

The Challenges in Balancing a New Collective Defense Role in the Western Pacific Littoral Seas

by Hideshi TOKUCHI

for Littoral OpTech-EAST Workshop

hosted by the Littoral Operations Center at the US Naval Postgraduate School

in Tokyo on December 1, 2015

Captain Wallander, thank you very much for the kind introduction. Good morning, every one. Ambassador Robach, Admiral Aucoin and Admiral Otsuka, it is always nice to see you. Captain Bo Wallander and Commander Stephen Benson, thank you from the bottom of my heart for inviting me to this important and timely workshop. I am very much honored to give an address to all this distinguished audience today. I always appreciate the great contribution of the US Naval Postgraduate School to military education and research. I am more than happy to be able to participate in an event associated with such a renowned institute.

Having said so, I have nothing to add to Admiral Otsuka's great keynote address, and my speech today is very simple. "I completely agree with the admiral." I wish I could stop here and go down, but there is a plenty of time left for me. I simply would like to add some footnotes to his speech from a policy perspective.

When I think about maritime security in East Asia, one of my favorite books to read is Mr. Robert D. Kaplan's "Asia's Cauldron." This work begins with a sentence, which goes, "Europe is a landscape; East Asia a seascape." This simple sentence tells us many things, one of which is compatibility of US commitment and involvement in the affairs of Europe on the one hand and that in the affairs of East Asia on the other. His notion is exactly relevant to the reality of the US policy of rebalancing toward this region. Although I am fully aware

that the policy of rebalancing is not just a military policy but based on a whole-of-government approach, I would like to focus on the military security aspect of this policy for the purpose of today's discussion. The military capability needed for the peace and stability in the European theater is mainly land force, while one needed for the East Asian theater is mainly naval. Nonetheless, there still remain some skeptical views about the sustainability of that US policy because of some immediate US commitments elsewhere.

However, the recent Freedom of Navigation Operations, FONOPS, which USS Lassen conducted in the South China Sea demonstrated US strong commitment to this region, I strongly believe. In fact, it is not just a commitment to the region but to the rules-based international order at sea. In this sense, it is no doubt that the recent US naval operation gave a positive sign of reassurance to the entire world.

In this interconnected world, it is increasingly important to secure stable use of strategic domains such as maritime, cyber and outer space. Different from cyber space, maritime domain already has long-established international norms crystallized in UNCLOS. Stability generated by this regime benefits all including China. Although China is believed to try to alleviate heavy dependence on sea lines of communication in its foreign energy strategy, China's such efforts will not alleviate it much because of China's growing energy demand. Economic prosperity of China continues to depend upon freedom of navigation, and China must understand this crystal-clear point correctly. Japan and the US have a great interest in upholding freedom of navigation, peaceful settlement of disputes and all other principles established through plentiful international experience during the past seventy years. We are not outsiders in addressing any challenges to the order based on these invaluable rules, wherever those challenges take place. That is why the Government of Japan

weighs emphasis on maritime security in both National Security Strategy and National Defense Program Guidelines of 2013, and also in the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation of 2015 together with the US.

Now, my footnotes to Admiral Otsuka's speech are the following two points: First, importance of Southeast Asia and the South China Sea for us, and second, principles of our future orientations.

First, I would like to touch upon the importance of Southeast Asia and the South China Sea for us. In the twentieth century, Asia was known for its poverty, but in the twenty-first century, Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, is an engine of large economic growth of the world. Stability and prosperity of the region is critically important for all of us. Japan and the regional countries share common security interests in a wide range of issues including natural disaster management and stable and rules-based maritime order. In addition, diversity certainly features in Southeast Asia. Geographically, ethnically, linguistically, religiously, economically and politically, the region is diverse. Diversity makes a difference in forging energy and strength necessary to survive and prosper in today's world. We have much to learn from this.

In terms of maritime security, as much as 99.7% of our international trade relies on maritime transportation and we have key stakes in the peace and stability of maritime domain particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. Here, geopolitical significance of Southeast Asia is clear in everyone's eyes. The South China Sea is an integral part of world maritime traffic.

In addition, the depth of the South China Sea, more than 1,000m in average, adds a strategic importance in relation to the operations of the Chinese submarines. A good catch of fishery resources out of the South China Sea is a sign of importance of that area for the food

security of the Asians, and this point also requires us to keep vigilant against environmental impact of China's activities over there.

Second, I would like to point out the following five principles of our future orientations: Number 1, we need to stick to the established and widely-recognized norms of the legal order. Number 2, in our respective relations with the Chinese, we need to establish and keep up crisis management mechanisms and to keep channels of communication with them always open. Number 3, we need to keep efforts not to create a power vacuum. Number 4, we need to support littoral states, particularly of the South China Sea in their capacity building for maritime security. And finally, Number 5, we need to draw attention of the other hemisphere about the security environment of this hemisphere.

Number 1, upholding the long-established legal order. UNCLOS is the "clear, dependable, and widely-recognized regimes that manage navigational safety, security risks and disputes" as Professor Chong Ja Ian of National University of Singapore points out. You need to uphold the framework, no matter whether you officially accede to the convention or not. We must also join our voices against China's unilateral and peculiar "historical claims" for sovereignty right over the nine-dash line. There is absolutely no such rule to meet the claim. If they insist their claim is more than 2,000 years, then they should act their own age.

Number 2, crisis management mechanisms and lines of communication with China. While deterrence undergirded by adequate force is must, it is also important to keep the situations under control and not to escalate them to a higher and uncontrollable stage. We see some positive developments between Japan and China recently, e.g. the Sino-Japanese defense ministerial meeting in Kuala Lumpur, and the Sino-Japanese prime ministers meeting in Seoul, in which both leaders agreed on the early launch of the operation of

bilateral maritime communication mechanism. This momentum need to be kept up.

Number 3, we must not let China take advantage of a power vacuum. History of the South China Sea tells us that China has often capitalized on a power vacuum. China occupied half of the Paracel Islands in the 1950s after the French withdrawal from the region. It occupied the rest of the islands in the early 1970s after the American withdrawal from Vietnam. It expanded to the Spratly Islands in the 1980s after the withdrawal of the former Soviet Union from Vietnam. The lesson is “Do not create a power vacuum.”

If you see the situations in the two China Seas, you cannot miss a difference although both of them face increasing challenges including unilateral attempts to try to alter the status quo by force.

In the East China Sea, Chinese law enforcement vessels frequently intrude into the Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku islands. China also challenges the status quo of the air domain by unilaterally announcing Air Defense Identification Zone in November 2013, which covers the Senkaku Islands as if they belonged to China and attempts to force others to abide by Chinese regulations. In the South China Sea, China has been expanding its unilateral and coercive actions in even more assertive manners. Not only China’s land reclamation activity is rapid and massive, but also the Chinese are more violent over there. They use water cannons to chase away foreign fishing boats, for instance. Although I like Chinese wonton, I do not like wanton Chinese behaviors.

Where does that difference come from? First of all, we can reasonably point out that Japan’s capabilities, both its Coast Guard and the Defense Forces, offer key deterrent against such potential attempts by China. Japan is enhancing the capabilities of its Coast Guard and the Defense Forces so that they can more effectively and seamlessly counter and deter China’s activities from expanding. On top

of that, our robust alliance with the US and US forward-deployed military presence in Northeast Asia, especially in Japan, serve as a determinant.

Number 4, capacity building support to the littoral states. Southeast Asian countries need to raise their awareness of the situations in the South China Sea. This is an urgent task for them, but information sharing is just a first step. The Southeast Asians, the littoral states around the South China Sea in particular, need to enhance their own respective maritime security capabilities, law-enforcement and military.

In the short run, it is needed to increase the military presence of like-minded countries over there. The FONOPS operations by the US Navy are much appreciated. In the long run, however, the littoral states must assume larger responsibility. Here, there is a big opportunity for the US and Japan to work together to help those states enhance their own capabilities. Not only those littoral states are relatively weak, but also some of them are inward-looking. They have a big challenge even in the awareness of the situations at sea.

Coordination of assistance efforts on the bilateral and multilateral formats will certainly be useful. As the basis of the security assistance coordination, those littoral states must establish their own analyses, concepts, philosophies, goals, priorities and specific programs of their force developments and share these fundamentals with us. Otherwise, we will never know whether our assistance efforts are effective and realistic or not, relevant to the situations or not, and whether our coordination is meaningful or not. We may even have to discuss with them how to establish these fundamentals, before we provide actual capacity building support. Assistance providers like us must work out a common strategy. This is not just a matter of selling a single weapon or a system. It is about how to establish an effective capability as a sustainable and meaningful one. It is not just

about logistics basis to support frontline equipment, either. The entire national capabilities of the assistance recipients are to be addressed.

Finally, Number 5, we need to draw attention of the other hemisphere about the security environment of this hemisphere, and to share the notion of indivisibility of international security. No attempts must be made in order to alter the status quo by force or coercion. This is a universal rule which shapes the very basis of today's global order. If this rule was ignored in one hemisphere and you acquiesced in it, then you could not say no to similar actions in the other hemisphere, either. The world community must stand together against the Russian behaviors in East Europe as well as the Chinese behaviors in both East and South China Seas with a single voice. In order to do so, the US and Japan must work on the Europeans to be much more attentive to the security situations in East Asia.

As such, there are so many things for us to work together in the coming age for the maritime security. It is not just a regional matter. It is a global challenge. In promoting this effort, we must and we can capitalize on the momentum of our bilateral cooperation generated through the bilateral Defense Cooperation Guidelines review process.

I look forward to the fruitful discussion today and tomorrow. Captain Wallander, Commander Benson and everyone, thank you very much for this wonderful opportunity.

--end--