



Maritime Security and Multilateral Cooperation: A Japanese Perspective

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This paper focuses on multilateral naval cooperation. To understand the importance of multilateral naval cooperation, it is necessary to answer three questions: what kind of problems are we facing; what kind of cooperation mechanisms are effective to deal with these problems; and which one of them is the most important? Naval cooperation amongst friendly countries needs to primarily deal with imminent threats such as the arms race and power game in this region, non-state threats and concerns about the future. To effectively deal with these threats, countries have engaged in confidence-building mechanisms by sharing information regarding various events, and by building capacity to deal with emerging threats and uneasy situations. All of these methods elaborate the importance of multilateral cooperation, and the navies of countries should cooperate actively in this network to maximise outcomes. Hence, there is great potential in the multilateral framework of the “New Alliance” which is developing in the region.

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Introduction

In February 2016, India will be hosting an international fleet review (IFR). Why are international fleet reviews held? The main task of a country's navy is to serve its country; but if navies are so country-specific, then what is the relevance of an international fleet review? The point to remember at this juncture is that the objective of a country's navy is not to merely flex muscles, but also to grab an opportunity for proactive engagement in a multilateral security framework to tackle issues that are not limited to a specific country. The IFR provides such a platform for friendly countries to go beyond the display of their naval strength and show mutual cooperation, and thereby deliberate upon similar international concerns. Thus, this paper focuses on multilateral naval cooperation. To understand the importance of multilateral naval cooperation, it is necessary to review three factors: what kinds of problems are being faced, what kinds of cooperation mechanisms are effective to deal with these problems, and what is the most important problem?

What kinds of problems are we facing?

(a) Arms race

At least three international problems have navies at the epicentre; first is a competitive situation among countries. It is likely that countries in the Indo-Pacific have been facing security dilemmas. This assertion is validated by the fact that there are a growing number of submarines in the Indo-Pacific. Submarines are symbols of an arms race because they cannot be used to deal with non-state threats like piracy, terrorism, disasters, etc. Their major task is to engage with naval platforms which pose a threat by collecting vital information about the opponent, and destroying ships. [Table 1](#) shows the number of submarines owned by various countries over the last few years.

Although [Table 1](#) excludes China, the number of submarines possessed by coastal countries in the Indo-Pacific has increased from 55 to 79 since 1990. The table shows the submarines in each region, which have increased from 19 to 34 in Northeast Asia except China, and from two to 14 in Southeast Asia. It is forecasted that this may increase to about 70 in Northeast Asia except for China, and 30 in Southeast Asia, by 2020–2030. On the other hand, in the Indian Ocean, the number of submarines has

Table 1. The Number of Submarines Owned by Various Countries.¹

	1990	2000	2010	2015	2020–2030
Japan	15	16	16	18	24
Taiwan	4	4	4	4	10
South Korea	0	8	11	12	18
North Korea	24	26	22	20	?
Total in Northeast Asia except China	19	28	31	34	72?
Philippines	0	0	0	0	2~3?
Vietnam	0	0	0	4	6
Thailand	0	0	0	0	3?
Malaysia	0	0	2	2	2
Singapore	0	1	4	6	6
Indonesia	2	2	2	2	12
Myanmar	0	0	0	0	?
Total in Southeast Asia	2	3	8	14	28?
India	19	16	16	14	24
Australia	6	3	6	6	12
Pakistan	6	7	5	5	13
Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	2
Iran	0	3	3	3	?
South Africa	3	2	3	3	?
Malaysia	0	0	2	2	2
Singapore	0	1	4	6	6
Indonesia	2	2	2	2	12
Myanmar	0	0	0	0	?
Total in the Indian Ocean	36	34	41	41	51?
US	127	74	71	73	54~66
China	94	65	65	70	?

increased from 36 to 41 since 1990, and this number is likely to increase to more than 50 in 2020–2030.

The most important characteristic of the submarine race is that it is a product of the changing power balance between the US and China in this region. While China has acquired at least 41 submarines during the period from 2000 to 2014, the US, in contrast, has acquired only 11 submarines in the same period (Figure 1). The number of submarines in the US Navy has therefore decreased from 127 in 1990 to 73 in 2015. Hence, numerically speaking, both the US and China now possess about 70 submarines each.²

Such information indicates a pessimistic scenario. The presence of the United States, which has maintained peace and order in the region, has been declining. This declining presence is inversely proportional to the rising number of warships from coastal countries; hence, mutual distrust among countries has increased in the East China

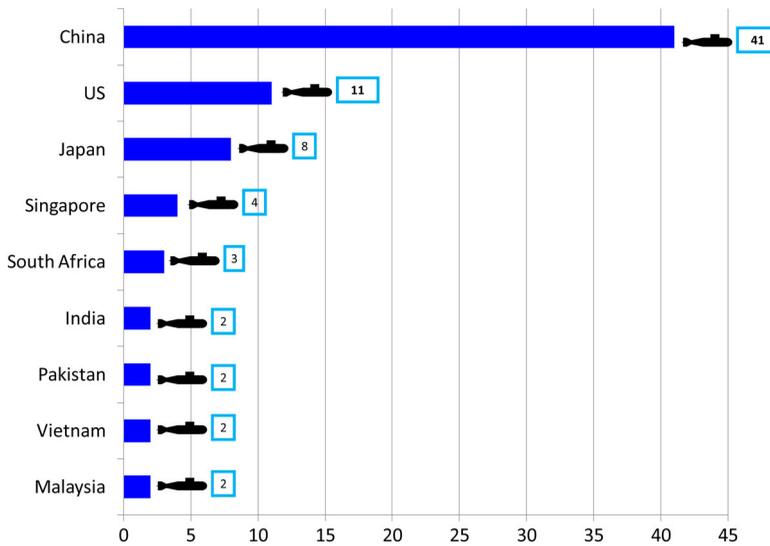


Fig. 1. The Number of Submarines Acquired from 2000 to 2014.³

Sea, South China Sea, South Pacific and Indian Ocean. In such a situation, managing the arms race and avoiding conflicts have become the topmost priorities in the Indo-Pacific region.

(b) Non-state security threat

Non-state security threats are equally important. Despite the fact that countries around the Indo-Pacific have been undergoing increased economic development, there are still many challenges such as piracy, smuggling, terrorism, failed states, etc. These not only impact locally, but have wider global implications. For example, in 2001, after the 9/11 terrorist attack, people realised that Islamic extremism in a failed state can affect the entire world; hence, a problem of such nature cannot be contained within the confines of a particular state.

Since these problems are beyond the scope of a single nation to handle, they call for collective multilateral action. To further elucidate this point, terrorists or rebels use neighbouring countries to supply arms. Thus, sealing the border and stopping the inflow or outflow of weapons and money is an important part of counterinsurgency operations, and such measures call for multilateral initiatives. In a scenario where competition among great powers escalates, the competitors will use these weak points to

challenge their opponents. There is ample evidence suggesting that some countries support “rebels” or “terrorists” in this region.⁴ Affected countries may attack terrorist camps in the neighbouring country without informing their neighbours. In such cases, even if the operation per se is successful in destroying the supply routes of illegal arms, the bilateral relations with neighbouring countries are affected. Hence, a multilateral framework is needed to effectively deal with such situations.

Coping with future challenges

Countries in the Indo-Pacific region need to prepare for new challenges which are likely to emerge in the near future. For example, political instability, rising sea level, climate change, etc. are likely to trigger new security problems in the near future.⁵ In 2015, impacted by ongoing war, millions of refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia have reached the doorstep of Europe. Such an influx of refugees affects world politics sooner rather than later by changing economic and environmental conditions in the region. Thus, all coastal countries need to understand these ramifications and prepare for the worst-case scenario. Navies emerge as an important player for collecting detailed data and to analyse activities at sea. Further, the navies of concerned countries also need to actively cooperate amongst themselves to effectively tackle such challenges.

What kind of cooperation mechanisms are effective to deal with these problems?

The next question that arises is: what kind of cooperation should countries in this region engage in? There are at least three measures:

1. Building confidence to defuse tension;
2. Sharing exact information; and
3. Building capacity to deal with the problem.

But what kind of security framework is suited to implement these measures?

For a long time, alliances such as Japan–United States, United States–South Korea, United States–Australia and United States–Philippines have maintained order in the Indo-Pacific, as the US had the military resources to tackle any problem in this

region. In such a context, US allies like Japan and Australia, being dependent on the military power and information of the US, were assured of necessary help from the US for resolving any potential military issues.

However, the situation has changed gradually on the ground. The US military presence in the region has been declining, and the bilateral “Old Alliance” system is not enough to maintain peace and stability in this region. The changing power balance is best reflected in “China’s assertiveness” in the region⁶ and emphasises the need for an alternative system that can function better in changed circumstances. Hence, a “New Alliance” system has emerged in the region.

What is the “New Alliance” system? Several multinational security cooperation arrangements have been built such as Japan–India–US,⁷ Japan–US–Australia, Japan–India–US–Australia–Singapore,⁸ etc. These arrangements are important to understanding the “New Alliance” system. There is a possibility that the network of these mini-multilateral security initiatives would culminate in a collective security system in the future.

The declining military resources of the United States in the region demand allies to share the responsibilities for maintaining stability in the region and to join forces proactively. In an effort to share the responsibilities of the United States,⁹ the first Japan–India–Australia trilateral dialogue held in June 2015 was symbolic because it did not include the United States. In January 2015, the Commander of the seventh fleet, United States Navy, mentioned that they would welcome Japan to patrol South China Sea.¹⁰ This shows that the US wants Japan to share greater naval responsibilities. Hence, in the future, it is likely that countries in this region could engage in new trilateral frameworks such as Japan–India–Vietnam,¹¹ India–Indonesia–Australia,¹² etc. (Figure 2).

It is crucial that the concerned countries do not ignore the flexibility of this “New Alliance”. The “New Alliance” system is not solely limited to allies and friendly countries, but could be extended to others including China and Russia. If countries act responsibly under an agreed set of rules, any country could join because the main purpose of this system is not to defeat enemies but to maintain peace and stability. For example, in 2014, the United States invited China to Rim of the Pacific Exercises (RIMPAC), and has tried to persuade China to cooperate with it and its allies. India, Australia and Malaysia have also held joint exercises with China. Japan, India, the US and other Asian and European countries along with China and Russia have also cooperated in the anti-piracy measures off the coast of Somalia. These indicate that a

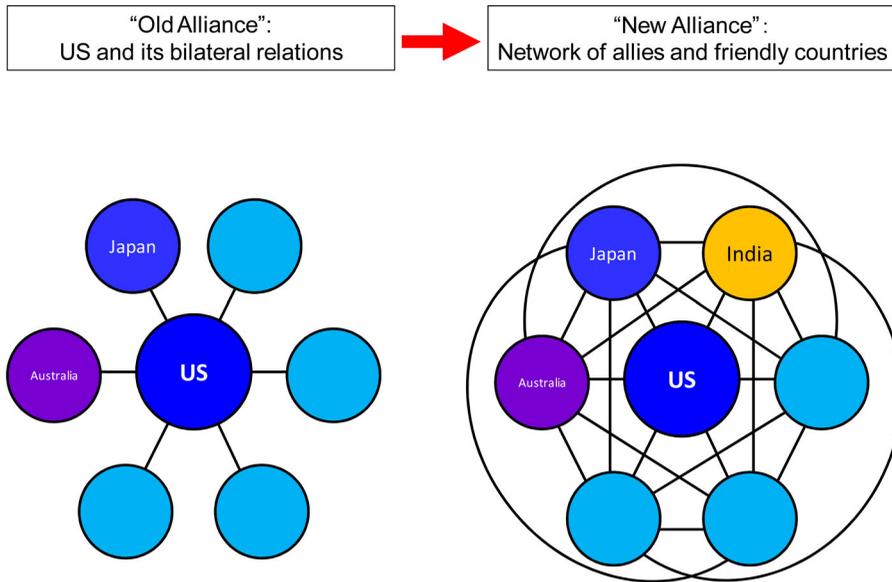


Fig. 2. "Old Alliance" and "New Alliance".¹³

cooperative multilateral security framework has the potential to defuse tension and to maintain peace and stability in the region. If countries in this region can build confidence amongst themselves, sharing information and further capacity building measures will become easier.

Conclusion

There are at least three major threats that naval cooperation needs to deal with: the arms race and power game in the Indo-Pacific region, non-state threats and concerns about the future. To deal with these, countries in this region have developed confidence-building measures to defuse tension, sharing information about events/incidents and building capacity to deal with problems. These methods are important for multilateral cooperation. As analysed in the preceding sections, the "New Alliance" system has the potential to emerge as an effective multilateral framework for dealing with threats and challenges confronting the Indo-Pacific region, and the navies of the concerned countries can actively cooperate within this framework. Finally, countries in the Indo-Pacific region could discuss maximising outcomes by adopting a multilateral

security framework. This would ensure that even the small players are satisfied with the functioning of the system and are encouraged to cooperate willingly.

The IFR is one such opportunity to work on devising a multilateral initiative towards a collective security framework. Such a multilateral framework is better suited to tackle present-day problems. The participating countries should realise this and proactively cooperate to maximise the outcomes for all participants.

Notes

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6. In August 2013, Japanese defence minister Itsunori Onodera’s statement at a symposium in Tokyo carried one important point worth taking notice of. He reiterated that “China has made more and more advancement into the seas. ... When it did not have as much military capability, China tried to promote dialogue and economic cooperation, setting territorial rows aside But when it sees a chance, any daylight between a nation and its ally, it makes blunt advancements. This is what is happening and what we should learn from the

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