must also include guidance on diplomatic, economic, technological and intelligence capabilities.

Among these areas, applying skillful diplomacy is critically important and highly relevant to the region’s peace and stability. It is necessary to build and maintain trust between countries so that the international community has a foundation on which to work to ensure peace and prosperity in the region. For example, Japan and China should, and are, continuing their efforts, at the highest levels, to manage their relationship so as to strive for a stable and peaceful regional environment.<sup>9</sup>

Firstly, Japan’s new security strategy reflects the vision of FOIP and Japan is willing to cooperate with countries that share similar values and goals. ASEAN is the most important partner for Japan in this endeavor. In fact, Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio recently remarked in a policy speech that Southeast Asian countries are the closest and most crucial partners for Japan. He observed that the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) resonate with each other and he expressed his intention to demonstrate that Japan's ties with Southeast Asian countries constitute a core element of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, even in the face of the drastically changing international community.<sup>10</sup>

ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019. The AOIP provides a guideline for ASEAN's engagement with its external partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

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<sup>9</sup> The point was precisely emphasized in the press releases. Available at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/cn/page1e\\_000550.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page1e_000550.html) and [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000367.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000367.html).

<sup>10</sup> For further details about his remarks, please see [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/statement/202301/\\_00005.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202301/_00005.html)[https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/statemen/202301/\\_00005.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statemen/202301/_00005.html).

In the same year, Japan and ASEAN confirmed their shared view of promoting a rule-based Indo-Pacific region that is free and open. Furthermore, in 2020, Japan and ASEAN noted that both the AOIP and FOIP concepts shared relevant fundamental principles in promoting peace and cooperation. As a result, they began to engage in enhanced cooperation initiatives designed to promote the AOIP cooperation.

Japan's cooperation with AOIP covers all of its four priority areas, including maritime cooperation, connectivity among ASEAN member countries, the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and cooperation in economic and other areas. Their priority areas coincide with Japan's priorities and, above all, Japan considers it important to support ASEAN centrality in regional initiatives. Therefore, Japan supports ASEAN member countries in this regard. Currently, there are more than seventy active projects that are being supported by Japan for the realization of AOIP. Japan appreciates that Cambodia is the first ASEAN country to support FOIP.

Secondly, Japan will continue to promote the rule of law, including the UN Charter and its principles. Japan appreciates and commends Cambodia's unwavering opposition to any use or threat of force to infringe on the territorial integrity of other countries, as has been evidenced by the three UNGA Resolutions pertaining to the war in Ukraine that Cambodia has supported as a co-sponsor.

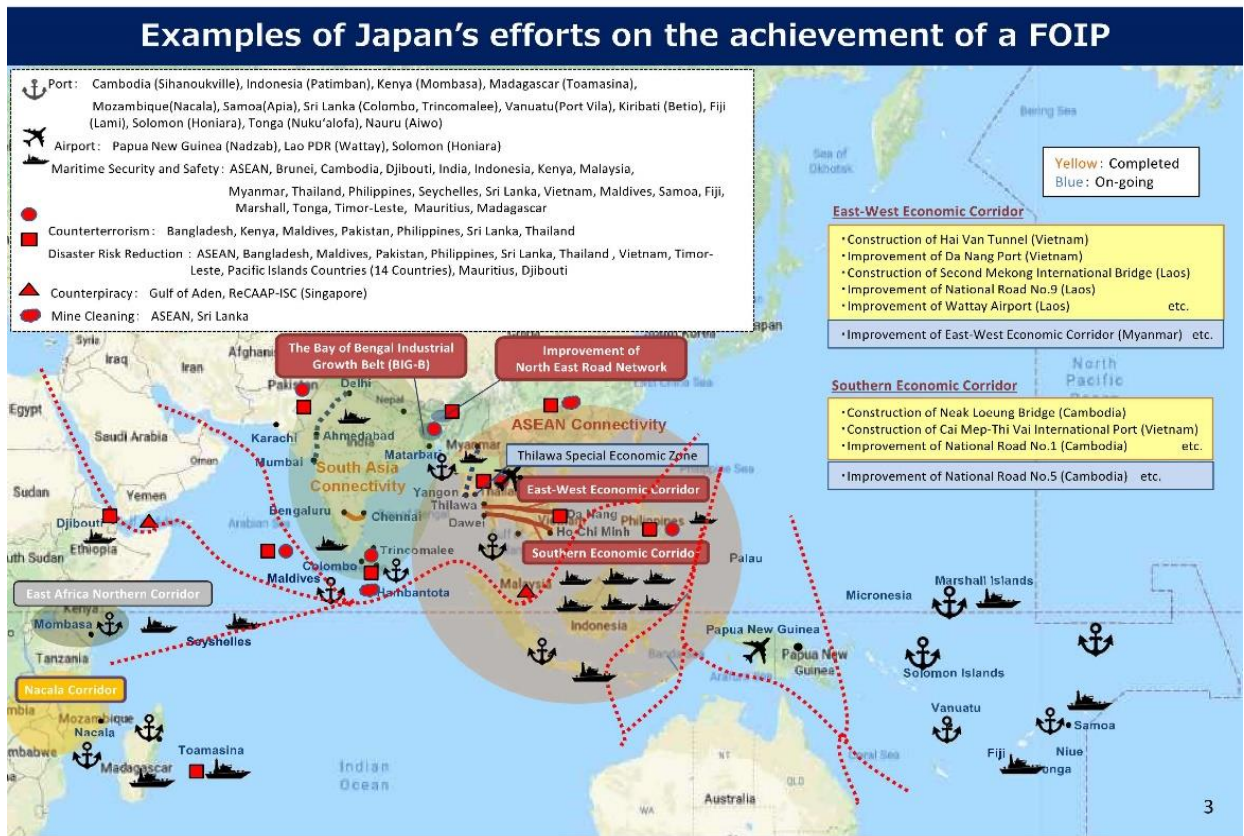


Figure 1: Japan's efforts on the achievement of a FOIP

Source: [Online]. Available:

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e\\_000278.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e_000278.html)

### Economic Security

One of the key features of the Strategy is that it includes a new focus on economic security perspectives. Modern warfare is increasingly a hybrid affair. There are no longer clear-cut boundaries between military and non-military measures. Blackwill and Harris have already articulated this in their 2016 book *“War by Other Means”*.<sup>11</sup>

11 Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

For example, there are many high-tech products made for non-military purposes that can be transferred to military use, such as, to name just a few, nuclear materials and equipment, sensors and lasers, and aerospace and propulsion systems. The private sector is increasingly producing more sophisticated parts and machinery that could be described as ‘dual use’ and many countries are becoming increasingly aware of the need to tighten export controls.

Another example is the use of economic coercion. Some countries are attempting to expand their own influence by economically coercing other countries.<sup>12</sup> They do this by, for example, restricting the export of mineral resources, food, and industrial and medical supplies, or by providing loans to nations in a manner that ignores their debt sustainability.

Therefore, the new National Security Strategy provides guidance on economic security. Japan recently enacted a basic law, the Economic Security Promotion Act, to promote economic security.<sup>13</sup>

### *Japan’s Contribution to Indo-Pacific Region and Cooperation with Cambodia*

Japan is committed to taking a leading role in enhancing the peace, stability, and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indo-Pacific region is one of the world’s centers of economic growth, yet there are a variety of challenges facing the region, including piracy, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass

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12 For cases about the economic coercion, please see [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)738219](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)738219)[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)738219](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)738219) and [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA700/PEA796-1/RAND\\_PEA796-1.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA700/PEA796-1/RAND_PEA796-1.pdf).

13 For further discussions about the economic aspect of the Japan’s FIOP, please see [https://www.cao.go.jp/keizai\\_anzen\\_hosho/index.html](https://www.cao.go.jp/keizai_anzen_hosho/index.html) and [https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/economic%20security%20promotion%20act%20%28summary%29%28English%29.pdf?utm\\_source=sendupdatelogo](https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/economic%20security%20promotion%20act%20%28summary%29%28English%29.pdf?utm_source=sendupdatelogo)[https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/economic%20security%20promotion%20act%20%28summary%29%28English%29.pdf?utm\\_source=sendupdatelogo](https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/economic%20security%20promotion%20act%20%28summary%29%28English%29.pdf?utm_source=sendupdatelogo).



destruction, natural disasters, environmental degradation, and illegal fishing. Tackling these will require our concerted efforts, and Japan will work together with other countries in this regard.

It is necessary to use the rules set out in international law to establish maritime order in the region. Japan will continue to contribute to the region's peace and stability through capacity building initiatives that focus on maritime law enforcement, disaster risk reduction, anti-piracy, and nuclear non-proliferation.

Japan will continue providing economic assistance, including supporting projects to enhance connectivity such as, in the case of Cambodia, the development of Sihanoukville Port and National Road 5, and providing grass-roots support for school development and community empowerment.



Figure 2: Japan-Cambodia Summit Meeting held in Phnom Penh on 12 November 2023

Source: [Online]. Available:[https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/sa/sea1/kh/page23\\_004056.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/sa/sea1/kh/page23_004056.html)

Cambodia is an important partner for Japan in terms of working together for peace and prosperity in the region and the wider world. This year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Cambodia and, to mark the occasion, the leaders of both countries have decided, starting this year, to upgrade their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).

Under the CSP, it is expected that the bilateral cooperation will become wider and deeper as we progress further down the road. Examples of this cooperation include, firstly, Japanese and Cambodian collaboration on the provision of humanitarian assistance to other countries. I recently visited Siem Reap and witnessed that, with the support of Japan, Ukrainian personnel were being trained on land mine clearance by the Cambodian experts. Japan will continue to support the enhancement of Cambodia's capability in conducting PKO operations around the world. Japan greatly appreciates Cambodia's proactive contribution to world peace and its efforts to support humanitarian projects.



Figure 3: Training for Ukrainian personnel in land mine clearance

Source: Embassy of Japan in Cambodia

Secondly, both countries are expected to deepen their defense exchanges and cooperation. Dr. Hun Manet, Commander of Cambodian Army, visited Japan in February 2022. In turn, Mr. Yoshihide Yoshida, Chief of Japan’s Ground Self-Defense Forces, visited Cambodia in February this year and signed a cooperation document with Dr. Hun Manet.<sup>14</sup> Japan’s maritime self-defense vessels paid friendly port visit to Sihanoukville twice last year and are expected to make similar visits this year.



Figure 4: Port call of Japan’s Self-Defense Force Vessel

Source: Embassy of Japan in Cambodia

Thirdly, it is likely that cooperation on environmental protection will be given a higher priority through enhanced collaboration with the private sector. Besides, collaboration opportunities in the

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<sup>14</sup> For the report about this meeting, please see <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501239507/rca-jgsdf-ink-pact-to-boost-ties/>.

areas of digital and state-of-the art technologies will be explored, for instance, through the utilization of the Cambodia-Japan Digitalized Manufacturing Center (CJDM).<sup>15</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

Despite its huge potential for growth and prosperity, the Indo-Pacific region is faced with a security environment that has become quite challenging and complex. Japan's new National Security Strategy is primarily intended to deal with the situation through the significant enhancement of its defense capabilities. Yet the Strategy is comprehensive in nature and particularly emphasizes the need for an enhanced engagement in the Indo-Pacific region in line with the vision set out in FOIP. It is, therefore, expected that the new Strategy will enable Japan to further enhance its security and diplomatic engagement with the ASEAN countries, including Cambodia.

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**Mr. TANINAI Ichitomo** is the Deputy Chief of Mission / Minister at the Embassy of Japan in Cambodia. As a career foreign service officer, he has held posts relating to international law, economic affairs, disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear affairs, international cooperation, policies relating to the Korean Peninsula, etc. His previous overseas postings have included Vienna and Warsaw. He holds a MA from the University of Chicago.

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<sup>15</sup> For the report about Japan and Cambodia cooperation on the digital related sectors, please see <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/japan-aided-industry-40-centre-view>.

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