

時評論文

Japan's New ASEAN Diplomacy? Why the Abe Doctrine May Be Counterproductive

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安倍政権のASEAN外交 —「安倍ドクトリン」の政策的インプリケーション—

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安倍晋三首相は総理就任後初の外遊先として東南アジアを訪問し、安倍政権の外交方針を掲げた「日本外交の新たな5原則」を発表した。このASEANに重きを置く外交方針は、安倍ドクトリンと称されることがある。安倍ドクトリンは日・ASEAN関係の強化を図るものであるが、安倍政権のASEAN外交はこの意図に相反する結果をもたらす恐れがある。それは、第一に普遍的・自由主義的価値を重視していること、第二に対中の側面が強く出ていることに起因する。特に後者は、ASEAN諸国の懸念を生んでいる。

キーワード： ASEAN、東南アジア外交、日・ASEAN関係、安倍ドクトリン

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There is a widespread perception across Southeast Asia today that Japan's presence in the region is fading into the sunset. *The Jakarta Post*, for example, posted an article regarding the role of Japan in Southeast Asia and noted that Japan's role and influence depend on whether China's influence will wax or wane.¹ As the United States, China, and India are strengthening their ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in recent years through policies known or dubbed as rebalancing, charm offensive, and Look East, Japan has generally followed the same path in part to dispel such a view that Japan is in decline. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited all the ten ASEAN countries in 2013, held a commemorative summit in Tokyo to mark the 40th anniversary of their partnership, and manifested five principles that Japan would seek to achieve with ASEAN. The enunciation of the five principles of Japan's ASEAN diplomacy amounted to the announcement of the Abe Doctrine.²

This paper analyzes the recent developments in Japan's ASEAN diplomacy, especially that of the Abe administration. It submits that while Japan is striving to enhance its relations with ASEAN, Japanese diplomacy based on the Abe Doctrine may have an adverse effect on its ASEAN ties, thereby weakening, not strengthening, their cooperation. The first two sections of this paper discuss Abe's ASEAN diplomacy, its aims and implications for Japan-ASEAN cooperation. The third section suggests a way forward for their relations.

1. The Abe administration and ASEAN

Some experts in Southeast Asia think that the message Prime Minister Abe sought to convey in his January 2013 trip to ASEAN countries—his first official visit overseas in his sec-

ond term as Japan's premier—is this: Japan is back in Southeast Asia.³ Some even described his ASEAN diplomacy as “Japan's rebalancing” and “Japan's ASEAN charm offensive.”⁴ But to be sure, Japan has never left the region. Since the elaboration of the Fukuda Doctrine in 1977, Japan emphasized economic aspects of cooperation and provided aid to Southeast Asian countries to promote their state-building and economic development. Since the 1990s, Japan and ASEAN have expanded cooperation to include security cooperation. Japan sent its very first peacekeeping mission to Cambodia; has provided assistance in curbing piracy and helped build maritime law enforcement capabilities of ASEAN countries; and has actively engaged in regional institutions including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus.

Why, then, has the Abe Doctrine drawn attention from countries in Southeast Asia? This is because the Abe Doctrine is more strategically-driven than the previous Japanese policy and sets Japan-ASEAN relations in the context of rivalry against China.⁵ The Abe Doctrine outlines five principles: 1) protection of universal values such as freedom of thought, expression, and speech; 2) ensuring the rule of law at sea; 3) pursuit of free, open, interconnected economies; 4) strengthening of intercultural ties; and 5) promotion of youth exchange. Among them, the first two principles are worthy of note.

The first principle implicates Abe's vision of constructing a regional order based on universal or liberal values. In his first term as prime minister, Abe promoted the arc of freedom and prosperity, which laid importance on enhancing ties with countries which share values such as democracy, freedom, human rights, and

rule of law. This values-based diplomacy continues to lay the foundation of the second Abe administration. In his essay titled “Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond,” Abe envisaged to form a diamond among Japan, Australia, India, and the US state of Hawaii to cope with the disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. He then stressed the importance of values: “Japan’s diplomacy must always be rooted in democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. These universal values have guided Japan’s postwar development. I firmly believe that, in 2013 and beyond, the Asia-Pacific region’s future prosperity should rest on them as well.”⁶

The first principle of the Abe Doctrine clearly reflects his values-based diplomacy. Abe sees ASEAN as a partner which shares universal values: “The development of the ASEAN members has been marked by respect for the rule of law and human rights, along with steady moves toward deeply rooted democracy.”⁷ The *Diplomatic Bluebook 2013* also writes that as Japan enhances its cooperative relationships with countries with which Japan shares fundamental values, “ASEAN is becoming more and more important for Japan.”⁸

The second principle of the Abe Doctrine—ensuring the rule of law at sea—undoubtedly has China’s assertive maritime activities in mind. This is evident from his speech: “Both Japan and ASEAN are connected with the rest of the world by the broad oceans. I believe we must work together side by side to make our world one of freedom and openness, ruled *not by might but law*.”⁹ These principles—emphasis on universal values and rule of law at sea—were reiterated when Abe paid a visit to Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines in July 2013. The Abe Doctrine bears in mind the notion that Japan and ASEAN must cooperate

with one another so as to effectively cope with their common concern; that is China.

The Abe Doctrine implies references that Tokyo strives to draw ASEAN away from China and bring it closer to Japan. In fact, Japan-ASEAN relations in the 2000s have developed as if to counter fast-growing China-ASEAN relations.¹⁰ For example, Japan’s efforts to strengthen defense cooperation with ASEAN countries have been accelerated by China’s assertive behavior in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. Developments in bilateral defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines and Vietnam indicate this. In September 2011, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Philippine Navy held their first dialogue on maritime and oceanic affairs and agreed to promote cooperation between the defense authorities of the two states. On the occasion of Prime Minister Abe’s visit to Manila in July 2013, he agreed with Philippine President Benigno Aquino that defense authorities and coast guard agencies of the two countries would undertake joint exercises. Abe also announced that Japan would provide ten patrol vessels to bolster the capacity of the Philippine Coast Guard. In a similar vein, Japan signed with Vietnam a memorandum on defense cooperation and exchange in October 2011 and agreed to promote defense cooperation, including regular dialogue at the vice-ministerial level and cooperation in humanitarian and disaster relief. To reflect this agreement, the Japanese government decided to provide six patrol ships as part of its official development assistance, all of which are scheduled to be delivered by the end of 2014.

2. The Abe Doctrine and its implications

Given the geostrategic importance of Southeast Asia that connects the Indian and the

Pacific Oceans, ASEAN will be a vital partner for Japan to build a liberal, open, rules-based order in the Asia-Pacific. The consolidation of Japan-ASEAN cooperation may raise Japan's profile in Southeast Asia. However, if the Abe administration pursues its ASEAN diplomacy too vigorously, it may have an adverse effect on Japan-ASEAN relations, militating against the very intention of the Abe Doctrine.

There are two risks. First, if Japan over-emphasizes universal or liberal values in its approach, it may undermine the unity of ASEAN. It is true, as Abe says, that ASEAN has shown some progress in human rights and democracy, as the Indonesian case illustrates. Though ASEAN advocates adherence to the principles of democracy, rule of law, and respect for and protection of human rights in its ASEAN Charter, such principles have not yet taken root throughout ASEAN. It will take more time until these principles are genuinely shared by all the ASEAN member countries. The outlook that the permeation of liberal values does not come about so soon is not so misplaced when we recall the process of drafting the ASEAN Security Community, or now the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC).

One of the tasks of the APSC is political development. This item, however, was once removed from the Bali Concord II. ASEAN excluded it because the members equated political development with democratization. Indonesia managed to persuade other ASEAN partners to reinsert political development in the "Vientiane Action Programme," only after they understood that it meant preventing an "unconstitutional" change of regimes, where unconstitutional is taken to mean that local or foreign democrats use social and political unrest to overthrow an autocratic status quo.¹¹ Some ASEAN countries take political develop-

ment more as domestic political order than as democratization.

Given this much ado, if Japan overstresses universal/liberal values in its relations with ASEAN, it may weaken the solidarity of ASEAN.¹² Since the ASEAN Community is in the making by the end of 2015, ASEAN will not allow itself to be divided over values. Japan's values-based diplomacy will in consequence alienate ASEAN from itself. This is contrary to what Abe seeks to achieve with ASEAN.

Second, diplomacy that is based on the idea that China is the common adversary for both Japan and ASEAN may keep the latter from strengthening cooperation with Japan. Japan and some ASEAN countries (Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam) are indeed confronted by China with its claims over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and the Spratly and the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea respectively. They both have the same anxiety about China's increasingly assertive actions in these waters. Given their shared concern, some argue that strengthening Japan-ASEAN security cooperation is a realistic option because "China is their common adversary."¹³ However, it would be premature to think that Japan and ASEAN have the common objective of confronting China.

The perception that China is a threat is strong especially in the Philippines, followed by Vietnam. The Philippines is explicit in welcoming Japan's more active contribution to regional security as a counterweight against China. In an interview with *the Financial Times*, Philippine Foreign Minister Albert Del Rosario said that Manila would welcome Japan's rearmament since it serves as a counterbalance to China's rise.¹⁴ But, such a view is not commonly held by all the ASEAN member countries. In his remarks in Tokyo in December 2013, former

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono stated that stable relations between Japan and China were critical to future regional security and it was important that Japan's security role be "pursued gradually."¹⁵ This divergence over Japan's role vis-à-vis China among ASEAN countries stems from the division over their perception on China.

The differences in the perception of China were illustrated most recently by the 45th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and the ASEAN Summit in 2012. Bitter words were exchanged between Cambodia on the one hand and the Philippines and Vietnam on the other over the wording of the South China Sea dispute in ASEAN's statement, culminating for the first time in non-adoption of such a statement in ASEAN's history.

What ASEAN strives to achieve is to prevent major powers such as the U.S. and China from becoming dominant in the region so that it can maintain its influence and centrality in the construction of regional order. ASEAN is pursuing equidistance diplomacy through balancing its relations with the major powers by cultivating amicable relations with them, but at the same time avoiding taking sides. As the Malaysia Prime Minister Najib Razak stated at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2012: "China is our partner. The United States is also our partner. And this evening I say clearly to our friends from America, from China, Russia, India and beyond: we in ASEAN share your values and your aspirations, and we urge you to work with us. It is not about taking sides."¹⁶

Because ASEAN seeks to be relatively neutral to major powers and avoid favoring one country over another, Japan's ASEAN diplomacy must not be understood as seeking an ally or partner against China. If ASEAN perceives Japan's policy as such, the Association will be

hesitant about expanding cooperation with Japan. After Abe's enunciation of the Five Principles, though some welcomed it as a sign of Japan's commitment to Southeast Asia, reports abounded with titles such as "Japan's Abe turns to Southeast Asia to counter China."¹⁷ As expected, the Abe Doctrine raised concerns among ASEAN countries. Simon Tay, chairman of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, warned that "Asean must not be dragged into an anti-China coalition with Japan."¹⁸

A harsher assessment came from Tang Siew Mun, director for foreign policy and security studies at the ISIS Malaysia, who similarly cautioned ASEAN to be alert to Japan's attempts to link the South China Sea disputes with that in the East China Sea. He argued that the Abe Doctrine could even "damage Japanese diplomacy" and urged Japan not to use ASEAN-Japan relations "as a means to other ends."¹⁹ Given ASEAN's divided stance vis-à-vis China, Tokyo's diplomacy based on the assumption that Japan and ASEAN share the objective of confronting China seriously limits the potential for furthering relations between the two.

3. Keeping a low profile on China

While the possibility that Japan's values-based diplomacy comes into full swing in its ASEAN diplomacy cannot be totally dismissed, it is not very likely that this would happen in the foreseeable future. Tokyo has never in its diplomatic history promulgated liberal values as vigorously as other countries like the United States. Thus far, despite its pronouncement neither has the Abe administration. A more likely diplomatic course that Japan would attempt to take is to gang up with ASEAN against China. However, as this paper has shown, it would be counterproductive to

Japan-ASEAN relations.

ASEAN's equidistance diplomacy is not novel. In fact, it has maintained it since during the Cold War. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad once explained Malaysia's foreign policy, saying "we want to remain equidistant from the big powers, the United States, China, and the Soviet Union."²⁰ Such a line of policy is not only held by Malaysia but its other ASEAN counterparts. Considering that this long-practiced equidistance diplomacy of ASEAN will likely persist, Japan must design a policy that is compatible with ASEAN's relative neutralism.

Will ASEAN shy away from strengthening relations with Japan? Only if it comes to perceive that Japan's policy is so anti-China-driven that its cooperation with Japan will upset China and split it into pro-China and anti-China camps. Setting Japan-ASEAN relations in the context of Japan-China rivalry certainly would not help. But the Abe administration should know better. Tokyo knows that China is a partner too important for ASEAN to alienate or antagonize, as much as it is to Japan.

At the same time, Tokyo is also aware that many ASEAN countries do share apprehensions regarding China's assertive maritime behavior. This led Japan and ASEAN to the endorsement of ensuring freedom and safety of navigation and overflight in accordance with the principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.²¹ Many ASEAN countries are also modernizing their defense maritime capabilities in part to respond to China's military modernization. Japanese assistance to improve their capabilities in a non-provocative fashion will be most appreciated. Against this backdrop, Japan needs a more nuanced form of foreign policy toward ASEAN. Mend-

ing Japan-China relations would also allay ASEAN's anxiety about Tokyo's China-driven strategy, paving the way for enhanced Japan-ASEAN ties. It would serve the interests of both Japan and ASEAN when the Japanese government seeks to intensify its own assets in Southeast Asia, rather than undermine those of China.

Notes

- ¹ Kavi Chongkittavorn, "Japan's new diplomatic ASEAN roadmap," *The Jakarta Post*, October 20, 2010. For a more recent account, see Bhuhundar Singh, "Abe's First Overseas Trip: Why Southeast Asia?" *RSIS Commentaries* No. 6, January 14, 2013.
- ² It should be noted that the Abe Doctrine stresses other aspects of Japanese policy as well, including Japan-U.S. alliance and proactive pacifism (proactive contribution to peace).
- ³ Tang Siew Mun, "Pitfalls of the Abe Doctrine," *New Straits Times*, February 12, 2013, p. 17; Singh, "Abe's First Overseas Trip: Why Southeast Asia?"
- ⁴ Kavi Chongkittavorn, "Japan's rebalancing strategies with sea," *The Nation*, January 14, 2013; Prashanth Parameswaran, "Japan's ASEAN Charm Offensive," January 24, 2013, available from http://bosco.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/01/24/japans_asean_charm_offensive (accessed August 20, 2013).
- ⁵ Gilbert Rozman, "Japan's Approach to Southeast Asia in the Context of Sino-Japanese Relations," *The Asan Forum*, October 17, 2014, <http://www.theasanforum.org/japans-approach-to-southeast-asia-in-the-context-of-sino-japanese-relations> (accessed November 7, 2014).
- ⁶ Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond," *Project Syndicate*, December 27, 2012, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>

- ⁷ Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, "The Bounty of the Open Seas: Five New Principles for Japanese Diplomacy," January 18, 2013. Abe was scheduled to deliver his speech during his visit to Indonesia, but it was cancelled because his trip was cut short. However, the text of his scheduled speech is available from http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/96_abe/statement/201301/18speech_e.html (accessed January 28, 2013).
- ⁸ Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), *Diplomatic Bluebook 2013: Summary* (Tokyo: April 2013), p. 7.
- ⁹ Abe, "The Bounty of the Open Seas." Emphasis added.
- ¹⁰ Tamotsu Fukuda, "Nihon to ASEAN," in Toshihiro Minohara, ed., *Zero-Nendai Nihon no Judai Ronten* (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobo, 2011), pp. 105-125.
- ¹¹ Rizal Sukma, "Political Development: A Democracy Agenda for ASEAN?" in Donald K. Emmerson, ed., *Hard Choices: Security, Democracy, and Regionalism in Southeast Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2008), pp. 137-8.
- ¹² On this point, I am indebted to David Martin Jones, "Security and Democracy: the ASEAN charter and the dilemmas of regionalism in South-East Asia," *International Affairs*, 84:4 (2008), pp. 735-756.
- ¹³ "Japan seeks defence ties with Asean amid China rows," *The Straits Times*, March 13, 2013.
- ¹⁴ "Philippine backs the rearming of Japan," *The Financial Times*, December 10, 2012, p. 1.
- ¹⁵ President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, "Building Regional Architecture for Common Peace, Stability and Prosperity," speech delivered at a policy forum of the Japan Institute of International Affairs, Tokyo, December 13, 2013.
- ¹⁶ Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak, "Shangri-La Dialogue 2012 Keynote Address," Singapore, June 3, 2012.
- ¹⁷ "Japan's Abe turns to Southeast Asia to counter China," *Reuters*, January 15, 2013; "Abe cements ties with Southeast Asia to counter China," *Kyodo News*, January 18, 2013; "Japan seeks ASEAN backing on China with \$25 billion pledge," *The Straits Times*, December 14, 2013. The last article was posted on newspaper websites of several ASEAN countries. For a view welcoming the Abe Doctrine, see Rizal Sukma, "The promise of a new Japan," *The Jakarta Post*, January 26, 2013.
- ¹⁸ Simon Tay, "The right balance," Commentary, Singapore Institute of International Affairs, January 23, 2013.
- ¹⁹ Tang, "Pitfalls of the Abe Doctrine."
- ²⁰ "Mahathir: Vietnam Won't Attack Us," *Bangkok Post*, August 15, 1981, p. 1.
- ²¹ "Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation," Tokyo, December 14, 2013.