

Japan's Strategy toward Southeast Asia and the Japan-U.S. Alliance

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Background

Southeast Asia, with a population of more than 620 million and a growing working-age middle class, is beginning to reap the benefits of its demographic dividend. Southeast Asia's total gross domestic product (GDP) was \$2.3 trillion in 2012, bigger than India's and 12.5 percent of the total GDP of Asia, making it one of the largest and fastest-growing markets in the world. The development of supply chain linkages in the region has increased intraregional interdependence in Southeast Asia and multilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) have also helped to connect it to other parts of the world.

Southeast Asia occupies a critical strategic geopolitical location in the Asia-Pacific's maritime and aviation networks. It lies at the crossroads of the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean and astride key global sea lanes and chokepoints, such as the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. Each year \$5.3 trillion worth of shipping passes through the waterways of Southeast Asia.² In addition, Bangkok and Singapore function as key hub airports connecting passengers traveling to and from Oceania, Northeast Asia, and South Asia. In terms of international passenger traffic in 2013, Singapore and Bangkok rank numbers five and eight in the world, respectively.³ A well-connected Asia-Pacific, or Indo-Pacific, is not possible without an open and active Southeast Asia.

In this era of economic integration, Southeast Asian countries have chosen to diversify internationally to maximize their security and stability. This focus on diversification, or "risk hedging," seeks to avoid assertive action by non-Southeast Asian countries, including China, Japan, or the United States. Southeast Asia's priority is keeping diversification feasible. In addition to Southeast Asia's growing economic power, it also has gained substantial diplomatic influence through collective decisionmaking in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), East Asia

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² ASEAN Matters for America/America Matters for ASEAN, East West Center, Washington, DC, http://www.asiamattersforamerica.org/sites/all/themes/eastwestcenter/pdfs/Asean_Matters_for_America_brochure2.pdf.

³ Airports Council International's 2013 data, <http://www.aci.aero/Data-Centre/Annual-Traffic-Data>.

Summit (EAS), and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), as well as ASEAN+3 and ASEAN+6 meetings.

In 2013, Japan made clear Southeast Asia's strategic importance when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited 10 Southeast Asian countries in a single year, a first not only for a Japanese prime minister, but for all non-ASEAN leaders. This ASEAN-focused diplomacy culminated in the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in December 2013, in which Japan and ASEAN released a joint statement announcing: "We recognized the important role that ASEAN and Japan could play to address regional and global challenges and exchanged our views on issues of common interests."⁴

Japan's Strategic Goal

Japan's first regional goal should be to build a stronger Southeast Asia. This strategic goal is important for two reasons. First, it is crucial that Southeast Asia be a stable and prosperous region for its own wellbeing. Second, a stronger Southeast Asia would make Asia as a whole more balanced, stable, and prosperous. A unipolar Asia would create space for power-based intraregional politics. To make Asia stable and prosperous and to encourage a rules/consensus-based Asia—a balanced multipolar Asia (e.g., China, India, ASEAN, and Japan)—is important. Southeast Asia, as the region where we can expect accelerated growth while China's growth slows, will hold vital strategic meaning and determine whether Asia can be stabilized as a whole.

Japan's second goal should be to reinforce its status as Southeast Asia's legitimate partner. In other words, Japan needs to gain legitimacy by leading and being endorsed by its partners and neighbors. Strength is a prerequisite, but legitimacy is critical considering the destructive power of modern weaponry and Asia's closely interconnected economy. The competition today is not simply over power itself, but a more subtle competition for legitimacy, which defines the way states use their accumulated power.

Japan's third goal relates to the classic phrase: "Foreign policy begins at home." Japan's strategy is best accomplished by satisfying domestic needs, which is why Southeast Asia is likely to matter more as Japan faces the demographic challenges of an aging society. Japan will need a stable and active partnership with an emerging community of great talent and youth. Japan is one of the few countries that has enjoyed a long-term, stable, strong, and peaceful relationship with Southeast Asian countries for more than 40 years. There is no place like Southeast Asia that has shared stable relations with Japan, and becoming its closest partner is strategically important for Japan's prosperity in the decades to come.

Japan's fourth goal acknowledges that as it is neither the economic giant it was 30 years ago, nor a military powerhouse, it is crucial to redefine Japan's role in Southeast Asia and the broader global

⁴ "Hand in hand, facing regional and global challenges," Joint Statement of the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, December 14, 2013, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000022451.pdf>.

society. Japan's national strength is best described by the term "resiliency." Japan has demonstrated its resilience in terms of domestic economic and disaster relief policies, but resilience could also be valuable in Japan's diplomacy. Japanese diplomats should seek to build a "resilient society" in Southeast Asia and the broader region. This policy is a good fit because it is also a goal in Southeast Asia. In 2013, at the APEC meeting in Bali, Indonesia, APEC leaders led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia called for a "resilient Asia-Pacific, engine of global growth." This is a golden moment for Japan to match its values with those of ASEAN.

Enhancing Resiliency in Southeast Asia

In pursuit of these goals, Japan's strategy for strengthening Southeast Asia should be to enhance "four resiliencies" in Southeast Asia: economic, political, environmental, and security.

Economic Resilience

Keeping Southeast Asian production capability strong and maintaining connectivity among both markets and networks is a shared Southeast Asian, Japanese, and even American interest. The sustainability or resilience of the current liberal economic order is yet to be confirmed. High-performing economies in the region—such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore—aspire to attain the next level of development, following in the footsteps of Taiwan and South Korea. However, their economic resilience needs to be enhanced to address challenges to Southeast Asia's economies, such as economic disparities.

The strength of Southeast Asia's economy in the coming decade is not low-cost labor or natural resources—it is the growing middle class. Japan now has more invested in Southeast Asia than China, which had been Japan's favorite investment target.⁵ Southeast Asia is not only a production engine, but a rapidly growing consumption engine as well. To maintain stable, sustainable, and balanced growth is particularly important for major economic partners, such as Japan, the United States, and China.

The Southeast Asian consumer market is highly attractive to Japanese businesses given the shrinking size of Japan's own population and its aging society. Due to Japan's demographic constraints, its companies inevitably go abroad and invest for growth and survival. In so doing, Southeast Asia has become not only a production base but also an indispensable consumption market. Ultimately, Japan's objective is to establish a middle class that shares Japanese values and a secure, open, and connected Southeast Asia.

⁵ In the first half of 2013, Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) in Southeast Asia reached \$10.3 billion (a 50 percent increase compared with 2012)—more than twice its FDI in China, which stood at \$5 billion (a 30 percent decrease compared with 2012). In the first half of 2009, FDI in Southeast Asia and China were roughly equal, at around \$7 billion. Since then, Japanese FDI in Southeast Asia has surpassed that in China. The exception is 2012, when Thailand suffered a particularly serious flood that damaged the country's key industrial zones. (See *Nikkei Shimbun*, November 20, 2013). Also, the Japanese automobile industry sold 2.73 million new cars in ASEAN in 2012, equivalent to its sales in China for that year. Its market share in Southeast Asia was 79 percent, but dropped to 20 percent in China in the wake of the crisis over the Senkaku Islands. See *Nikkei Shimbun*, September 11, 2013.

The major challenge for Southeast Asia to enhancing its economic resiliency is decreasing two economic disparities. The first challenge is domestic disparity. Poverty remains a serious concern and the income gap is widening in each country. Geographical distribution of wealth within countries is highly unbalanced, as major metropolitan areas take a larger share of growth while peripheries are left underdeveloped. The second challenge is intraregional disparity among Southeast Asian countries, which could be a major destabilizing factor for Southeast Asia. This is particularly problematic in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (the CLM countries) as well as other ASEAN member states. As the ASEAN Economic Community seeks economic integration by the end of 2015, ASEAN depends on private corporations' supply chain management. The economic competition in ASEAN will be a contest for high-value-added components of the supply chain. In this regard, there is a "first mover advantage" or a "lock-in effect" that favors countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and now Vietnam. The CLM countries need to catch up in order to avoid being trapped in low-value-added economic areas, as demonstrated by the "smiling curve" model. This structural unfairness could lead to dissention within Southeast Asia, which could potentially spill over to security issues. A balanced and prosperous Southeast Asia is in Japan's interest, because it is required for continued political stability and Japanese economic growth.

Political Resilience

In recent years Indonesia, Japan, the United States, and others have helped Myanmar gain international trust and respect, particularly in Southeast Asia. President Thein Sein, despite being a high-ranking military general during Tan Shwe's regime, has achieved credibility in committing himself to major political reforms. However, it is too early to be assured of Myanmar's long-term political stability. Various challenges lie ahead, such as constitutional privileges for the military, prohibitions preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from running for president, and the lack of protections for ethnic minorities.⁶

The major question for Southeast Asia's political stability, especially in democratic countries, is how election losers accept defeat. Democratization does not guarantee economic development, stable commodity prices, higher wages, or ousting the old elite. Defeated politicians too often reject their defeat, as in Thailand, which is a danger to Myanmar and Cambodia as well. In all of these countries, especially in the current era when a military coup is a costly choice, the key institution for political stability is the judicial system, which has played a critical role in Thailand.⁷

⁶ Whether people will accept the election result in 2015 if Aung San Suu Kyi is not allowed to run for president remains an open question. Questions also remain about whether the National League for Democracy (NLD) can gain trust from minorities and manage ethnic conflicts, particularly with Muslims in Rakhine.

⁷ The role of judicial power is gaining importance as politics of the middle-income trap creates a platform for politicians to leverage their influence by capitalizing on feelings of economic nationalism. As we saw in the political battle not only in Thailand but also in Indonesia over the 2009 New Mineral Law and the Indonesian Constitutional Court's 2012 ruling dissolving BP Migas, it is now the judicial institutions that play a critical role to manage politicized economic issues as well. Labor movements and their demands for welfare in countries that manufacture or produce goods will be a hot-button issue. Japanese companies must have comprehensive knowledge of these

Japan and the United States can support maintaining political stability in Southeast Asia by promoting liberal democracy (i.e., free and fair elections, accountability, free media access, respect for human rights, and prohibition of xenophobic policies). Interethnic and intermigrant social structures and historical legacies are landmines that could derail democracy and economic growth in the region. The United States and Japan must work together to prevent ethnic issues from setting back democratic reforms.

Environmental Resilience

The main threats to human life in Southeast Asia have been environmental disasters, such as typhoons in the Philippines, floods in Bangkok, and volcanic eruptions and earthquakes in Indonesia. Disaster relief, therefore, is a key pillar of good governance. The challenge for Southeast Asian countries is to enhance disaster management capability, in order to secure the lives and livelihood of their nations, promote environmentally safe and energy-efficient economic development, and build urban infrastructures in densely populated Southeast Asia.

This is an area in which Japan can make a major difference. Japan's experience in handling natural disasters, such as the 2013 Tohoku Great Earthquake and the tsunami, demonstrates its capacity for both civil and military cooperation. Multinational humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) operations in the Philippines were a huge step forward in establishing a more resilient Asia. This practice should be cemented as a new area of cooperation in Asia to address the common threat of natural disasters.

Security Resilience

To maintain Southeast Asia as an open and stable economy, resilience in the field of security is indispensable, especially given the changing power balance in the region. Enhancing Southeast Asian security serves not only the respective countries in Southeast Asia, but also the whole of Asia. One key norm is the maintenance of freedom of navigation through strategically important sea-lanes (the Malacca Strait, South China Sea, and East China Sea) and freedom of overflight.⁸ Securing these global commons is vital to ensuring the region's continued economic growth and the smooth exchange of goods, information, and people.

The Philippines and Vietnam (and to a lesser degree Malaysia and Brunei) are facing maritime challenges from China in the South China Sea. This is a major threat not only to the sovereign claims of these countries, but also to every state whose economic activity is connected to the South China Sea. Asia's vibrant economy relies heavily on freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. For example, approximately 95 percent of Japan's energy supplies and 40 percent of its maritime trade passes through the South China Sea. Thus, maritime security in the South China Sea is critical to Japanese national interests. With China now projecting power throughout the South China Sea

dynamics, especially in the coming five years. It is vital that Japan understand how Southeast Asian governments will handle these new demands.

⁸ The phrase "free and safe maritime navigation and aviation" was coined at the ASEAN-Japan Summit in December 2013 and was a major topic of consensus building. See <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000022451.pdf>.

and challenging Southeast Asian countries, the way this dispute is solved will be crucial to the security of the region as a whole.

Three challenges complicate the South China Sea case. First, there is a clear asymmetric power relationship between the Southeast Asian countries and China. Southeast Asia's maritime law-enforcement capacity is limited compared to China's. This asymmetric power relationship offers little chance for Southeast Asian countries to establish their claims or to settle upon a code of conduct. Instead, China has been using its advantages to prolong the process, pursuing fait accompli actions to cement a "new status quo" in negotiations.

For Southeast Asian countries facing this impasse, choices are limited. The first option is to stand up to China and maintain the principle of reciprocity. However, the lesson from the standoff over Scarborough Shoal and other reefs and islands is that the costs proved bigger than the gains for the Philippines.⁹ Since the 2010 crisis between Japan and China, neighboring countries have also learned that China can utilize trade as a weapon in its bid to force policy changes in countries with which it has international disputes. Thus, only a few big countries such as the United States, India, and Japan can choose this option in disputes.

The second option is to counterbalance China by cooperating with another major power (i.e., the United States). This strategy is favored by the Philippines and Vietnam, which have appealed to the United States to support their claims.¹⁰ The difficulty for Southeast Asian countries in choosing this strategy is the possibility of being forced to "take sides" with either China or the United States. Being forced to "take sides" was precisely the dilemma that Cambodia confronted during its chairmanship of ASEAN; international pressure was aimed at Cambodia, which Cambodia absolutely wanted to avoid.¹¹

A third choice is a diplomatic strategy of international norm creation and diplomatic pressure. Strengthening enforcement of international norms under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is a vital diplomatic channel. Using this approach, Japan can clearly demonstrate its common interests and strategy with other littoral states in Southeast Asia. Therefore, Japan's strategy in this regard is to pursue multilateral and legal approaches by claiming that the situation is a common challenge to the global commons. With the first choice infeasible and the second choice forcing ASEAN to take sides, the third choice best serves ASEAN littoral states' interests.

The second challenge to enhancing Southeast Asian security is the ASEAN member states' different

⁹ China banned Filipino banana imports to "sanction" the latter nation during the Scarborough Shoal standoff. However, China denies this claim, saying it was a quarantine issue. Additionally, Chinese authorities restricted the issuance of tourist packages to the Philippines.

¹⁰ Secretary of State John Kerry was in Vietnam on December 14–16 and the Philippines on December 17–18, pledging the United States' commitment on maritime security assistance.

¹¹ For Prime Minister Hun Sen, the toughest dilemma will be taking sides either with Vietnam or China rather than the United States or China, due to his personal political career. His ascendancy to power could not have happened without support from Vietnam.

stances toward China. ASEAN can be effective only when the member nations have a consensus. Attitudes toward China naturally differ between countries depending on their geostrategic location, economic ties, and historical relationships. Despite the knowledge that bilateral negotiations disadvantage Southeast Asian countries, collective action has been difficult to coordinate. However, this does not mean that the ASEAN framework is ineffective. As Japan's strategy is to enhance ASEAN's collective position, cooperation in other areas could be important. For example, information sharing and capacity building through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum could address nontraditional security issues such as piracy and disaster management in maritime zones. Activities such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and Military Medicine Exercise held in Brunei in June 2013 have established cooperation among the defense forces of the ADMM-Plus countries under ASEAN.¹² Under this umbrella, ASEAN and Japan can enhance capacity and cooperation and can establish a framework that applies to gray-zone security challenges. Using the ASEAN-centered regional framework for nontraditional security issues offers Japan an opportunity since this platform allows Japan and ASEAN states together with other key partners such as the United States, China, Korea, and Australia to address shared regional challenges together.

The third important challenge is that despite the security threats noted above, China remains an important partner and neighbor. Neither Japan nor its Southeast Asian friends can afford an all-out confrontational relationship with China. Both Southeast Asia and Japan need to be clear that there is no intention to contain China. Security resilience in the region is fundamentally about whether the rule of law can prevail over rule of power. If rule of power wins, the stability and prosperity of this region would cease. It is in the interest of ASEAN countries, Japan, the United States, and China that these nations secure an open ASEAN and keep Southeast Asia a place where law rules rather than power.

Taking all three issues into account, Southeast Asia can first enhance its security resilience by improving surveillance in maritime zones. The surveillance system is crucial because it is necessary for effective law enforcement and settling disputes legally. Southeast Asian countries, however, at this stage lack the capacity to monitor every sea and air passage; the vast size of the maritime zone makes it difficult to make a strong legal claim based on well-monitored accumulated violations.

Finally, Southeast Asian countries will always face a tough decision between the United States and China, with domestic politicization remaining a challenge. Japan's role and its importance is that it can offer a low-risk hedge that prevents Southeast Asian countries from being drawn into a zero-sum game between the United States and China.

¹² See Joint Declaration on the Second ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, Bandar Seri Begawan, August 29, 2013, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2013/aug/29aug13_nr/29aug13_fs.html#.U0WepVdTDLU.

Recommendations for Japan's Southeast Asia Policy and the U.S.-Japan Alliance in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia's core interest is maintaining its political and economic stability. Japan's strategy should be first, to meet Southeast Asia's interests; second, to strengthen Southeast Asia; and third, to reinforce its position as a reliable and legitimate partner for Southeast Asia. It is critical that Japan and the United States actively engage Southeast Asia. The expectation that Southeast Asia will "risk hedge" must be the baseline for designing a strategy toward Southeast Asia. Stronger triangular ties among Southeast Asia, Japan, and the United States are fundamental to effective risk hedging. East Asia is undergoing a subtle competition for legitimacy and legality, in addition to the military and economic power balance. "Just showing up" at multilateral conferences such as EAS and APEC is not good enough anymore; setting the political agenda is the real battleground. In so doing, there are four areas in which the United States and Japan should further commit themselves:

1. Economic Resilience

- Macroeconomic performance in Southeast Asia continues to rise and impress the world, but Gini coefficients are also rising. In order to lessen economic disparities while sustaining growth, the United States and Japan should first support economic reforms and second support private infrastructure development. Supporting private investment in key transportation projects will be a catalyst for regional development in Southeast Asia. Supporting underdeveloped zones would not only balance the economy but also help to stabilize local politics.
- Supporting middle-class expansion by promoting advanced skilled labor will help to capitalize on broader economic opportunities. Japanese companies are in an especially good position to meet the expectations of Southeast Asian countries facing this challenge, due to Japan's capacity-building experience as well as its manufacturing and production standards. This would not only establish the basis for a value-added economy in Southeast Asia, but it would also encourage a consumption market and liberal democracy, creating a win-win for Southeast Asia and Japan.

2. Political Resilience

- Japan's biggest strength is the trust it has cultivated in Southeast Asia over 40 years. To ameliorate Southeast Asian countries' fear of being trapped between the United States and China, Japan needs to explain that its goal in Southeast Asia is not containing China, but rather balancing and stabilizing Southeast Asia by keeping its policy options open. Diplomatically, Japan needs to lower tensions with China, as Indonesia's president requested in December 2013, while strengthening its alliance with the United States.
- Southeast Asian political reform is increasingly dependent on the judiciary; as we have learned in Thailand, a trusted judiciary is crucial for sustaining political stability. Thus,

building judicial networks will be fundamental to creating common ground on the rule of law, despite national differences in political and legal structures. Japan and the United States could both play critical roles in establishing such a judicial network.

- Political stability cannot be accomplished without tackling social disparity. It is high time for Southeast Asian states to design upgraded medical and taxation systems. Japan's healthcare system could be a good reference point, helping Southeast Asia to enhance both the taxation and medical systems.
- Civil society is also critical. Southeast Asia has recovered from the Asian financial crisis and has enjoyed economic growth for more than a decade. There is a growing civil society across Southeast Asia composed of informed and civically minded people. Fostering civil society is vital to the future of Southeast Asia; this includes the freedom of press, rule of law, and democracy. Such efforts require U.S. support together with help from regional allies and partners that share these common principles. The United States has the power to set the agenda, so enhancing the skills and capabilities of hitherto unconnected counterparts should be a priority.
- One of the most powerful values that the United States is identified with is liberty. The promotion of human rights is also important. Japan can raise the value of resilience, which is ultimately a humanitarian value. The U.S.-Japan alliance thus is a complementary alliance of human rights promotion and humanitarian relief.

3. *Environmental Resilience*

- Japan and Southeast Asia share the challenge of managing severe natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, and volcanoes. Establishing a network of resilient urban societies based on shared values of environmental stewardship and disaster prevention is fundamental to sustainable growth in Asia. Improved urban planning, urban infrastructure, disaster management, and transportation development are necessary to increase resilience against natural disasters. Japan should invite those with expertise in these fields to assist with enhancing Southeast Asia's resilience for the sake of not only Southeast Asia, but also foreign partners. Energy-saving and environmentally respectful governance is also critical in terms of political accountability and stability. This will create a new standard that will nurture common societal values in the region.

4. *Security Resilience*

- Southeast Asia needs enhanced radar and surveillance systems at sea, in the air, and underwater. Capacity building is needed in monitoring operations and analysis, as demonstrated by the challenging Malaysia Airlines search effort. In the short term, especially until a code of conduct is agreed upon, it is particularly important that Japan help to enhance Filipino and Vietnamese maritime security to deter Chinese fait accompli tactics.

- Japan, together with the United States, should take diplomatic steps to implement the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). It is also high time that the United States ratifies UNCLOS to gain the legal high ground in Asia's political dynamics.
- The U.S.-Japan alliance should be used as a common platform for information sharing on maritime activities and China's new East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone. Updated maritime traffic rules and maritime pollution-monitoring mechanisms should include all parties in the South China Sea and East China Sea.
- Enhancing the role and function of the ADMM-Plus is vital as it offers the best channel for defense ministers to sit together on a regular basis. Establishing a multilayer dialogue is crucial to the ADMM-Plus. Cooperation should include: regional antipiracy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, sustainable fisheries, maritime law, and maritime communication. This multilayered approach would create an opportunity to convert the South China Sea from an area of potential conflict into an area of cooperation. This inclusive mechanism with ASEAN at the helm should help China feel secure and ensure that China's rise contributes to the common good of all.
- Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) with Southeast Asian partners, Korea, and the United States should also be expanded. China is welcome to join, which would make for a great platform for future cooperation.

In conclusion, the U.S.-Japan alliance could offer what is needed in Southeast Asia and vice versa. Both alliance partners agree on the strategic importance of Southeast Asia, and thus should not hesitate to cooperate in securing stability and sustainable growth in that region. Southeast Asia is now entering the golden decade of its demographic dividend. This era has already passed in Japan, China, Taiwan, and South Korea. Thus, if we are to expect a prosperous Asia in the decades ahead, Southeast Asia is the key to the promising path. Pursuing areas of common ground with Southeast Asia's rising middle class, establishing a resilient social system in the region, and confronting numerous common challenges (such as natural disaster and other nontraditional security issues) are crucial for Southeast Asia's future as well as that of Japan and the United States.

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