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## **Japan's geopolitical vision and practices on the Indian Ocean**

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## **Abstract**

Since the defeat in the Second World War, Japan has become dependent on international maritime trade for its recovery and prosperity. Due to its geographical configuration as an island state, Japan ranks the sixth in the size of territorial water and EEZ in the world. Japan's inevitable dependence on natural resources overseas, especially petroleum in the Middle East, has made the security of sea lanes crucial for the state's future. Sea lanes for Japan stretch from the East China Sea through the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf, in other words, along the southern fringe of the Arc of Instability. However, the Japanese constitution restricts the use of Japan's military forces outside its territorial water, meaning that Japan has had to seek non-military ways to secure sea lanes. There have been two ways for this: the provision of ODA for countries along sea lanes and the use of U.S. military forces according to the Japan-U.S. alliance. This division of roles between Japan and the U.S. and between economy and military has loosened especially since 9/11; Japan is attempting to participate in international activities to secure sea lanes, such as U.S.-led military campaigns against Afghanistan. This paper explores the above-mentioned historical shifts in Japan's geopolitical vision and practices on the Indian Ocean and identifies its political implications in the hegemonic order of Asia as a whole.

Keywords: Japan, the Indian Ocean, geopolitics, sea lanes, the Japan-U.S. alliance, Asia

## **Introduction**

This paper explores how Japan's geopolitical vision and practices on the Indian Ocean have been shifting over time since the 1970s when the security of sea lanes became one of the key security issues for Japan and between Japan and the U.S. Since the defeat in the Second World War, Japan has been dependent on international maritime trade for its recovery and prosperity. Due to its geographical configuration as an island state, Japan ranks the sixth in the size of territorial water and EEZ in the world. Japan's inevitable dependence on natural resources overseas, especially petroleum in the Middle East, has made the security of sea lanes crucial for the state's future. The sea lanes for Japan stretch from the East China Sea through the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf, in other words, along the southern fringe of the Arc of Instability (U.S. Department of Defense 2001). Such geopolitical and geo-economic location of Japan in the Eurasian Continent has shaped and conditioned Japan's security and foreign policies and public consciousness.

However, the Japanese Constitution restricts the use of Japan's military forces outside its territorial water, and the power balance under the Cold War did not give Japan so many options to adopt its own policies to secure sea lanes around Japan. These internal and external conditions have made Japan seek non-military ways to secure the sea lanes. There have been two major ways to achieve this objective. One is to provide Official Development Assistance or ODA for countries along the sea lanes to establish and maintain friendly relationship with those countries. The other is to utilize U.S. military presence on the West Pacific and Indian Ocean according to the Japan-U.S. security alliance. Due to the constitutional regulations and Cold-War power balance, Japan has depended on the U.S. for the security of sea lanes in Southeast, South and West Asia by allowing the forward deployment of U.S. forces stationed in Japan. This division of roles between Japan and U.S. and between economy and military seems to have worked well until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Grant and Nijman 1997).

This division of roles between Japan and the U.S. has apparently shifted since the beginning of the 21st century; especially after 9/11 Japan is more actively involved in international security activities in the Indian Ocean, such as U.S.-led military campaigns against Afghanistan and the international cooperation to prevent piracy along the East African Coast. The significance of this shift is manifold. First, it seems to stem partially from the shift in U.S. power projection towards the Indian Ocean and to affect Japan's military posture towards the region. Second, at least the level of discourse among policymakers, the independence and proactiveness of foreign and

security policies (*jishu-gaiko* and *jishu-boei*) have been occasionally emphasized since the end of the Cold War. Similar to defense against nuclear arsenals, the security of sea lanes for Japan cannot be achieved without U.S. cooperation, which tends to frustrate Japan's desire to improve its profile in the international political arena. Third, the demise of the U.S.S.R. has contributed to the emergence of the Arc of Instability and initiated the long-term reconfiguration of a geopolitical order in the Arc. One of the focal points in this process is the expansion of China's hegemony. Japan's perception of China in this century cannot be divorced from China's influence on sea lanes in the Indian Ocean. Taken together, any arguments about sea lanes for Japan need to take into account the above-mentioned shifts in the geopolitical context surrounding the Indian Ocean.

Thus, this paper firstly analyzes how the Indian Ocean has been described in Japan's security policy to understand Japan's geopolitical vision and practices on the Ocean, secondly examines how those descriptions have referred to the issues of sea lanes, thirdly explains how and why the descriptions have been shifted over time, and finally identifies the political implications of the Ocean in the hegemonic order of Asia as a whole. By doing these, it will be clarified how Japan wishes to be involved in the maintenance and reformation of the order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Data and methodologies**

For the above-mentioned research objectives, this paper used the digitized textual data of *Defense of Japan (Bōei-hakusho)* or *DOJ* that is an official white paper published by Japan's Ministry of Defense (formerly Defense Agency of Japan). *DOJ* began to be published in 1970 as a 94 page booklet. Since the second issue in 1976, it has been published annually. Its English translation has also been published since 1976. *DOJ* is a comprehensive report on Japan's defense policies and its perception of international security affairs. Its style of description is not overtly professional so that the general public can understand its contents. Although *DOJ*'s contents reflect the position of the Japanese government and thus are not necessarily neutral, it can be used as an appropriate and systematic material that represents Japan's geopolitical vision and practices on the Indian Ocean and their spatio-temporal shifts.

The full-textual data for *DOJ* from 1970 to 2011 are currently available and downloadable at the website of the Ministry<sup>1</sup> except for the years from 1971 to 1975 when *DOJ* was not published and from 1995 to 1998 for which the full-textual data are

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/wp/index.html> (accessed July 1, 2012)

not available on line. There is also a search engine for the contents of the reports at the website so that particular terms can be searched and located. The engine shows the HTML web pages and PDF documents that contain the searched terms. This search engine was used for terms such as “Indian Ocean (*Indoyo*)” and “sea lanes (*shī rēn*)” and other terms.

In the first searching, the term “Indian Ocean” appeared 414 times while “sea lanes” 46 times. Like other ordinary governmental reports, *DOJ* has hierarchal contents consisting of Part (*bu*), Chapter (*shō*), Section (*setsu*), and one or two sub-section levels. Each appearance was carefully examined and recounted by the level of sub-sections so as to identify the exact unit of document that contains the term. The result of such a recount showed that “Indian Ocean” appears 367 times in *DOJ* while “sea lanes” appears 38 times. As shown in Figure 1, there are recognizable peaks in the appearance of “Indian Ocean” and “sea lanes” which are not proportional to a general increase in the number of pages of *DOJ*.

For each appearance, a paragraph (or a group of paragraphs) that contains a searched term was examined and classified by five criteria: term location (in which part, chapter, section, and sub-section it appeared), key player country/region, key player administrative/military unit, subject(s) of the description, and geopolitical context of the description. The author coded each appearance according to the term location and the paragraphs describing the term and identified the geopolitical context of the description. Most of the appearances were classified by all of these criteria. The following paragraph is an example of the appearance of “Indian Ocean” and “sea lanes.”

The Navy consists of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, which is in charge of the area including the western Pacific and *Indian Ocean*, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet, which is in charge of the area including the eastern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea, under the Pacific Fleet, the headquarters of which is located in Hawaii, totaling approximately 180 vessels. The 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet is comprised mainly of one carrier strike group, with main bases in Japan and Guam. Its major mission is to defend and prospect the territory, citizens, *sea lanes*, allies, and other vital interests of the United States, and ships assigned to the Pacific Fleet including carriers, amphibious ships, and Aegis cruisers. (Ministry of Defense 2011: 139, emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>

This paragraph appears in Part 1 (Security Environment Surrounding Japan), Chapter 2

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<sup>2</sup> For translation, the English version of *DOJ* for each year was referred to in this paper.

(Defense Policies of Countries), Section 1 (United States), Sub-section 3 (Military Posture in the Asia-Pacific Region) in *DOJ 2011*. The author classified key player country as the U.S. and key player military unit as the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, coded the description as “military deployment,” and identified the geopolitical context of the description as “alliance with the U.S.” This is mainly because the author regards an act of military deployment by a country as being to some degree restrained by the context in which the country is situated in relation to other countries. Since coding such description and identifying its geopolitical context are not necessarily straightforward, the author repeated this interpretative process several times so as to be as consistent as possible in his analysis.

The database thus created were used to understand: first what kind of geopolitical significance the Indian Ocean had in Japan’s defense policy by locating the descriptions of the Ocean in *DOJ* each year; second how the descriptions referred to the issues of sea lanes by examining the appearance of “sea lanes” or related terms in the descriptions; third what kind of meaning temporal shifts in such descriptions had by tracing them in *DOJ* each year; and finally what kind of political implication the Ocean had for Japan in the hegemonic order of Asia by investigating the geopolitical contexts of Japan described by *DOJ* each year.

### **Analyses of the database**

Analyses of the database of *DOJ* show several interesting tendencies in descriptions on the Indian Ocean and sea lanes. According to the above-mentioned research questions and methodologies to answer them, this chapter examines the results of the analyses from the following viewpoints: 1) the location of the Indian Ocean in Japanese defense policies, 2) relationships between the Indian Ocean and sea lanes for Japan, 3) the shifting importance of the Indian Ocean for Japan, and 4) the linkages between Japan and the Indian Ocean under the hegemonic order of Asia.

#### **1) The location of the Indian Ocean in Japan’s defense policies**

Until 2001, the location of descriptions on the Indian Ocean in *DOJ* had been only in the first part of the report. *DOJ* adopted the ‘Part’ system in 1970, 1978-1990, and 2007 to present and the ‘Chapter’ system in 1976, 1977, and 1991-2006. The Indian Ocean always appeared in Part 1 or Chapter 1 of *DOJ*. Whether *DOJ* began with Part 1 or Chapter 1, its first part overviewed international military affairs and/or

described the security environment surrounding Japan every year. In contrast to the second part which usually described Japan's national defense policies, the first part basically referred to foreign countries as key players.

Table 1 illustrates which countries/regions *DOJ* described as key players in the Indian Ocean in its first part each year. There are several important trends in the Table. First, as mentioned above, descriptions on the Indian Ocean had appeared only in the first part of *DOJ* before 2001, meaning that the Indian Ocean had been described as a place *external* to Japan and that after 2001 the Ocean began to be referred to as more than an external place for Japan. As will be discussed below, descriptions on the Ocean appeared in other parts of *DOJ* after 9/11 took place and promoted Japan's involvement in the War on Terror in 2001. Second, before the end of the Cold War, key player countries related to the Ocean were rather limited to a few countries such as the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. suggesting that *DOJ* saw the geopolitical context of the Ocean in light of the confrontation between the two global powers. After the demise of the U.S.S.R., *DOJ* almost ceased to refer to the former U.S.S.R. or Russia as a key player in the region. It can be inferred from these that *DOJ*'s increasing attention to the Ocean from the late 1970s to the late 1980s was brought about by Cold-War military tensions over the Ocean.

Given Japan's postwar dependence on U.S. military presence for its own security, it is not difficult to understand that *DOJ* continues to pay attention to U.S. military posture toward the Indian Ocean. For Japan, the deployment of U.S. military forces in the Ocean as well as in the West Pacific has been crucial for its resource import and maritime trade. In other words, the military deployment of the U.S.S.R. towards the Ocean and Afghanistan since the 1970s directed Japan's attention to U.S. military posture to counter such a threatening act. With the buildup of U.S.S.R. Navy, *DOJ* expressed concerns as follows:

The buildup of the U.S.S.R. navy forces brings about some kind of shift in the above-mentioned military structure in Northeast Asia.

Island regions separated from the Asian Continent have enjoyed security advantage. This has been largely dependent on the overwhelming sea-control abilities of the U.S. Such abilities have been restricted by the fact that the U.S.S.R. has come to compete militarily with the U.S. in the ocean, particularly the ocean around the U.S.S.R.

As the navy presence of the U.S.S.R. in the Indian Ocean is increasing, Australia which has security interests in the free use of the Ocean plans to

carry out a maritime patrol mission by itself. Such a mission used to be carried out mostly by the U.S. Navy.

It can be said that such a shift is not a negligible factor regarding the enhancement of U.S.S.R. political influence on the region under the U.S.-U.S.S.R. global mutual deterrence and the triad structure of the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and China.

The ocean-going deployment of the U.S.S.R. Navy further stimulates concerns of the pertinent countries including Japan that neighbor sea-current routes to the outer oceans. (*DOJ 1977*: Chapter 1, Section 2, Sub-section 2)

In this description, although *DOJ* clearly expresses concerns about U.S.S.R. navy deployment into the Indian Ocean as increasing military tensions between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., it describes Japan as a country that has enjoyed the security advantages provided by U.S. sea-control abilities. *DOJ 1980* states Japan's concerns about U.S.S.R. navy deployment in terms of U.S.S.R. invasion into Afghanistan in 1979 as follows:

[The U.S.S.R.] is securing footholds at choke points which are able to control oil transportation routes from the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean to Europe, the U.S., and Japan. This U.S.S.R. deployment towards the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia is worth noting with the fact that U.S.S.R. forces have improved their ability to intervene in remote regions as mentioned in the section of the strategic posture of the U.S.S.R. When Western countries such as the U.S. are more concerned about the increasing influence of the U.S.S.R. on the Middle East and Africa, U.S.S.R. military intervention in neighboring Afghanistan has heightened tensions between the Eastern and Western blocs and further fluidized and destabilized Middle Eastern affairs. (*DOJ 1980*: Chapter 1, Section 3, Sub-section 3)

This description well illustrates how *DOJ* perceived U.S.S.R. navy deployment into the Indian Ocean as a threat to the West and Japan itself in terms of the protection of "oil transportation routes (*sekiyu yusō rūto*)."

It can be said from this that *DOJ's* attention to the U.S. and U.S.S.R. in the 1970s and 80s came mainly from concerns about U.S.S.R. military deployment into the region.

Table 1 also indicates that even after the end of the Cold War, *DOJ* continued to mention the military role of the U.S. in the Indian Ocean. This is mainly because Japan (has) depended on U.S. military deployment in the West Pacific and Indian



Ocean for its military and resource security according to the Japan-U.S. security alliance. *DOJ* states the role of the U.S. after the end of the Cold War as follows:

The U.S. has so far deployed the Pacific Command in the Asia-Pacific region as the Joint Force of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine and carried out policies to prevent conflicts in this region and protect interests of the U.S. and its allies by concluding security agreements with Japan and several countries in the region. [...]

The U.S. Pacific Command located in Hawaii responds to unexpected contingencies swiftly and flexibly and forward-deploys the forces consisting mainly of its own navy and air force units in the Pacific and Indian Ocean. (*DOJ* 1992: Chapter 1, Section 3, Sub-section 4)

However, Table 1 shows that *DOJ*'s descriptions regarding the Indian Ocean began to mention other key players including Japan itself in the region after 2001. The appearance of "Indian Ocean" decreased in the first part and moved to other parts of *DOJ*, meaning that the Ocean began to be mentioned in the parts on counterterrorism measures in the Ocean and humanitarian and reconstruction support in Iraq. Unlike the Cold-War periods, *DOJ* has clearly changed its perception of the geopolitical context of the Ocean from a bipolar to multi-polar structure in which Japan can play a certain role. In this sense, since 9/11 the Ocean has become 'a space of engagement' for Japan, which will be discussed below.

## **2) Relationships between the Indian Ocean and sea lanes for Japan**

As mentioned in the previous section, *DOJ* often refers to the Indian Ocean as an important maritime transportation route (*kaijō kotsūro*) but does not necessarily use the term "sea lanes (*shī rēn*)."<sup>1</sup> As shown in Figure 1, "sea lanes" appears from the early 1980s to the early 1990s and from the mid 2000s to present. From 1983 to 1990, "sea lanes" were referred to as a key word for the Japan-U.S. defense cooperation in *DOJ*. *DOJ* or the Defense Agency of Japan used "sea lanes" to express one of the policy objects of such defense cooperation. Sea lanes used in this context are similar to what sea lines of communication or SLOCs usually mean (i.e. not only resource transportation routes but also military logistic routes).

The discussion about sea lanes between Japan and the U.S. began in the late 1970s and finally laid down the "Guidelines for Defense Cooperation between Japan

and the U.S.” in 1978. The Guidelines stipulated that Japan’s Self Defense Forces (SDFs) take responsibility for the defense of Japan’s territory and the surrounding sea and air areas while the U.S. forces supplement functions beyond the abilities of the SDFs. Following the U.S.S.R. military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki and U.S. President Reagan defined their bilateral relationship as an “alliance (*dōmei*)” and agreed on an appropriate “division of roles (*yakuwari buntan*)” for security issues in 1981. With regards to this division of roles, Suzuki stated that Japan would defend sea lanes within 1,000 nautical miles from its territory while the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet would handle the security of the Persian Gulf (Kotani 2006: 195-196). *DOJ* began to refer to such sea lanes in 1983 when the Japan-U.S. joint research on the defense of sea lanes started (it ended in 1986).

Another point to note for sea lanes in the 1980s is that the U.S.S.R. was thought to be a direct threat to sea lanes for Japan. The following description began to appear in 1987 and remained at earliest till 1994 in the first part of *DOJ*:

The non-strategic nuclear capabilities of the U.S.S.R. Far East Command have rapidly been strengthened for the past few years. Approximately 170 SS-20 missiles and 85 TU-22 Backfire bombers are currently deployed. SS-20 missiles are deployed in Central Siberia and areas around Lake Baikal. Each missile carries three nuclear warheads *with Japan and China in range* and has an ability to reach Japan within 10 or so minutes after launch. Backfire bombers are deployed to the west of Lake Baikal and on the opposite shore of Sakhalin, have the action radius of approximately 4,000 km, are able to carry AS-4 air-to-surface missiles, and hold excellent assault ability against ground targets within the radius and *sea lanes in the areas surrounding Japan*. (*DOJ 1987: Chapter 1, Section 2, Sub-section 2, emphasis added*)

Although Japan should defend sea lanes in its surrounding areas according to the above-mentioned Japan-U.S. defense agreement, *DOJ* continued to express Japan’s (SDFs’) inability to defend itself from nuclear threats from the U.S.S.R. *DOJ* recognized that the SDF’s capabilities were still limited to carry out the geopolitical division of roles with U.S. military forces.

The appearance of “sea lanes” from the mid 2000s has different nuances from the 1980s and 90s. “Sea lanes” appeared again in 2004 in the section titled “U.S. Forces in the Asia-Pacific Region.” The section explains the roles of U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet as follows:

The Navy is based mainly in Japan and Guam, deploying approximately 40 ships including one aircraft carrier, 70 combat aircrafts, and 19,000 personnel. The 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet is an operational unit with a mission to protect the territory, nation, *sea lanes*, allies, and other vital national interests of the U.S. Ships assigned to the Fleet include aircraft carriers, amphibious ships and AEGIS cruisers. (*DOJ 2004*: Chapter 1, Section 3, Sub-section 7, emphasis added)

Since *DOJ* used to use the term “to secure maritime transportation (*kaijō kōtsū no kakuho*)” instead of “to protect [...] sea lanes (*shī rēn wo boueisuru*), this shift may have reflected that the use of “sea lanes” was more generalized.<sup>3</sup> The term continues to be used in this description till present, suggesting that *DOJ* regards one of the roles of U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet as the protection of sea lanes and allies for the U.S. In 2006, the above-mentioned description on U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet began to include “Indian Ocean” by adding the following phrase:

The Navy consists of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, which is in charge of the area including the western Pacific and *Indian Ocean*, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet, which is in charge of the area including the eastern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea, the headquarters of which is located in Hawaii. [...] (*DOJ 2006*: Chapter 1, Section 2, Sub-section 1, emphasis added)

These two descriptions were formerly separated but combined in 2004 to indicate both action area and missions for the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. Here *DOJ* came to clearly describe in a single description the roles of the Fleet as the protection of sea lanes, allies, and the Indian Ocean. *DOJ 2006* also contains the declaration of “The Japan-U.S. Alliance in the New Century” which was published jointly by Japan’s Prime Minister Koizumi and U.S. President Bush in 2006.<sup>4</sup> It states in the first part that:

The United States and Japan share interests in: winning the war on terrorism; maintaining regional stability and prosperity; promoting free market ideals and institutions; upholding human rights; securing freedom of navigation and commerce, including *sea lanes*; and enhancing global energy security. It is these common values and common interests that form the basis for U.S.

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<sup>3</sup> English versions of *DOJ* had already used “sea lanes” in this sub-section before 2004.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/summit0606.html> (accessed July 1, 2012).

-Japan regional and global cooperation. (emphasis added)

“Sea lanes” has become a term mentioned in the (geopolitical) context of the Japan-U.S. alliance in which Japan basically depends on and cooperates with the U.S. for its own security from the Indian Ocean to the West Pacific. All descriptions on sea lanes in *DOC 2011* also appear in the context of the Japan-U.S. defense cooperation.

However, *DOC 2010* has different features on the description of sea lanes in two respects. First, it begins to explain Japan-India defense cooperation and exchange by stating:

India is located in the center of *sea lanes* which connect Japan with the Middle East and Africa, making it an extremely important country in a geopolitical sense for Japan, which relies on maritime transportation for most of its trade. (Part 3, Chapter 2, Section 2, Sub-section 2, emphasis added)

In this sub-section, *DOJ 2010* emphasizes that Japan and India share fundamental values such as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and capitalist economies and that these countries have established a strategic global partnership for the peace, stability and prosperity of Asia and the world. Although previous *DOJs* often referred to bilateral defense cooperation with countries other than the U.S., this is the very first case in which the issue of sea lanes is explicitly mentioned as one of the values for such cooperation. As shown in Table 1, *DOJ* paid attention to the movement of China in the Indian Ocean from 2006 to 2008. This is mainly because China also became interested and intensified military activities in the Indian Ocean. Compared to Japan’s strong dependence on U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet for the security of remote sea lanes, these descriptions imply Japan’s more independent effort to be involved in the protection of such sea lanes.

Second, *DOJ 2010* includes the summary of the report titled “Japan’s Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era: Toward a Peace-Creating Nation.” The report was made by the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era which was an advisory commission for new Prime Minister Hatoyama from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). In the 2009 Lower House election the coalition government led by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was changed to the DPJ-led one. Thus the report showed new directions of Japan’s security policies promoted by the new government. In the original report “sea lanes” (and “SLOCs” in

the English version) appears several times as listed below:<sup>5</sup>

Passage 1

The scarcity of resources and energy in Japan makes *SLOCs* and their surroundings an important security issue. Japan relies for most of its energy supply on maritime transportation across *the Indian Ocean*. Thus, the security of *the SLOCs* that run from the Persian Gulf, *the Indian Ocean*, the Strait of Malacca, the South China Sea, the Bashi Channel, and the east coast of Taiwan to Japan's vicinity and the stability of the coastal countries around the *sea lanes* are of crucial importance for Japan. This will not change in the future. (Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era 2010: 12, emphasis added)

Passage 2

Japan has benefited enormously from the open international economic system and global commons (for example, safety of *sea lanes* and air transport routes) which have been supported by the U.S. Deterioration of these international public goods poses great harm to Japan's safety and prosperity. Japan therefore needs to supplement U.S. efforts to assure the safety of the global commons. In this regard, Japan's role in operations such as constant surveillance of the surrounding sea areas and air space will be increasingly important. (ibid: 17, emphasis added)

Passage 3

Security cooperation with India should also be strengthened. India is an important partner which shares many values with Japan. In addition, India is a great regional power with influence over *the sea lanes on the Indian Ocean* from the Middle East to Japan. Japan potentially shares many strategic interests with India. It should also actively promote nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament through cooperation with India. (ibid: 19)

Passage 4

There is a need to enhance the SDF's capability to protect freedom of maritime use and maintain the security of *SLOCs*, both of which are of critical

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/shin-ampobouei2010/houkokusyo\\_e.pdf](http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/shin-ampobouei2010/houkokusyo_e.pdf) (accessed July 1, 2012).

importance to Japan as a maritime nation, through the SDF's own regular ISR<sup>6</sup> operations and international peace cooperation activities, as well as in close cooperation with U.S. and partners' militaries. (ibid: 39)

Unlike the Japanese original report, its English version uses "sea lanes" and "SLOCs." It is however not at all clear how the report distinguishes these two terms since only "sea lanes (*shī rēn*)" is used for the original Japanese report. The two terms can thus be treated as the same word. Then what the report implies is summarized as follows:

- Sea lines across the Indian Ocean are of crucial importance for Japan which relies for most of its energy supply on maritime transportation from the Persian Gulf (Passage 1).
- Japan has benefited from the open international economic system and global commons such as safety of sea lanes and air transport routes which have been supported by the U.S. (Passage 2).
- Security cooperation with India should also be strengthened because India is a great regional power with influence over the sea lanes on the Indian Ocean (Passage 3).
- There is a need to enhance the SDF's capability to protect freedom of maritime use and maintain the security of sea lanes in close cooperation with U.S. and partners' militaries (Passage 4).

In sum, with regards to the security of sea lanes in the Indian Ocean, it can be said that Japan will maintain the alliance with the U.S. as a global power and seek cooperation with India as a regional power by enhancing the SDFs' capability for such purposes. In order to achieve these objectives, Japan needs to be more actively involved in the security of the Indian Ocean. In the next session, this paper will explain how Japan has been 'spontaneously' involved in the security of the Ocean.

### **3) The shifting importance of the Indian Ocean for Japan**

As mentioned in the previous sections, until 2001 almost all descriptions of the Indian Ocean had appeared in the first part of *DOJ*, indicating that the Ocean had been treated as a remote ocean for Japan and as a space protected by the U.S. against the U.S.S.R. Although Japan's interest in the Ocean increased in the 1980s following

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<sup>6</sup> ISR stands for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

U.S.S.R. military intervention in Afghanistan, the Ocean had never constituted any national security issue for postwar Japan. This is mainly because the Japanese Constitution prohibits the exertion of military forces outside Japan's territory. However, 9/11 has completely changed such an attitude towards the Ocean.

In order to understand the significance of this change, it becomes necessary to know how Japan had been involved in international conflicts after the end of the Cold War. During the Gulf War in 1991, Japan did not dispatch any military forces according to the Japanese Constitution but provided financial support for the U.S. and pertinent countries after the war. Japan's 'passive' attitude towards such an international crisis became controversial within Japan and led the LDP-led government to dispatch the SDFs for U.N. Peace Keeping Operations in the 1990s. Since then Japan has become more active in pursuing a 'military' contribution in the international arena. Immediately after 9/11, the Koizumi cabinet decided to dispatch the SDFs to the Indian Ocean and Pakistan to provide logistic support for the U.S.-led military operation in Afghanistan. During the Iraq War, the Koizumi cabinet also sent the SDFs to Iraq to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. 9/11 facilitated international military cooperation (i.e. "War on Terror") initiated by the U.S. and contributed to the construction of a new geopolitical context in East Asia that allowed Japan to become more active in the international security arena. Accordingly Japan has been more proactive in dispatching the SDFs for international disaster-relief activities such as in Indonesia. Japan's interest and involvement in the Indian Ocean region should be seen in this context.

Table 2 shows where the Indian Ocean was referred to except for the first part. After 9/11 took place in 2001, the Indian Ocean began to be mentioned in the second and latter parts of *DOJ*. *DOJ 2002* and *2003* referred to the Ocean in the part on responses to security emergency after 9/11 and SDF dispatch to the Ocean. Then *DOJ* increased the number of descriptions on the Ocean in the part on international cooperation for the War on Terror, the subsequent humanitarian intervention in Iraq, and the recent involvement in disaster relief in Indonesia and other countries.

As mentioned above, Japan dispatched the SDFs to the Indian Ocean to support the U.S.-led military campaigns in Afghanistan. There are two meanings in this action. One is a completely new definition of the Indian Ocean as a space of engagement for the SDFs. According to the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law (2001-2007) and the Law Concerning the Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq (2003-2009), the basic plans to implement these laws designated the Ocean as an area for SDFs' activities. The Ocean is no longer a remote

space for Japan's defense policy.

The other is a restoration of Japan as a 'normal' state. As has been argued elsewhere (see for example Tanaka 1997), the postwar establishment of the Japanese Constitution that prohibits the exertion of military forces outside Japan was accompanied with the presence of U.S. military forces within Japan as nuclear deterrence according to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. Thus Japan's defense policies cannot be separated from that of the U.S. in the West Pacific even though they only cover the areas surrounding Japan. Japan's dependence on the U.S. for its own security is clearly reflected in the fact that *DOJ* has described the U.S. as the most important ally to protect Japan at the national and global scales (Tables 1 and 2).

The Japan-U.S. alliance is not only a key defense mechanism but also a source of frustration for Japan as seen in the involvement in the Gulf War. Too much dependence on U.S. military forces can restrict Japan's independent diplomacy and security activities. Probably recognizing this security dilemma, *DOJ 2003* stated that the basic plan for SDF's activities in the Indian Ocean had been revised "as an independent decision (*shutaiteki handan toshite*)" (Chapter 4, Section 2, Sub-section 4). *DOJ 2005* changed the title of the fourth chapter on international emergency cooperation from "Efforts to Secure International Peace and Security" to "Efforts to Improve International Security Environment Proactively and on Its Own Initiative." Although the expression "proactively and on its own (*shutaiteki sekkyokuteki*)" was dropped in the subsequent *DOJs*, it is easy to understand how the Ministry of Defense (then Defense Agency of Japan) wished to describe SDFs' activities at that time.

Table 2 also shows a new trend in which Japan is seeking bilateral defense cooperation and exchanges with countries other than the U.S. such as Australia and India. In addition to the emerging description of China as a potential threat to the Indian Ocean, an attempt to build such a regional security network will definitely be continued in the future. The normalization of Japan as a state with 'independent' military forces and diplomacy has probably been an underlying desire among many Japanese policymakers (Yamazaki 2002).

#### **4) Linkages between Japan and the Indian Ocean under the hegemonic order of Asia**

As explained in Data and Methodologies, each extracted description that contains the term "Indian Ocean" was examined, classified by the main subject of the description, and linked to one or two codes of the geopolitical context in which the subject was situated or occurred. This interpretative coding process was employed to



understand how *DOJ* had seen the Indian Ocean under what kind of geopolitical order of Asia. As discussed above, the geopolitical significance of the Ocean was drastically changed after the end of the Cold War and 9/11. Thus, this paper examined how the subjects of descriptions and their geopolitical contexts were inter-related and how such relationships were changed after the historical epochs. The results of such an examination are shown in Tables 3-1 and 3-2.

According Table 3-1, it can roughly be summarized that *DOJ* mentioned three main subjects in relation to the Indian Ocean before 1990: U.S.-U.S.S.R. confrontation, maritime defense, military deployment or build-up, and regional dynamics around the Ocean. There are three points to make in this Table. First, the “Cold-War (*reisen*)” or “East-West confrontation (*tōzai-tairitsu*)” was most frequently mentioned or implied to express international affairs regarding the Ocean, suggesting that *DOJ* was written based on the paradigm of the bipolar world. Due to Japan’s heavy dependence on the U.S. for its maritime defense, *DOJ* spent a great amount of pages in explaining the global deployment of U.S. military forces and its significance for the West and Japan. To a similar degree, the U.S.S.R. was frequently mentioned as a threat to Japan and the West in the Ocean where their maritime transportation routes are laid out. Thus it seems that *DOJ* treated the Indian Ocean as one of the Cold-War fronts in the 1980s. Second, Table 3-1 also indicates that *DOJ* paid reasonable attention to regional stability in Southeast Asia as a geopolitical choke point leading to the Ocean. Finally, as noted in the previous section, Table 3-1 shows that there was only one description referring to (the importance of) the maritime defense of Japan as a maritime state. With regards to the Indian Ocean, this was an exception before 1990, indicating that the Indian Ocean had not yet become a space of engagement for Japan.

Compared to Table 3-1, Table 3-2 illustrates *DOJ*’s completely different geopolitical visions on the Indian Ocean. The structure of description regarding the Ocean has become much more complicated with varying subjects and contexts since 1991. Roughly speaking, *DOJs* have mentioned six main subjects: dispatch of Japan’s SDFs, international disaster relief activity, maritime defense, Southeast Asia, defense policies of foreign countries, and military deployment or buildup. As mentioned in the previous section, the demise of the U.S.S.R. and the subsequent 9/11 terrorist attacks allowed Japan to emerge as one of the key players in the Ocean. Nearly a half of the descriptions in this period were about the dispatch of Japan’s SDFs towards the Ocean. This policy aimed to support the U.S.-led military campaigns against Afghanistan and the postwar reconstruction of Iraq as well as the disaster-relief activities in Indonesia and neighboring countries. Japan’s much more active engagement such as these marks

the post-9/11 period.

Although the dispatch of Japan's SDFs to the Indian Ocean for counterterrorism and Iraqi reconstruction was largely initiated by Japan itself, Table 3-2 suggests that these decisions were also made in the context of the Japan-U.S. alliance, in other words, as Japan's cooperation with the U.S.-led military campaigns. On the other hand, as Table 3-2 illustrates, Japan seeks bilateral defense cooperation with India and Australia (probably against China's hegemony) and attempts to contribute to the stabilization of Southeast Asia through international disaster relief and other measures. Taken together, after the end of the Cold War, 9/11 and the subsequent international affairs seem to give rise to a multi-polar geopolitical context that can be called "new international military cooperation." In such a context, Japan is making an active attempt to participate in the establishment of regional security from the East China Sea through the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explores how Japan's geopolitical vision and practices on the Indian Oceans have been shifting over time since the 1970s when the security of sea lanes became one of the key security issues for Japan and between Japan and the U.S. Using the digitized textual data of *DOJ* published from 1976 to 2011 and conducting multidirectional textual analyses of their contents, this paper analyzed 1) how the Indian Ocean had been described in Japan's security policy to understand Japan's geopolitical vision and practices on the Ocean and 2) how those descriptions had referred to the issues of sea lanes, 3) explained how and why the descriptions had been shifted over time, and 4) identified the political implications of the Ocean in the hegemonic order of Asia as a whole. The results of the above-mentioned analyses are as follows:

First, before 9/11 took place in 2001, the descriptions of the Indian Ocean had appeared only in the first part of *DOJ* where the Indian Ocean had been described as a place *external* to Japan. Before the end of the Cold War, key player countries related to the Ocean were rather limited to a few countries such as the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. *DOJ* saw the geopolitical context of the Ocean in terms of confrontation between the two global powers. Although *DOJ*'s attention to the U.S. and U.S.S.R. in the 1970s and 80s came mainly from concerns about U.S.S.R. military deployment into the region, Japan could not help depending on U.S. military deployment in the West Pacific and Indian Ocean for its military and resource security according to the Japan-U.S. security

alliance. However, after the demise of the U.S.S.R., *DOJ* almost ceased to refer to the former U.S.S.R. or Russia as a key player in the region. After 2001, descriptions on the Ocean began to appear in other parts of *DOJ* where the Ocean was referred to as more than an external place for Japan.

Second, *DOJ* often refers to the Indian Ocean as an important maritime transportation route. Descriptions on sea lanes first appeared in *DOJ* in the 1980s as an object of the Japan-U.S. defense cooperation in which Japan would defend sea lanes within 1,000 nautical miles from its territory while U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet would handle the security of the Persian Gulf. However, given U.S.S.R. nuclear threats to sea lanes both around Japan and in the Indian Ocean, *DOJ* recognized that SDF's capabilities were still limited to carry out the geopolitical division of roles with the U.S. military forces. After the end of the Cold War, *DOJ* came to clearly describe the roles of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet as the protection of sea lanes, allies, and the Indian Ocean in more general terms while mentioning the Japan-India strategic partnership for the defense of sea lanes (against China's potential threats) in recent years.

Third, after 9/11 took place in 2001, the Indian Ocean began to be mentioned in the second and latter parts of *DOJ*. *DOJ* increased the number of descriptions on the Ocean in the part on SDFs' international cooperation for the War on Terror, the subsequent humanitarian intervention in Iraq, and the recent involvement in disaster relief in Indonesia and other countries. There are two meanings in these practices. One is a completely new definition of the Indian Ocean as a space of engagement for the SDFs. The other is a restoration of Japan as a 'normal' state that can seek more independent security policies.

Finally, relationships between the subject of each description on the Indian Ocean in *DOJ* and its conceivable geopolitical context were examined. Before 1990, *DOJs* were written based on the paradigm of the bipolar world over which Japan had little control. After 1991, however, *DOJs* came to show completely different geopolitical visions on the Indian Ocean. 9/11 and the subsequent international affairs seem to give rise to a multi-polar geopolitical context that can be called "new international military cooperation." In such a context, Japan has been making an active attempt to participate in the establishment of regional security from the East China Sea through the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf.

Unlike the years during the Cold War, the Indian Ocean has already become a space of engagement for Japan. It will become increasingly important for the resource transportation and international status of Japan. However, while the nature of Japan's security dependence of the U.S. may be changing, it is still difficult to anticipate a

drastic shift in such dependence. One of the reasons for this is that the roles of the SDFs in this context are still unclear in relation to those of the U.S. How Japan can become less dependent on the U.S. and build a reliable security network within Asia would be a key to this question.

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## Data source

*DOJ (Defense of Japan)* each year. Tokyo: Ministry of Defense. Available at <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/wp/index.html> (accessed July 1, 2012).