

JAPANESE AND SOUTH KOREAN ENGAGEMENTS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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Japan and South Korea are two nation-states that have increasingly been assuming a constructive role in East Africa. Japan has, particularly, assisted African nations through a variety of initiatives that have considerably raised the profile of its development assistance programmes, most pertinently pushed through by the Official Development Assistance (ODA). The Republic of Korea, on the other hand, has matched the efforts of Japan as regards its burgeoning relations with east African countries through its own ODA programmes, as well as through high-level exchanges.

Despite the differences between the two countries in their immediate regions, Japan and South Korea have a similar outlook in many regions of the world, such as Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa, as far as development, connectivity, infrastructure, and addressing threats such as piracy are concerned.

This Article seeks to address maritime security from the purview of the East African region's security arrangements and seeks to espouse Japanese and Korean engagements and will highlight decisive and credible results within the ambit of their respective deployments and strategies.

The presence of an array of maritime forces has become necessary in the Horn of Africa and the adjacent maritime area due to instability arising mainly from piracy, that also concerns Japan and South Korea. The Horn depicts the topographical arc that is territorially the Somalian coastal state, but when the Horn is described as a region, it also covers several east African countries that border the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, some of which are landlocked.

THE MANY DIMENSIONS OF JAPANESE INVOLVEMENT

Japan announced its anti-piracy deployment in 2008, following the removal of legal barriers.¹ Since then, Japan has always ensured that its deployments have followed a timeline, which has ensured the presence of the Japanese Navy in the area. This policy being pursued by Japan is in pursuance of its stance as a peaceful nation willing to deploy forces in non-offensive roles while ensuring stability and security.

¹ See Dr Ayyare Elmi and Dr Ladan Alfi, "Barriers to developing Anti-Piracy Law in Somalia", November 20, 2014, *Al Jazeera English*, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2014/11/2014112010310522448.html> (accessed August 2020)

Apart from deployments, which include ships and maritime patrol aircrafts, Japan has provided financial and technical assistance to improve the capacities and capabilities of the region's nations such as Djibouti, Kenya, and Somalia. For example, Japan provided financial assistance to enhance the capabilities and capacities of the Djibouti Coast Guard in dealing with maritime security issues. The expanded Japanese military base in Djibouti conveyed the impression that Japan harboured long-term interests concerning the military and maritime domains namely East Africa. Somalia, too, has sought Japan's assistance as far as fighting piracy is concerned, with the Japanese committing to bilateral cooperation.²

Two legal provisions were also enacted to deter piracy and offer Japan a broader route in its leanings towards the eradication of piracy from the region.³ These were the Act of Punishment and Countermeasures against Piracy of 2009, which was extended until 2016, and the Act of Special Measures concerning Guarding of Japanese ships in Piracy-infested Waters. Prior to the enactment of the Act of Punishment and Countermeasures against Piracy in July 2009, a Chinese fishing vessel with a Japanese captain was hijacked off the coast of Kenya in November 2008, resulting in Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) releasing a statement affirming Japan's anti-piracy commitments in east Africa, and condemning the dastardly act at sea.⁴

In pursuance of 'Proactive Commitment to Peace', an initiative to develop Japan's contribution to international security, a Japanese Rear Admiral, for the first time after World War II, commanded the Combined Maritime Force 151 (CMF-151).⁵ The mission, which started on June 1, 2015, lasted for three months. This Japanese contribution to international security raised the profile of the Japanese Navy and was a recognition of their ability to command international maritime forces, and indicated the presence of a country that is committed to self-defence and has assumed an offensive role to counter hazards posed by the non-state outliers that are operational in the region on a routine basis.

The Regional Comprehensive Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) was pioneered by Japan, and can be expanded in scope to include the African region as it is a hotbed for pirate activities while the possibility of piracy falling further into the western Indian Ocean continues to remain a daunting prospect and concern.⁶

² See Dr Ayyare Elmi and Dr Ladan Alfi, "Japan-Somalia Summit Meeting", March 13, 2014, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2014/11/2014112010310522448.html>, accessed August 2020.

³ "Japan's Actions against Piracy off the Coast of Somalia", February 15, 2016, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/piracy/ja_somalia_1210.html, accessed August 2020.

⁴ "Statement by Hirofumi Nakasone, Minister for Foreign Affairs, on the Hijacking of a Chinese Fishing Boat off the coast of Kenya", February 8, 2009, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2009/2/1187911_1128.html, accessed August 2020.

⁵ "Japan makes history as it takes the lead of Combined Task Force 151", June 2, 2015, Combined Task Force (CTF) 151, Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2015/06/02/japan-makes-history-as-it-takes-the-lead-of-combined-task-force-151/>, accessed August 2020.

⁶ "Statement by the Press Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, on the United States' accession to the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy Against Ships in Asia", September 24, 2014, US Department of State, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000437.html, accessed August 2020.

Japan's maritime security assistance off the Horn of Africa is exemplified by its fast-developing multi-purpose military base in Djibouti. This military base in Ambouli, to which India is in the process of seeking access to in order to meet the demands of its own increasing maritime (and terrestrial) imperatives⁷, has emerged as a critical impairment to China's own military enterprise in Djibouti. Japan's involvement in East Africa offers a balance to the otherwise unipolar shift in external influence and presence in the region that is a burgeoning Chinese presence all over the eastern coast of the African continent. The Contact Group for Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was established in 2009⁸, and finds Japan to be a member that is involved in debates and discussions between member countries to improve the handling of maritime piracy off the Horn of Africa.

The two East Asian rivals continue to strive for east African geostrategic adroitness while countries such as India are keen on matching and bettering the efforts. India, in partnership with Japan, is committed to stabilizing and securing the region's many imbalances. Several scholars have attempted to analyse Japan's strategic thinking, and its endeavours to address piracy off the Horn of Africa. Commander Shishir Upadhyaya, a former Indian Naval Officer and former Research Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation, has emphasized that it is not just Japan but most other navies, too, that have an extra-regional bearing on the Horn of Africa that are attempting to accomplish a particular mission that is the overall security of vessels bearing their respective flags.⁹ The safe passage of Japanese flagged merchant ships also remains an imperative for Japan's anti-piracy deployments.

Some scholars have suggested that Japan's international obligations are the main reason for its unilateral deployments, which are essentially aimed at addressing illegal and illicit activities, and maritime terrorism. Further, Japan's presence is also aimed at augmenting the efforts of the Combined Maritime Forces (specifically CTF 151) – a US-led endeavour to fight regional misadventures – and the EU through Operation ATALANTA. Over the years, Japan has exhibited considerable commitment to its partners and allies, especially the United States of America, in overseas missions.

The presence of Japan in the form of its MSDF's anti-piracy patrols and operations from their base in Djibouti can be considered as two major symbols of Japan's intentions in promoting stability and enhancing security off the Horn of Africa and by extension in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This endeavour also aids the connectivity Japan that seeks to build and foster with the countries of the western IOR.

⁷ See Swarajya Staff, "Indian Navy to increase its power in Indian Ocean; seeks access to French Djibouti base for operations", April 19, 2019, *Swarajya Magazine*, <https://swarajyamag.com/insta/indian-navy-to-increase-its-power-in-indian-ocean-seeks-access-to-french-djibouti-base-for-operations>, accessed August 2020.

⁸ "Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia", January 20, 2017, US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/contact-group-on-piracy-off-the-coast-of-somalia/>, accessed August 2020.

⁹ Cdr Shishir Upadhyaya, *Combating Piracy in the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi: Manas Publishing, 2011), 54.

OVERTURES BY THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The South Korean outlay to the East African maritime stretches was epitomized by the announcement of the deployment of the *Cheonghae* unit in 2009. Since then, an annual expedition without any intermissions has resulted in South Korea having firmly embedded itself amongst the actors and players that have shaped the strategic edifice relating to maritime ill will, courtesy the region's independent groups operating at and from the sea, and their allies and sponsors. It boasts a crew of 300 Republic of Korea Navy (RoKN) personnel onboard a deployed destroyer and accompanying maritime patrol and surveillance aircraft. The *Cheonghae* unit cooperates with the CTF-151 on counter-piracy missions but is essentially an independent unit of the RoKN.

The CTF-151, which embodies the all-round naval involvement focused on maritime patrols and coordinated offensive actions against the region's many hazards pertaining to maritime security, features the Koreans as a partner Navy, having commanded the force for the first time in April 2010¹⁰, and several times thereafter. The CTF-151 primarily aims to monitor the region for pirate and suspicious vessels. Having assumed the role of a bearer of a responsible role for reasons that serve its own national interests as well as the pro-peace and anti-conflict interests of east African and island countries in the western IOR, South Korea has displayed a commitment that will ensure that its "stay" in the region will prove to be a beneficial one.

South Korea may not boast the opulent presence of Japan that is demonstrated through a multi-pronged approach involving securing key island or coastal bases for military activities intended to counter an assertive Peoples' Republic of China. South Korea has its fair assortment of issues with the PRC, and, hence, envisaging and developing competing ventures while also pushing through financial assistance in the form of soft loans and financial aid to the coastal African region's many poverty-stricken governing regimes and populaces may serve a larger purpose. South Korea has implemented its own ODA programmes since the later decades of the past century, with its ODA to Kenya totalling US\$ 114.5 million between 1987 and 2017¹¹. US\$ 4.24 million were disbursed to Djibouti in the same period.¹²

The maritime domain, in particular, faces continual neglect despite other areas having drawn considerable actions on the part of the RoK and its African partners, such as Djibouti. The RoK and Japan are partnered by the EUNAVFOR and the CTF-151 as far as joint efforts against maritime piracy are concerned. The criticality of the straits and sea lanes of the western IOR cannot be understated, and the RoK may just be rightly advised to step up the unitary and combined defence of the sea lanes that are harbingers of maritime trade and commerce. A book

¹⁰ CTF-151: Counter-piracy, COMBINED MARITIME FORCES (CMF), <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/>, accessed August 2020.

¹¹ "Kenya – Republic of Kenya", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/nation/m_4902/view.do?seq=154, accessed August 2020.

¹² "Djibouti – Republic of Djibouti", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/nation/m_4902/view.do?seq=144, accessed August 2020.

project, being written by this author under the patronage of the National Maritime Foundation, aims to conduct a review and put forth detailed suggestions and views on the RoK's increased involvement in the western Indian Ocean to meet emergent geopolitical and geostrategic objectives.

Deployment of the *Cheonghae* Anti-piracy Unit by the Republic of Korea Navy is its sole active overseas mission. The Republic of Korea's objectives in pursuing anti-piracy missions involves a deft balance between its self-interests and its abiding commitment to maritime security in the region. In 2011, the unit carried out Operation Gulf of Dawn of Aden, when it rescued a RoK flagged chemical tanker, the *Sambo Jewelry*, from pirates.¹³ In May 2017, the *Cheonghae* unit was dispatched to rescue a Mongolian fishing vessel with three Korean nationals aboard.¹⁴

In March 2009, the South Korean National Assembly approved the first foreign deployment of South Korea's naval forces to join the U.S.-led CTF-151. As per Terrence Roehrig of the Belfer Center, South Korea approached the CTF-151 for inclusion owing to a spate of attacks on its vessels and nationals, especially in the later years of the first decade of the ongoing century.¹⁵ South Korea's inclusion ensured that both East Asian nations, Japan and the RoK, were now firmly embedded in the multinational anti-piracy mission as either in command or independent navies. There is no better proof of South Korea's committed involvement in the region than the recent decision to extend anti-piracy patrols to the Strait of Hormuz.¹⁶

NEED OF A SELF-AWARE STRATEGY

Japan and the Republic of Korea's limited but consistent deployments off the Horn of Africa since 2009 are proof of their commitment to restoring stability and a high degree of security in the region.

In essence, Japan and the RoK remain deeply committed to their endeavours in liberating the High Risk Area off the Horn of Africa from the clutches of regional piracy. The official policy positions of the two countries espouse a long-term commitment firmly hinged on the eradication of piracy through actionable measures as well as multilateral cooperation and deliberations. Japan is clearly in Africa to stay in the pursuit of its long-term interests, while the RoK continues to remain disposed to its own set of goals and objectives in the vast High Risk Area that is infested by pirate activity on a routine basis.

¹³ See Ahn Sung-mi, "Cheonghae, Korea's first overseas anti-piracy unit", January 21, 2020, *Korea Herald*, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200121000803>, accessed August 2020.

¹⁴ See Reuters Staff, "South Korea's anti-piracy unit searches for", May 27, 2017, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/somalia-southkorea/s-koreas-anti-piracy-unit-searches-for-mongolian-ship-off-somalia-idUSL4N1T04G>, accessed August 2020.

¹⁵ See Terrence Roehrig, "South Korea's Counterpiracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden", October 2012, Belfer Center, 28-29, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/globalkorea_report_roehrig.pdf (accessed August 2020), accessed August 2020.

¹⁶ "South Korean forces expands patrol to Strait of Hormuz", January 21, 2020, *Navy Times* (via The Associated Press), <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2020/01/21/south-korean-force-expands-patrol-to-strait-of-hormuz/>, accessed August 2020

Self-awareness, meaning an understanding of what, how, why, and in what temporal ranges and numerical capacities the respective missions are being undertaken in a region that remains the only HRA¹⁷, which lies within the Voluntary Reporting Area, following the subtraction of Southeast Asia as a hub for piracy in the world, is of utmost importance. This has resulted in attuned missions that are intended to achieve the aims and objectives set out by the MSDF and the RoK Navy, and will be a formulative characteristic as far as maritime security interests for the third decade of the twenty-first century, and further, are concerned. While the objectives being pursued remain divided between venal national interest and benign liberal goodwill, a more definitive self-aware strategy may help ensure stauncher guidelines.

The units of the MSDF and the RoK Navy were not particularly subject to mishaps at the hands of irregular groups, indicating operational adroitness and carefully composed deployments within the ranks of the two esteemed maritime forces. How the future unravels as regards the rise of piracy and its kind, and how the responses to the menace take shape in the long-term courtesy the devisal of judicious policies by their respective policymakers, remains to be witnessed.

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¹⁷ “Geographic boundaries for ‘High Risk Area’ in the Indian Ocean reduced”, March 8, 2019, Safety4Sea, <https://safety4sea.com/geographic-boundaries-of-high-risk-area-for-piracy-in-the-indian-ocean-reduced/>, accessed August 2020