

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF JAPAN-PHILIPPINES MARITIME
DIPLOMACY AS PROACTIVE APPROACH TO RESPOND TO THE
ASSERTIVE CHINA IN SOUTH CHINA SEA (2012-2017)**

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Abstrak

Dewasa ini, Laut Cina Selatan ditandai dengan peningkatan belanja pertahanan dan modernisasi militer oleh negara-negara sekitar yang dipicu oleh sifat agresif Cina di kawasan. Keagresifan Cina di Laut Cina Selatan merupakan bentuk ambisi Cina dalam menguasai kawasan tersebut yang merupakan bagian dari kepentingan nasionalnya. Keagresifan tersebut didukung oleh kehadiran dan proyeksi kekuatan militer Cina yang signifikan di kawasan. Jepang dan Filipina memandang keagresifan Cina di Laut Cina Selatan sebagai ancaman, dan sehingga memiliki kepentingan bersama untuk merespon ancaman tersebut. Diperhadapkan dengan keagresifan Cina, sejak 2012, Jepang dan Filipina telah melakukan diplomasi maritim guna menjaga status quo Laut Cina Selatan dari keagresifan Cina. Implementasi dari diplomasi maritim Jepang-Filipina dalam menyaingi keagresifan Cina di Laut Cina Selatan adalah bentuk ‘pendekatan proaktif’ Jepang, mengikuti kebijakan “Proactive Contribution to Peace” yang dikumandangkan pemerintahan Perdana Menteri Shinzo Abe. Pendekatan proaktif dalam penelitian ini merupakan bentuk konseptualisasi dari **balance of power** dan **cooperative maritime diplomacy**.

Kata kunci: Laut Cina Selatan, keagresifan Cina, diplomasi maritim, hubungan bilateral Jepang-Filipina, pendekatan proaktif

Abstract

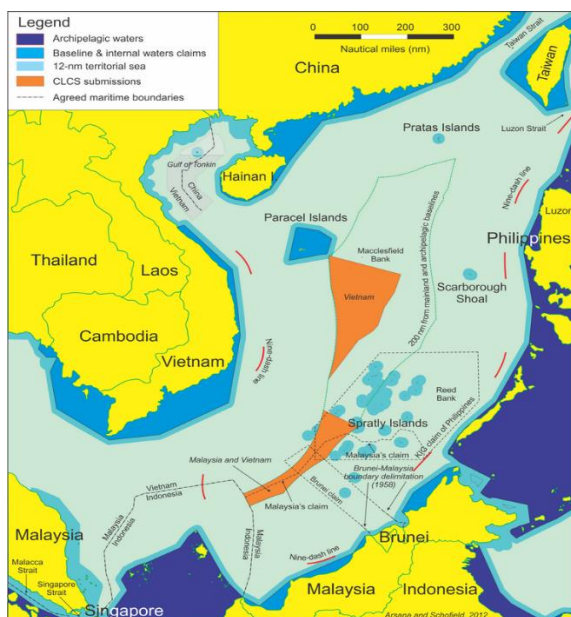
Nowadays, the South China Sea has been identified with increasing defense spending and military modernization of the neighboring countries which are driven by China’s assertiveness in the region. China’s assertive behavior in the South China Sea is an expression of its growing ambition over the region which is part of its core interests. China’s assertiveness is buoyed by its significant military presence and power projection in the region. Japan and the Philippines are having converging threat perceptions towards China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea as well as sharing common interests to balance the assertive China. Contested with China’s assertive behavior, since 2012, Japan and the Philippines have been conducting dynamic maritime diplomacy in order to safeguard the status quo of the sea from the assertive China. The implementation of Japan-Philippines maritime diplomacy in responding to China’s assertiveness in South China Sea is a form of “proactive approach” by Japan, following the “Proactive Contribution to Peace” banner resounded under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe administration. The proactive approach in this research features the concept of “balance of power” and “cooperative maritime diplomacy”.

Keywords: South China Sea, China’s assertiveness, maritime diplomacy, Japan-Philippines bilateral relations, proactive approach

Introduction

The South China Sea has been a center of attention in international affairs for the dynamics of its geopolitics. Its strategic significance to the world is exposed through the abundant amount of resources and potentials such as fishery stocks, minerals and hydrocarbon, and also its position as a strategic commercial shipping lane (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016; Cronin, 2013). However the current dynamics of its security environment is identified with territorial tensions among China, Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Viet Nam, and Malaysia; as shown in *Figure 1* (Bender, 2015).

Figure 1. The South China Sea Power Struggle



According to analytics firm *IHS Markit* in 2016, the tensions in the South China Sea

would keep escalating and drive an increase of defense spending in the Asia Pacific region for the upcoming five years by nearly 23 percent; rising to \$533 billion in 2020 from the previously \$435 billion in 2015 (IHS, 2016). This pour of expense and military modernization are indicating states’ responses not merely towards the escalating tensions but also to China’s assertive behavior in the region (Dominguez & Mazumdaru, 2015).

In that regards, the Philippines as one of the claimant states against China in the tension has expressed its concern towards China’s assertive behavior in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, Japan has likely shown its response towards the assertive China in the region despite not being a claimant state. On 24 July 2016 in Vientiane, Laos, Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a statement, “*I am seriously concerned with the continuing attempts to change unilaterally the status quo in the East and South China Sea,*” as his distress towards China’s escalating aggressive claims (Al Jazeera, 2016). On the other hand, throughout the past years after coming into power in 2012, Japan under Shinzo Abe has endorsed Japan’s vision to be the promoter of the rules and defender of the commons, and also reiterated the banner of “Proactive

Contribution to Peace” that this article describes as “proactive approach”.

Having an increasing convergence of security concerns in the face of China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea, Japan and the Philippines have remarkably developed maritime diplomacy in the past few years since 2012 (Cruz de Castro, 2017a). The maritime diplomacy was further characterized with the elevation of Japan-Philippines “strategic partnership” into “strengthened strategic partnership. Hence this article particularly discusses the implementation of Japan-Philippines maritime diplomacy which is the realization of Japan’s “Proactive Contribution to Peace” banner in response to the assertive China in the South China Sea.

The Assertive China in South China Sea

China has been increasingly identified with “assertiveness” since 2009 (Gilsinan, 2015), in what year China submitted its claim statement and nine-dashed line map to the United Nations for the first time (Mollman, 2016):

“China has indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed

and subsoil thereof. The above position is consistently held by the Chinese government, and is widely known by the international community.”

PRC to UN (Mollman, 2016)

The above claim statement marked a unilateral behavior of China in pursuing its *core interest*. China has then further asserted its sovereignty claim over the South China Sea by enforcing annual fishing ban, conducting regular maritime patrols, and performing scientific surveys and military exercises in the disputed area (Zhou, 2015).

The whole discourses of the *assertive China* surfaced as a reaction to China’s transition into a more *active and aggressive* China, that arguably took place in 2009-2010. According to the conceptualization by Richard Q. Turcsányi, Chinese assertiveness is “*the behavior in which China actively pursues its interests and acts boldly towards achieving its goals, even if they contradict the interests and/or security of other countries*”(Turcsanyi, 2017,13) . The narrative of the assertive China clearly advocates that China does something different than other countries, hence “*only those policies of China that are considerably different, qualitatively or quantitatively*”, from those other claimants will be regarded as assertive. This

conceptualization also requires the policies to be different (more assertive) than the proceeding policies, to be regarded as assertive.

Among the narratives of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea, here are some of the allegedly assertive actions in the South China Sea as identified based on the conceptualization of “assertiveness” by Richard Q. Turcsányi:

Table 1. Allegedly Assertive Actions of China in South China Sea 2009-2017

Chinese Action	Time of Occurrence	Category of Behavior
1. Submission of the nine-dash line to the UN	2009	No policy change
2. The more active defense of Chinese fishing activities, including the imposition of a fishing ban	2009 - Present	Policy adjustment
3. The cable-cutting incidents	2011-2012	Assertiveness
4. The Scarborough Shoal stand-off	2012	Assertiveness
5. The Second Thomas Shoal stand-off	Since 2013	Assertiveness
6. The oil rig incident	2014	Assertiveness
7. Land reclamation, constructions, and militarization of the outposts	2014 - Present	Assertiveness

Source: Richard Q. Turcsányi (2017)

China’s assertiveness in the region is supported and enabled by the steady capacity and infrastructure buildings, especially military facilities on artificial islands that allow China pursuing more control over the South China Sea. The construction of artificial islands and infrastructures such as runways, support buildings, loading piers, and possible satellite communication antennas, has urged other countries to question the aim of the projects (Dingli, et al., 2016). As matter of fact, those intense constructions

give China the potential to deploy aircrafts, missiles, and missile defense system to any of its constructed islands, as well as to actualize the possibility of *Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD)* and *Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)* that greatly improve China’s power projection in the region (Dingli, et al., 2016).

For over a quarter century, China also has broadly reinforced its military forces by maintaining great increases in its defense budget (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2017b). Though China’s *detailed* military budget allocation can hardly be tracked down due to its lack of transparency, China’s military expenditure is discussed to have been invested in whole kinds of weaponry while pursuing a comprehensive military modernization program, which also then contributes to its assertive approach in the South China Sea (Dominguez & Mazumdaru, 2015).

Meanwhile in 2017, according to *The Global Firepower* which provides an annual evaluation of the world’s military powers, China was positioned on the third rank worldwide in the overall factors; manpower, air power, army strength, navy strength, natural resources (petroleum), logistics, finance, and geographical values (The Global Firepower, 2017). This

position is indicating that China has significant military presence in the South China Sea that potentially discourages future military activities addressed to China (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2017a) and benefits China’s expansion in the South China Sea.

Table 2. Relevant Military Hardware of Important Actors in South China Sea Region

Country	Overall Rank	Total Aircraft Strength	Fighter Aircraft	Attack Aircraft	Attack Helicopters	Aircraft Carrier	Submarines	Destroyers	Corvettes	Frigates	Patrol Craft
USA	1	13,762	2,296	2,785	947	19	70	63	0	8	13
Russia	2	3,794	806	1,438	490	1	63	15	81	6	28
China	3	2,955	1,271	1,385	206	1	68	35	35	51	220
India	4	2,102	676	809	16	3	15	11	23	14	139
Japan	5	1,305	296	284	49	4	10	4	0	11	17
Indonesia	14	441	39	58	5	0	4	0	24	7	74
Vietnam	16	278	76	73	25	0	6	0	13	7	25
Taiwan	18	850	286	287	91	0	4	4	1	20	51
Thailand	20	555	76	95	7	1	0	0	7	8	32
Malaysia	33	232	36	55	0	0	2	0	6	2	41
Philippines	50	149	0	8	0	0	0	0	10	4	36
Singapore	65	226	92	119	17	0	6	0	6	6	11

Source: The Global Firepower (2017)

Japan-Philippines Converging Threat Perceptions towards Assertive China in South China Sea

China’s assertive manner in the South China Sea has subsequently conjured Japan and Philippine’s reactions. The Philippines has firmly addressed Chinese behavior in the South China Sea as aggressive and assertive, and also perceived the assertive China in the region as a certain threat for the country:

“The Philippines considers China’s behavior towards the Philippines and other States bordering the South China Sea to be

aggressive rather than cooperative.”

“The Philippines argues that China’s assertiveness in its claim to historic rights over all the waters, seabed, and subsoil within the so-called ‘nine-dash line’ has interfered with the Philippines’ enjoyment and exercise of its sovereign rights and jurisdiction under the Convention.”

(Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016)

The assertive China has been projected as threats by both Japan and the Philippines as seen through five dimensions: Structural, Historical, Geopolitical, Socio-Cultural, and Economic as conjured by Robert O. Tilman on *threat perceptions* concept.

Table 3. Japan-Philippines Converging Threat Perceptions towards China’s Assertiveness in South China Sea

	PHILIPPINNE	JAPAN
STRUCTURAL	Clear, urgent	Clear, urgent
HISTORICAL	Longstanding dispute in South China Sea	Longstanding dispute in East China Sea
GEOPOLITICAL	Close physical proximity; China’s strong power projection in SCS	
SOCIO-CULTURAL	Low favorability towards China; China as greatest threat	
ECONOMIC	Threatening	Threatening

As displayed in *Table 3*, in structural dimension, the Philippines government communicated the receipt of threats from the Chinese assertiveness with statement “*China’s actions constitute a clear and urgent threat to the rights and interests of the Philippines...*” that was delivered in the arbitration issued by the Philippines against China on the South China Sea dispute (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016). In historical dimension, China and the Philippines have long been involved in the South China Sea dispute over the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal, in which their interactions on the dispute shape the projection of China as a long-term security threat to the Philippines (Sokolsky, Rabasa, & Neu, 2001). In geopolitical dimension, the physical proximity between China and Philippines’ power struggles over the South China Sea is relatively close, especially when considering the position of their military outposts in the disputed areas. In socio-cultural dimension, *Pew Research Center* released “2017 Global Attitude Survey” in which 47% of Filipinos saw China as a major threat to their country, 30% saw it as a minor threat, and 8% took it as no-threat; while 66% of the Filipinos worry particularly about China’s growing military power and deployments in the region (Silver, 2017). The economic

dimension is shown by Philippine’s statement “*China has violated the Convention by: (a) interfering with the exercise of the Philippines’ rights under the Convention, including with respect to fishing, oil exploration, navigation, and the construction of artificial islands and installations*” (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016).

Meanwhile for Japan, in structural dimension, the threat perception started to be seen when the conservative *Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)* parliaments insisted the 2015 Defense White Paper of Japan to include the aerial photograph of China’s extensive island-building in South China Sea, which later included photos of Johnson South Reef and Subi Reef reclamations – showing more alarming Chinese assertiveness in Japan’s structural bodies view (Drifte, 2016). In historical dimension, Japan has historically been involved in tensions with China since the First Sino-Japanese War until today’s East China Sea dispute; in which China’s assertiveness is in tandem with that of in South China Sea (Shoji, 2014), hence Sino-Japanese longstanding dispute in East China Sea contributes to shaping the threat perceptions in the context of South China Sea. In geopolitical dimension, the physical proximity of Japan and China is

very close, especially when the competing military personnel around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are also added into consideration. In socio-cultural dimension, Japanese favorability view towards China goes as low as 13% and 90% of the people regard China's growing military as bad thing (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2017b; Vice, 2017). In economic dimension, Japan's national economic interests in South China Sea are jeopardized by Chinese assertiveness which involves unilateral fishing ban, foreign oil companies' ban, and extensive sea patrols.

The Implementation of Japan-Philippines Maritime Diplomacy (2012-2017)

Prior to 2012, Japan and the Philippines had not experienced a dynamic security partnership due to Japan's constraints in the pursuant, which was the *Article 9 of Japan's 1947 Constitution* (Cruz de Castro, 2017a) despite their tight diplomatic and economic relations. In 2011, the Philippines and Japan made a "strategic partnership" which more extensively addressed security issues including maritime affairs and South China Sea dispute, although the maritime cooperation then remained limited (Trajano, 2013). After assuming power in

2012, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe then instigated the strengthening of both countries' "strategic partnership" through "four initiatives" where the maritime security cooperation was one of the main pillars in the meeting with then President Benigno Aquino (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2013; Trajano, 2013). The initiative was further formally declared and construed in Japan-Philippines "Strengthened Strategic Partnership" in 2015, in which both countries' maritime cooperation has been progressively expanding and taken into priority of their relations. The implementation of Japan-Philippines maritime diplomacy since 2012 has been pursued through:

1) Agreements and Joint Statements

The maritime diplomacy of Japan towards the Philippines is formalized in the "Strengthened Strategic Partnership" which is also strengthened with various agreements that support both countries' commitment in the maritime cooperation. Amongst the agreements are:

- "The 2012 Statement of Intent on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges

between the Department of National Defense and the Ministry of Defense”

- “Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges between the Ministry of Defense of Japan and the Department of National Defense of the Republic of the Philippines” on 29 January 2015
- “Japan-Philippine Joint Statement” on 26 October 2016
- “Japan-Philippines Joint Statement on Bilateral Cooperation for the Next Five Years” on 30 October 2017

2) Contribution and Coordination in Regional and International Arena

Japan has been actively promoting cooperation with the Philippines that concerns on the regional and international situations and security. This activity is pursued through exchange of information; involvement and exchange in both *Peacekeeping Operations Center of the AFP* and *Japan Peacekeeping Training and Research Center*; as well as enhancing cooperation in multilateral framework

such as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM-Plus) (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2012). Other than the active involvement in the meetings and coordination in regional and international level, the partnership between Japan and the Philippines also highly values rule of law.

3) Political-Security Dialogues, Consultations, and Exchanges

The Philippines and Japan have been actively conducting high-level meetings and consultations to reinforce their security cooperation in the face of China’s military assertiveness, in which the two countries discuss and share strategies in handling the challenges posed by China’s behavior in the East and South China Seas (Cruz de Castro, 2017a). According to *the 2012 Statement of Intent on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges* between the DND of the Philippines and the Japan MOD, both countries are committed to conduct defense cooperation and exchanges through:

Table 4. Political-Security Dialogues & Exchanges in Japan-Philippines Maritime Diplomacy

High Level Exchanges	Bilateral Defense Ministerial meetings
	Bilateral meetings between Undersecretary of DND of Philippines & Vice-Minister of MOD of Japan
	Visits between: - Chief of Staff of AFP & Chief of Staff of JSDF - Commanding Generals of Philippine Army, Navy, Air Force & Chief of Staff of Japan Ground, Maritime, Air Self-Defense Forces
Working Level Exchanges	Military-to-military consultations/policy talks on security & defense matters at the Director General/Deputy Director-General level Staff talks between PN and JMSDF
Unit-to-Unit Exchanges	Exchange of students between defense educational institutional Exchange of activities & exercises, especially between AFP & JSDF
Cooperation in International Activities	Talks and exchanges between PKO Center of the AFP & Japan Peacekeeping Training and Research Center
Multilateral Cooperation	Strengthen cooperation in multilateral frameworks such as ARF and ADMM-Plus
	Participate in either Participant's related events, including <i>Meeting of Senior Defense Officials on Common Security Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region</i> and <i>Tokyo Defense Forum</i>

Source: Ministry of Defense of Japan (2012)

4) Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR)

Japan has been constantly contributing to securing peace in Mindanao area in the Philippines, and the HA/DR program is part of the two countries' maritime cooperation focus. In actualizing their HA/DR programs, both countries are focusing on the capacity building that is being buoyed by Japan. The JSDF is coordinating closely with the AFP in assisting the capacity building project, by conducting unit-to-unit exchanges and discussions, joint exercises, and even occasional and mutual ship visits

between the PN and JMSDF (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2012; 2015a).

5) Official Development Assistance (ODA) Loans

According to ODA Portfolio Review by the Philippines in 2016, Japan through JICA was the biggest source of loans with 45 percent share (USD 5.47 billion) of overall loan portfolio which was amounting to USD 15.60 billion; 66 loans (USD 12.21 billion) and 400 grants (USD 3.39 billion) (National Economic and Development Authority Philippines, 2017a). Among the projects covered by Japan, there are two of them that focus on the capacity building for PCG: (i) Maritime Safety Capability Improvement Project for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG); (ii) The Project for Enhancement of Coastal Communication System (National Economic and Development Authority Philippines, 2017a). In December 2013, JICA and the Philippines signed an ODA loan agreement that was specifically addressed for "Maritime Safety Capability Improvement Project for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG)" which was to be conducted through two phases. In the first phase, in 2013, JICA provided an ODA loan up to 18.732 billion yen to the Philippines

(JICA, 2013). The project that aimed to improve the PCG capabilities was later continued in the second phase in October 2016, in which both JICA and the Philippines signed an ODA loan agreement up to 16.455 billion yen (JICA, 2016).

6) Arms Transfer and Capacity

Building Assistance

In July 2013, while Japan was pursuing a strengthened strategic partnership with the Philippines, both countries reached an agreement that Japan would export ten patrol boats to the Philippines through a yen loan as part of ODA provision, aiming to increase the capacity of the PCG (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2013). The later Japan-Philippines “Memorandum on Defence Cooperation and Exchanges” in January 2015 and “Action Plan for Strengthening of the Strategic Partnership” in June 2015 further reiterated both countries’ commitments in defense equipment cooperation (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2015b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015). Until today, the development activities of Japan-Philippines cooperation in arms transfer are, among others:

- May 2016, agreement on Japan to lease five JMSDF TC-90 surveillance planes to the PN (Cruz de Castro, 2017a).
- September 2016, agreement on transferring MSDF TC-90 training aircrafts to Philippines; notified that first of ten 40-meter multirole response vessels (MRRVs) had arrived in Philippines with the remaining to steadily follow (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016b).
- 26 October 2016, agreement on ODA loans for: (i) two-large scale patrol vessels to Philippines, (ii) steadily maintaining the previous ten-patrol vessels provided (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016a).
- August 2017, Japan MOD reportedly offered its PC-3 patrol aircraft and spare parts for UH-1 helicopters to the Philippines (Kelly & Kubo, 2017).
- 12 October 2017, the PCG ordered the first multi-role

response vessel (MRRV), PCGS *Tubbataha*, which will be used for patrol, search and rescue, and law-enforcement operation in Philippine's maritime territory (Cruz de Castro, 2016a).

7) Naval Exercises and JMSDF

Ships' Port Visits

In a press conference by Japanese Defense Minister Nakatani in 2015, the minister disclosed the conduct of joint exercise between the JMSDF and PN on 12 May 2015 (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2015c). The joint naval exercise was part of the realization of security agreement signed by both countries in January 2015, on the implementation of further *Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea* (CUES) development and enhancement of their maritime cooperation (Cruz de Castro, 2017a).

Later on 21 June 2015, another joint training was achieved between JMSDF and PN when JMSDF P3-C Orion arrived at the Philippines (Cruz de Castro, 2017a). This activity marked an increasing tempo of Japan-Philippines maritime cooperation and was reportedly focused on enhancing

both countries' fleet skills and the interoperability of their navies in HA/DR operations (Cruz de Castro, 2017a). Other than conducting joint naval exercises, JMSDF ships have also made several port visits to the Philippines; 4 visits in 2012, 2 visits in 2013, 7 visits in 2015 (Cruz de Castro, 2017a).

8) Projection of Philippine-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)

Japan and the Philippines have been notably exploring the prospect of SOFA that would enable Japan's forces to access Philippine's military bases, including conducting larger military exercises with the AFP (Cruz de Castro, 2016b). In 2015 during then President Aquino's visit to Japan, the talks about Japan-Philippines VFA were publicly announced and addressed as an importance to boost Japan-Philippines security partnership (Parameswaran, 2017). The presence of a SOFA in Japan-Philippines maritime security is projected to be highly advantageous for the Philippines, because the agreement "*would give the Philippines access to training from Japan's highly developed maritime forces, repair*

services for the PN and Coast Guard, and maritime reconnaissance data; all these become more important as the Philippines acquires additional Japanese equipment” (Simon, 2015). Meanwhile Japan would be granted access of refueling and basing facilities in the Philippines, to later perform a joint patrol over larger area of South China Sea (Cruz De Castro, 2015).

Japan-Philippines Maritime Diplomacy as Proactive Approach in Responding to the Assertive China in South China Sea

The Philippines, fully aware of its lack on the capability to balance China, recognizes the importance of having *internal balancing* and to strengthen its relations with other powers that share the same interests:

“It is plain to see that our defense capabilities are no match for any economic giant who will attempt to touch our territories [West Philippine Sea]. There are other ways of tipping the balance of power more favorably towards weaker nations, however. ... the Department will continue to work on the attainment of a credible defense capability for the AFP, while at the same time enhance our ties and defense cooperation with nations, who are on the same page with us as far as keeping the

peace in the region is concerned. New ties are also being established and nurtured with friendly and peace loving nations.” (Department of National Defense Philippines, 2015)

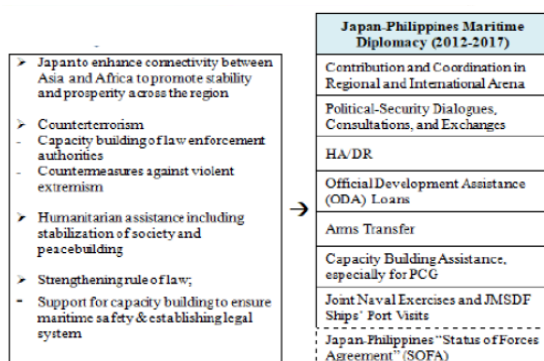
In order to also maintain the status quo of the South China Sea, Japan, on the other hand, offers relevant assistance to the Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines, by supporting their capacity buildings and urging the countries in the region to cooperate and adhere to the UNCLOS principles (Nirmala, 2016). In that regards, Japan’s maritime diplomacy with the Philippines is part and parcel of the country’s proactive approach in international affairs. The proactive approach is enabled by and based on the “Proactive Contribution to Peace” banner adopted by Japan, with a clear vision to proactively engage in international affairs:

“The key of national security is to create a stable and predictable international environment, and prevent the emergence of threats. It is thus necessary for Japan to realize an international order and security environment that are desirable for Japan, by playing an even more proactive role in achieving peace, stability and prosperity of the international community as a “Proactive Contributor to Peace” based on the principle of international

cooperation.” (National Security Strategy, 2013)

Japan’s engagement with the Philippines under Shinzo Abe has entered another stage of cooperation from economic-social approach to political-security approach (Nirmala, 2016). In April 2017, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs released “Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017” in which Japan aims to contribute more proactively to securing peace, stability and prosperity of the international community by promoting strategic and effective development cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2017). In that regards, Japan has shown its latest priority policy for the development cooperation, from which the writer sees its application in Japan’s maritime diplomacy with the Philippines:

Figure 1 - Japan's Priority Policy for Development Cooperation Key Area 1

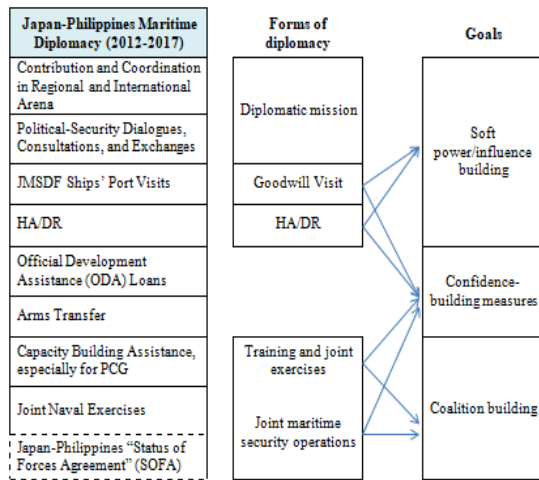


Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017)

The above diagram shows that Japan’s maritime diplomacy with the Philippine is a practice of Japan’s “Proactive Contribution to Peace” as seen through how Japan promotes the notion of “stability, prosperity and rule of law” not only through dialogues. When previously Japan was criticized for its “checkbook diplomacy”; using financial power such as economic aid and investment for increasing diplomatic ties; Japan under Shinzo Abe took a leap towards direct contribution to peace such as; capacity building for PCG, arms transfer, and even joint naval trainings as well as ODA loans addressed to maritime security (Hornung, 2015).

Meanwhile, if seen through Christian Le Mière’s maritime diplomacy conceptualization (Figure 3), Japan’s strategic partnership with the Philippine leans towards *cooperative maritime diplomacy* concept. Rather than using coercion as its primary tool, cooperative maritime diplomacy makes use of attraction and values as its tool (Mière, 2014, p. 8), which supports Japan’s proactive approach. Referring to Le Mière’s conceptualization, Japan-Philippines maritime diplomacy is adopting the following forms of cooperative maritime diplomacy:

Figure 3. Japan-Philippines Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy



The previous figure shows that Japan-Philippines maritime diplomacy is aiming to enhance diplomatic influence and strengthening the relations with the Philippines through its multilayered exchanges and port visits; enhance the capacity, knowledge, and compatibility with the Philippine’s navies through HA/DR and joint trainings; while also build harmonization and confidence among other nations through exercises and joint maritime security operations.

In that regards, cooperative maritime diplomacy has the opportunity to deter any potential rival by showing their confidence and synchronization although it is supposedly not the main aim – which is actually to entice or reassure other governments (Mière, 2014, p. 58). Accordingly, in cooperative maritime diplomacy, the strong power may also support the weak against a possible

aggressor; because compelling the other does not have to always take place in coercive maritime diplomacy, though it also does not necessarily mean that the diplomacy needs to be asymmetric (Mière, 2014, p. 58).

Conclusion

To conclude this article, it can be stated that the assertive China in the South China Sea poses as a security challenge for Japan and Philippines, which further conjure responses from both countries. In that regards, Japan-Philippines maritime diplomacy that started remarkably since 2012 is the joint response towards the assertive China in the region. The implementation of this maritime diplomacy is a form of *proactive approach* by Japan in the sense that it is in line with the “Proactive Contribution to Peace” banner proclaimed under Shinzo Abe administration. The promotion of *democracy, stability, prosperity, and rule of law* is clearly pursued in the Japan-Philippines maritime diplomacy, which is also followed with economic aid, capacity building for PCG, and arms transfer; some of which were previously constrained under Japan’s pacifist constitution.

In that regards, the article finds that the concept of balance of power is applied

in the implementation of Japan-Philippines maritime diplomacy, in which the act does not feature formal alliance and direct challenge towards the opposed military preponderance, but rather is pursued through diplomatic efforts, economic efforts and coordination, and increasing military cooperation and technological transfers. Meanwhile, according to Christian Le Mière's maritime diplomacy conceptualization, this maritime diplomacy is applying *cooperative maritime diplomacy*, which although seems subtle, it has potential to balance China comes from showing confidence and synchronization that could potentially deter the possible aggressor.

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