

# Japan's Security Policy in Africa: The Dawn of a Strategic Approach?



**Céline PAJON**

May 2017

The Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri) is a research center and a forum for debate on major international political and economic issues. Headed by Thierry de Montbrial since its founding in 1979, Ifri is a non-governmental and a non-profit organization.

As an independent think tank, Ifri sets its own research agenda, publishing its findings regularly for a global audience. Using an interdisciplinary approach, Ifri brings together political and economic decision-makers, researchers and internationally renowned experts to animate its debate and research activities.

With offices in Paris and Brussels, Ifri stands out as one of the rare French think tanks to have positioned itself at the very heart of European debate.

The opinions expressed in this text are the responsibility of the author alone.

ISBN: 978-2-36567-722-6

© All rights reserved, Ifri, 2017

Cover: © Ministry of Defense, Japan

#### **How to quote this document:**

Céline Pajon, “Japan’s Security Policy in Africa: The Dawn of a Strategic Approach?”, *Asie.Visions*, No. 93, Ifri, May 2017.

#### **Ifri**

27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE

Tel.: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00 – Fax: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60

Email: [accueil@ifri.org](mailto:accueil@ifri.org)

#### **Ifri-Bruxelles**

Rue Marie-Thérèse, 21 1000 – Bruxelles – BELGIQUE

Tel.: +32 (0)2 238 51 10 – Fax: +32 (0)2 238 51 15

Email: [bruxelles@ifri.org](mailto:bruxelles@ifri.org)

**Website:** [ifri.org](http://ifri.org)

# Author

**Céline Pajon** is a research fellow in the Center for Asian Studies, Ifri. Her area of expertise cover Japan's foreign and defense policy, Japan's domestic political debates and international relations in the Indo-Pacific region. Céline Pajon is also an International Research Fellow with the Canon Institute for Global Studies (CIGS) in Tokyo, where she stayed to conduct several research fieldworks. In 2016, she was a visiting research fellow in the Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIJA).

Among her latest publications are:

- “Japan and France: Slowly but Surely Moving Forward on Security Cooperation”, *The Diplomat*, February 6, 2017;
- “Japan's Coast Guard and Maritime Self Defense Forces in the East China Sea. Can a Black and White System Adapt to a Gray Zone Strategy?”, *Asia Policy*, No. 23, January 2017;
- “Japan and its Alliance with the US: Dynamics and Evolutions toward 2030”, *Notes de l'Ifri*, Ifri, June 2016;
- “Nationalism in China and Japan and Implications for Bilateral Relations” (with Alice Ekman), *Asie.Visions*, No. 74, March 2015;
- “Japan's ‘Smart’ Strategic Engagement in Southeast Asia”, *The ASAN Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 2013.

# Abstract

In recent years, Japan's security contribution in Africa rose with the unprecedented participation of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in an international counter-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden, the subsequent build-up of its first overseas military base in Djibouti, and the SDF's longest participation in United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations (UNPKO), in South Sudan (2012-May 2017). This increased security contribution has been driven by a need to react to various events, such as the rising Chinese presence in Africa and the increase in terrorist attacks and piracy. It is also, however, a means of reassuring a risk-averse business sector and encouraging it to step up its investment in Africa. Finally, it is also about demonstrating Japan's identity as a "proactive contributor to peace", and responsible shareholder in international security.

While media attention is drawn to the Japanese SDF presence on the ground and at sea, the bulk of Japan's security contribution to Africa remains low-key, mostly in the form of financial contributions and capacity-building assistance, and is very often channeled through or in partnership with multilateral institutions or a third country, such as France.

This paper documents new features of Japan's diplomacy that tend to gradually integrate Africa into Japan's strategic interests. First, despite limitations in terms of mandates, SDF deployments to Africa are now being facilitated, and the peacebuilding approach is providing opportunities to the SDF to act in synergy with development activities. Secondly, Africa is now being associated more tightly with Japan's strategic core interests. Terrorist attacks on the continent are posing a direct risk to Japanese nationals. Threats to the security of vital maritime shipping routes transiting from the Middle East to the Indian Ocean are also directly undermining Tokyo's interests. The inclusion of Africa in the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" demonstrates Japan's willingness to adopt a more strategic approach to Africa.

# Table of Contents

- INTRODUCTION.....5**
- DRIVERS OF JAPAN’S SECURITY COMMITMENT IN AFRICA.....7**
  - Protecting Japan’s growing economic interests and facilitating new investments ..... 7
  - Matching China’s presence on the continent ..... 10
  - Increasing its international contribution: Japan as a proactive pacifist..... 12
  - The tentative inclusion of Africa in Japan’s strategic interests ..... 13
- MEANS AND TOOLS FOR GREATER SECURITY COMMITMENT:**
- JAPAN, A PROMISING PEACEBUILDER? .....16**
  - Boats at sea and boots on the ground ..... 16
  - Japan’s approach to peacebuilding ..... 20
  - Extensive securitization of aid ..... 22
  - Building up African security capacities ..... 23
  - A partnership-based approach..... 25
- CONCLUSION: THE DAWN OF A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO AFRICA? .....27**

# Introduction

Over the last decade, Japan's security contribution in Africa rose with the unprecedented participation of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in an international counter-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden (from 2009), the subsequent build-up of its first overseas military base, in Djibouti (2011), and the SDF's longest participation in United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations (UNPKO), in South Sudan (2012-May 2017). These developments contrast with the traditional Japanese approach to Africa, essentially characterized by the provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to combat poverty and favor economic development, but also to help secure critical natural resources, facilitate Japanese investments and gain African countries' support for the Japanese agenda in the United Nations. Japan's "Africa moment" was the creation of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in 1993, at a time when aid fatigue and "afro-pessimism" kept the continent away from the eyes of Western donors. Since then, however, the Japanese ODA budget has been decreasing,<sup>1</sup> and Tokyo has lost ground to more adventurous and prodigal powers. In recent years, however, Tokyo has rediscovered the potentialities of the continent and worked toward an enhanced presence in Africa, including militarily, with an eye on reaching out to this "new frontier" for Japanese diplomacy.

This recent upgrade of Japan's military presence and security commitment in Africa raises several questions: As Japan's military contributions overseas are traditionally very limited, how should we assess its security commitment in Africa? Is it sustainable? One of Japan's objectives is to demonstrate that it is now a serious, responsible shareholder following the strategic goal set by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe since 2013 to act as a "proactive contributor to peace". Accordingly, overseas deployments of Japan's military have been facilitated by the Legislation for Peace and Security adopted in September 2015. The enhanced security contribution in Africa is thus said to support the

---

1. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 13% of Japan's bilateral ODA between 2012 and 2014, well below the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries' average (27%). This African share in Japanese ODA actually never rose above 19% (in 2011). According to OECD, in 2014, Japan was the fifth country contributor to Africa, with \$1.6 million.

incremental normalization of Japan's defense posture.<sup>2</sup> Other factors, however, also motivated the reconsideration of Tokyo's African security policy, such as the need to provide security guarantees to Japanese companies in the context of growing terrorist attacks, and to upgrade Japanese presence to catch up with China.

Shinzo Abe did not spare any efforts to demonstrate Japan's strong political will for greater commitment in Africa, traveling no fewer than three times to the African continent since 2014, a quite unprecedented record for a Japanese prime minister.<sup>3</sup> In August 2016, for the first time, TICAD was held on the African continent, in Nairobi.<sup>4</sup> Shinzo Abe then highlighted the importance of Africa for Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy", which embodies core interests in terms of maritime security. In this context, is the upgraded security contribution of Japan in Africa a sign of a more strategic Japanese approach to Africa?

To respond to these questions, this paper will examine the drivers of Japan's security policy in recent years, and then analyze the tools Tokyo is using to increase this security contribution.

This paper argues that Africa is now being associated more tightly with Japan's strategic security interests. Nevertheless, the approach is still partly reactive, and lacks a strong strategic foundation. The thickening of security-related cooperation is meant to offer a safer environment to encourage Japanese investments in Africa; to cope with China's multiform presence, and to uphold Japan's image as a "proactive peace contributor". There are political attempts to try to include Africa eventually in Japan's grand strategy for the Indo-Pacific region. In terms of tools, while the media attention is focused on Japanese's SDF dispatch in Africa, the bulk of Japan's security contribution remains very low-key: mostly in the form of financial contributions (securitization of aid) and capacity-building assistance, and it is often channeled through, or in partnership with, multilateral institutions or a third country, such as France. Japan is thus likely to continue to rely on comprehensive principles and approaches such as "human security" and "peacebuilding" as it elaborates on its original contribution to security, from development cooperation to nation-building and stability.

---

2. Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution states that Japan is not allowed to wage war or to maintain armed forces. Therefore, Japan's "Self-Defense Forces" are in principle dedicated to defensive actions only, and limited to non-combat activities overseas.

3. He first visited Mozambique, Ivory Coast and Ethiopia in January 2014, then Egypt, Jordan, Israel and Palestine in January 2015, and finally went to Kenya in August 2016.

4. See the official website of TICAD 6: <https://ticad6.net/>.

# Drivers of Japan's Security Commitment in Africa

## Protecting Japan's growing economic interests and facilitating new investments

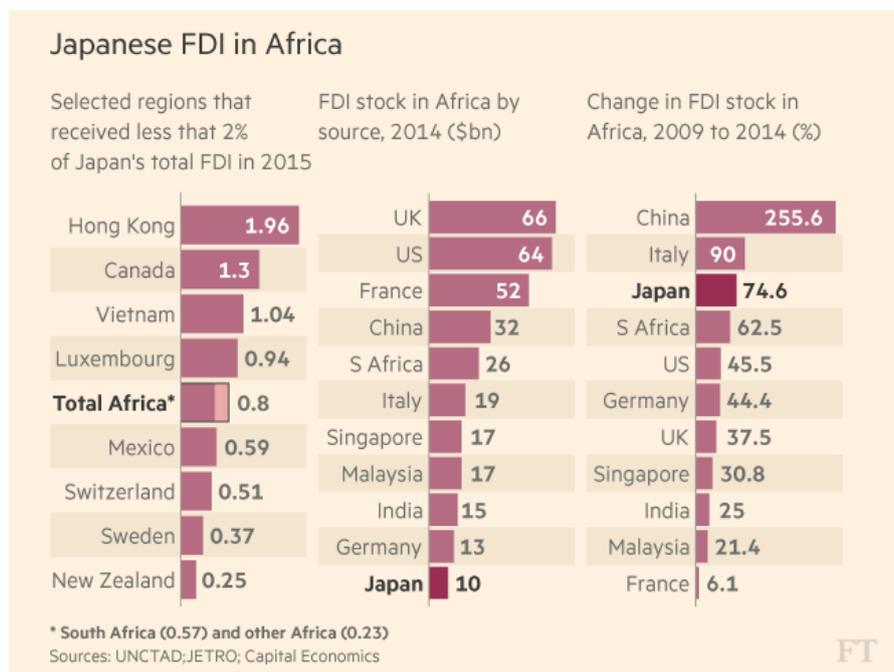
While still modest, Japan's economic interests in Africa are growing: the stock of Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) increased twelvefold from 1997 to 2012, and has almost doubled since then, to reach around \$12bn. In 2015, 687 Japanese companies were operating on the African continent;<sup>5</sup> fewer than 8,000 Japanese nationals currently live in Africa – mostly in South Africa. Indeed, Japanese companies' traditional strongholds in Sub-Saharan Africa are South and Eastern Africa, especially Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique and Tanzania.

Since TICAD 3 in 2003, there has been a shift from resources diplomacy to infrastructure-building and more market-oriented investments, with the support of public funding. Tokyo wants to take advantage of the growing consumer market,<sup>6</sup> including in West Africa. In 2012, the acquisition by Toyota Tsusho of the French retailer CFAO, holding an historic position in this area, was symbolic of this new ambition.

---

5. O. Caslin, "Hiroyuki Ishige: 'Les entreprises japonaises doivent être beaucoup plus présentes en Afrique'", *Jeune Afrique*, August 10, 2016.

6. McKinsey & Company estimates that Africa's consumer spending will surge from \$860bn in 2008 to \$1.4trn in 2020. Go Yamada, "Asian Marketers' New Target: The African Consumer", *Nikkei Shimbun*, August 4, 2016.



Source: *Financial Times*<sup>7</sup> August 2016

As public funds have been drying up and as African countries have been longing for private contributions, the Japanese government has actively engaged its companies to invest in Africa.<sup>8</sup> But, in 2015, the sharp decline of commodity prices badly hurt Japan's private sector.<sup>9</sup> The government thus decided to provide more incentive to maintain and diversify investments through a fresh package of ODA-related opportunities, multiplication of public-private partnerships (PPPs), establishment of economic zones exclusively for Japanese companies, negotiation of new trade and investment agreements, and so on. At the 2016 TICAD, Prime Minister Abe, then accompanied by representatives of 80 leading Japanese companies, pledged \$30bn assistance for Africa – out of which \$20bn was to be covered by private investment. Securing private investment is thus indispensable in fulfilling the promise of financial support that Japan is making to Africa.

7. J. Aglionby and L. Lewis, "Japan Looks to Boost Trade with Africa", *Financial Times*, August 26, 2016.

8. For example, in 2013, a five-year action plan with a focus on increasing private investment was devised – Yokohama Action Plan 2013-2017, Yokohama, June 3, 2013, on MOFA website: <http://www.mofa.go.jp>.

9. All the African branches of Japanese trading houses were in deficit, with particularly worrying cases such as Sumitomo, which had invested in a nickel mine in Madagascar. See K. Inagaki, "Sumitomo and Sherritt Hit by Nickel Slide", *Financial Times*, January 13, 2016.

While Japan's political interest in investing in Africa is thus quite strong, the private sector remains rather reluctant. Beyond the inherent risks related to the investment environment and profitability issue, the traditionally risk-averse Japanese companies are also deterred by the security context, generally perceived in a very negative way. Some companies see Africa as "the continent of terrorism" and feel unsafe; the SDF were until recently unable to rescue Japanese nationals by land in the event of an emergency.<sup>10</sup> In addition, if Japanese companies are interested in tapping into the consumer market, they need to send a greater number of Japanese employees there to sustain their activities. Hence, ensuring Japanese citizens' safety in Africa has become more important.

The January 2013 terror attacks in In Amenas, in which 10 Japanese citizens were killed, was a shock, and served as a wake-up call.<sup>11</sup> It marked a turning point for Japanese security strategy in Africa: the limits imposed on the SDF regarding evacuation missions were questioned,<sup>12</sup> and it was decided to send seven new defense attachés to Africa to better collect information on the security context.<sup>13</sup>

In January 2015, Daesh beheaded two Japanese citizens, having demanded a ransom from Prime Minister Abe (then travelling in the Middle East) shortly after he had pledged \$200m in aid to the Iraqi government and Syrian refugees.<sup>14</sup> Then, in March 2015, three Japanese nationals were killed in the attack at the Bardo Museum in Tunis. In September 2015, as part of the new Security Legislation, the SDF law was revised to allow the use of land vehicles for evacuation missions.<sup>15</sup>

In this new context, ensuring peace and stability in Africa is not only a prerequisite for the sustainable development of the recipient country, but also now clearly a condition to allow greater Japanese investment and, increasingly, a direct contribution to the security of Japan and Japanese nationals.

---

10. Interview with an official of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Tokyo, April 2016.

11. J. McCurry, "In Japan, Sadness and Frustration over Algeria Hostage Crisis", *Global Post*, January 28, 2013.

12. At that time, Japanese troops were not allowed to conduct rescue missions on land, to avoid being caught in combat; they had to rely on Algerian authorities to drive the victims' bodies to a Japanese aircraft. See K. Spitzer, "Japan Looks to Protect Its Own Overseas", *Time*, February 18, 2013.

13. Before that, only 2 defense attachés were based in Egypt and Sudan. The seven new attachés were dispatched to Algeria, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa.

14. E. Johnston and M. Kameda, "Hostage Crisis Could Influence Japan's Mideast Priorities", *The Japan Times*, February 3, 2015.

15. "SDF Holds First Evacuation Drill by Land for Japanese Nationals Abroad", *The Japan Times*, February 16, 2015.

## Matching China's presence on the continent

The rise of China is considered by Japanese policymakers as presenting the greatest systemic challenge the country faces in the coming years.<sup>16</sup> For Tokyo, Beijing's maritime expansion is not only a direct threat to its sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, but also an attempt to challenge the norms of the liberal international order and freedom of navigation in the East and South China Seas. In addition, as China is trying to take the lead in regional and world governance through initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Project, Tokyo sees it as a strategic rival too.<sup>17</sup> China is thus a structural factor in Japanese foreign policy, even when considering its diplomacy *vis-à-vis* Africa.

Japan is, first, concerned with China's rapid economic advance in Africa. Since 2009, China has been Africa's largest trade partner (\$200bn worth of trade in 2014, compared to \$27.5bn for Japan). Almost 3,000 Chinese companies are now operating on the continent and, in 2014, China invested three times more than Japan (\$32bn versus \$12bn). This advance could allow China to gain a large share of the growing consumer market. Moreover, China provides massive assistance and a large workforce in loose political conditions in order to build substantial infrastructure across the continent, which results in expanding its political influence.<sup>18</sup> For Tokyo, China's economic expansion in Africa is advancing at the expense of human rights and good governance, and is used to gather support for Beijing's core interests (from cross-strait relations to expansion in the South China Sea) and revisionist international agenda. One telling example is the way Beijing lobbied African countries to gain their backing in its territorial dispute with the Philippines over the Spratly archipelago, and the way that China claimed huge support from these countries as a means of challenging the tribunal's jurisdiction.<sup>19</sup>

Another important point, on which China is opposing Japan's diplomatic interests in Africa, concerns Tokyo's efforts to reform the UN Security Council (UNSC) and obtain a seat as a permanent member.

---

16. C. Pajon, "Le Japon d'Abe face à la Chine de Xi : de la paix froide à la guerre chaude ?", *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 79, No. 3, Fall 2014.

17. A. Ekman *et al.*, "Three Years of China's New Silk Roads: From Words to (Re)action?", *Études de l'Ifri*, February 2017; [www.ifri.org](http://www.ifri.org).

18. One example of Chinese's attempts to build its soft power in the region is its funding of the \$200m headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa.

19. AMTI Leadership, Arbitration support tracker, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (consulted on 11 March 2017); <https://amti.csis.org>.

Indeed, gathering the support of the 54 African countries for the reform of the UNSC has been Japan's first political priority in Africa for many years. Beijing has consistently and adamantly opposed Japan's project.

Finally, in a more strategic dimension, Tokyo is concerned about Chinese's expanded military presence in Africa (UNPKOs, capacity-building of armed forces, counter-piracy operations), and especially about the base in Djibouti.<sup>20</sup> Japan, as well as its US ally, thus took early initiatives to press the Djiboutian government to reject the Chinese offer. Japan, in turn, announced in October 2016 the expansion of its own base in Djibouti.<sup>21</sup>

Japan is reacting to China's expanded presence in Africa in two ways: first, by trying to emulate Chinese activism. For example, in 2014, Tokyo decided to reinforce the visibility and significance of TICAD by holding it once every three years (instead of every five years) and alternately in Africa and Japan. This follows the framework of the Chinese FOCAC (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, founded in 2000) summit. The second way for Japan to react is to demonstrate more clearly the difference and merits of its own contribution. Tokyo thus underlines the fact that the TICAD forum, in contrast to FOCAC, is truly multilateral, as it is co-organized by institutions such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), World Bank and African Union. Also, as Japan obviously cannot compete with China in amounts of development cooperation aid<sup>22</sup> or investment, it stresses rather the quality of its contribution. Tokyo argues that its infrastructure is more solid and sustainable, as local engineers and agents are involved in the construction and trained to maintain roads and other facilities. Japan's motto is thus to provide a differentiated offer, based on quality, training of human resources and local ownership. Since 2012, Japan has also been elaborating a policy to counterbalance China's public relations strategy in Africa, not only regarding UNSC, but also concerning its claims in the East and South China Seas. For example, Prime Minister Abe was successful in including in the Nairobi Declaration of TICAD last August a mention of the importance of supporting a "rule-based maritime order in accordance with the principles of international law".<sup>23</sup>

---

20. M. Duchâtel, R. Gowan and M. Lafont Rapnouil, "Into Africa: China's Global Security Shift", *Policy Brief*, ECFR, June 14, 2016, [www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu).

21. "Japan to Expand Djibouti Military Base to Counter Chinese Influence", *Reuters*, October 13, 2016.

22. For example, in December 2015, Xi pledged to spend \$60bn over the next three years, while Abe announced half this amount at the latest TICAD summit.

23. TICAD 6 Nairobi Declaration, 28 August 2016, on MOFA website [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

## Increasing its international contribution: Japan as a proactive pacifist

In December 2013, the first National Security Strategy (NSS) of Japan defined “proactive contribution to peace”, based on international cooperation, as the fundamental principle in defending and promoting the country’s security interests.<sup>24</sup>

This notion of a proactive pacifism is not new; it has been developed over time to help provide legal grounds for a political endeavor.<sup>25</sup> In the postwar period, in part because of its constrained use of the military, Japan has defined its security in broad terms. The “comprehensive security” (*sôgô hanzen hoshô*) coined by the Ohira cabinet (1978-1980) addresses both military and non-military threats, including disruption of resource supplies, pollution, natural disaster and terrorism. Later on, in the 1990s, Japan championed the rather vague concept of “human security”, defined as ensuring for individuals “freedom from fear and freedom from want”, which has informed the security-related development cooperation policy of Japan since then. Both approaches favor economic and diplomatic means rather than military tools, as they address the root causes of insecurity rather than the insecurity itself.

However, there were multiple pressures on Japan to abandon its “checkbook diplomacy”, especially after it failed to send troops in the First Gulf War, which provoked acerbic criticism from its US ally. Thereafter, Japan adopted in 1992 its International Peace Cooperation Law (PKO Law) to allow the SDF to join UNPKOs, under very strict conditions (five principles to allow deployment)<sup>26</sup> and rules of engagement (ROEs). Since then, Japan has sent a total of approx. 9300 SDF personnel to places such as Cambodia, Mozambique, the Golan Heights, Timor-Leste, and Haiti.<sup>27</sup> While being a modest contributor in terms of troops, Japan is the third largest financial funder to UNPKOs (after the US and China).

Longing to align its international security contribution with its claim for permanent membership of the UNSC, Japan has been seeking to deploy its armed forces overseas to a greater extent. In the context of counter-

---

24. National Security Strategy, December 13, 2013. Available on the website of the Prime Minister’s office: [www.cas.go.jp](http://www.cas.go.jp).

25. A. Fukushima, “Japan’s ‘Proactive contribution to Peace’. A Mere Political Label?”, *The Tokyo Foundation*, 19 June 2014, [www.tokyofoundation.org](http://www.tokyofoundation.org).

26. The principles are: 1. Existence of a ceasefire; 2. Consent for the undertaking of UNPKO; 3. Impartiality of the operations; 4. In case of non-respect of these principles, the SDF may be withdrawn; 5. The use of weapons shall be limited to the minimum necessary.

27. “Japan’s Contribution to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations”, on MOFA’s website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

terrorism, the Koizumi government allowed the SDF to logistically support the coalition in Afghanistan through refueling activities (2001) and conduct humanitarian activities in Iraq, for the first time outside a UN peacekeeping resolution (2003). In 2006, international interventions were included in the list of core tasks of the SDF. However, strict ROEs have continued to limit the contributions of the SDF to the riskier UNPKOs. That is why Prime Minister Abe has been eager to facilitate SDF missions abroad. In September 2015, the Legislation for Peace and Security<sup>28</sup> revised the PKO Law, allowing the SDF to use force to “rush to protect” UN-related forces or civilians (“rush and rescue” missions or *kaketsuke-keigo*) and properly fulfill its mandate. The SDF were also permanently authorized to conduct support activities for international peace operations outside UNPKOs.

In a nutshell, even if the principle of “proactive contribution to peace” is not only about using the military forces, in reality, it aims to demonstrate in a visible way that Japan is a responsible stakeholder – that is, by responding to international calls to step up its security contribution outside Asia, in particular through military means.

## The tentative inclusion of Africa in Japan's strategic interests

Since the late 2000s, Africa has become an area where Japan's interests in terms of security of the sea-lanes and freedom of navigation are at stake. Hence, Japan joined the anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden in 2009, and showed a more resolute commitment to the region by establishing in Djibouti Japan's first military base overseas in the postwar period (2011).

In 2016, Prime Minister Abe unveiled the concept of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” in his opening remarks to TICAD, when he explained:

“When you cross the seas of Asia and the Indian Ocean and come to Nairobi, you then understand very well that what connects Asia and Africa is the sea-lanes. What will give stability and prosperity to the world is none other than the enormous liveliness brought forth through the union of two free and open oceans and two continents. Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from

---

28. Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security, Government of Japan, March 2016. PowerPoint presentation on MOFA's website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

force or coercion, and making it prosperous. Japan wants to work together with you in Africa in order to make the seas that connect the two continents into peaceful seas that are governed by the rule of law.”<sup>29</sup>

This resonates strongly with the speech he gave nine years ago to the Parliament of India about the “confluence of the two seas”; he called for an “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” to be formed through the partnership of like-minded liberal countries on the outer rim of the Eurasian continent.<sup>30</sup> This concept was even presented as a new pillar of Japan’s “value-based diplomacy” in the 2007 Bluebook.<sup>31</sup> Later, after several setbacks, in particular the end of the “Quadrilateral Initiative” with the US, Australia and India after China criticized this scheme as an attempt to create an “Asian NATO”, the concept disappeared from public statements – but the idea continued to serve as an ideological basis of Japan’s foreign policy.

In other words, the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” seems to be the latest avatar<sup>32</sup> of a maritime “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” approach that can be seen in the current geopolitical context as Japan’s efforts to propose a counter-initiative to China’s Belt and Road project. The concept is still fluid and loosely defined. As in the case of the Chinese project, the vision and the terminology are coming before the actual details of the scheme have been worked out. Several defining elements, nevertheless, can be identified: the centrality of liberal norms and the security of maritime routes; the central partnership with India – Shinzo Abe emphasized this new strategy during Modi’s latest visit to Japan;<sup>33</sup> and the inclusion of Africa (the original arc ran from the Korean peninsula to northern Europe, avoiding the African continent). In concrete terms, Japan’s efforts in advancing this strategy will involve providing nation-building support to African countries while ensuring their ownership, and expanding

---

29. Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 6), Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), Nairobi, August 27, 2016. Available on MOFA’s website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

30. “Confluence of the Two Seas”, speech by Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007. Available on MOFA’s website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

31. See the first section of the Diplomatic Bluebook 2007, available on MOFA’s website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

32. Shinzo Abe signed an op-ed calling for a “security diamond” in 2012, which covers the maritime security aspect of the project: Shinzo Abe, “Asia’s democratic security diamond”, *Project Syndicate*, December 27, 2012. Available on: [www.project-syndicate.org](http://www.project-syndicate.org).

33. The objective is to achieve coordination between Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” and India’s “Act East Policy”. See India-Japan joint statement during the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Japan, November 11, 2016, available on the website of the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <http://mea.gov.in>.

infrastructure development, trade and investment from East Asia to the Middle East and Africa.<sup>34</sup>

This comprehensive initiative does not mean that Japan's activities in Africa will drastically change; it is rather an effort to make the various contributions more visible by setting a strategic framework and providing an alternative narrative to the Chinese Belt and Road project, thus attracting the attention of the international community.

---

34. "A New Foreign Policy Strategy: Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy", MOFA. Available on the website of Japan's Consulate in Sydney: [www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp](http://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp).

# Means and Tools for Greater Security Commitment: Japan, a Promising Peacebuilder?

## Boats at sea and boots on the ground

### *The counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden: a positive experience*

The counter-piracy mission represents at least two important steps for Japan's upgraded security contribution in Africa: first, for the first time, the Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) were allowed to participate, along with the Japan Coast Guard (JCG), in an international law-enforcement operation far from Japanese coasts; second, to support its participation on a longer-term basis, Japan set up a military base abroad for the first time since 1945.

Piracy has been a major concern for Japan as it relies heavily on the sea-lanes for its energy imports and trade, and maintains the second-largest merchant fleet in the world. Despite this, Tokyo reacted rather slowly to the UN calls<sup>35</sup> to tackle the increasing number of piracy attacks off the coasts of Somalia.<sup>36</sup> By February 2009, more than 20 countries, including India, Russia and China, and EU member states had already sent forces. This prompted Japan's decision to finally act swiftly, not to be left behind.<sup>37</sup>

The major difficulty was for Japan to find an acceptable legal framework for sending its SDF outside of Asia to join a law-enforcement operation. As a first response, Tokyo decided in March 2009 to issue a Maritime Security Operation order (Article 82 of SDF Law) to allow MSDF to support Japan Coast Guard (JCG) actions in the Gulf of Aden, since the JCG lacked the capacity to project force to so distant a region. In this

---

35. See United Nations Documents on Piracy. Available on UN website: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

36. H. Kaneda, "Japan Should Immediately Dispatch Naval Ships off Somalia", AJISS-Commentary, February 4, 2009.

37. L. Black, *Japan's Maritime Security Strategy. The Japan Coast Guard and Maritime Outlaws*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 136.

framework however, they could only protect Japan-related ships. In June 2009, the Anti-Piracy Measures Bill was adopted to cover all boats, and it allowed use of weapons to deter and repress acts of piracy. The administrative authority to arrest the pirates rested with the JCG; the SDF role was restricted to convoy and surveillance.

Since then, Japan has been deploying two MSDF destroyers (with 400 personnel) and two P-3C maritime patrol aircraft (with 60 personnel) on a rotating basis. Every four months, the rotation allows the troops to sail strategic waters from the Indian Ocean to the South and East China Seas, conducting intelligence and surveillance activities, and making strategic port calls. As the number of ships directly escorted by SDF vessels decreased rapidly, in July 2013 the forces joined the multinational Combined Task Force 151 (CTF151) for zone-defense activities. For the first time since 1945, a Japanese officer commanded a multinational force after he took over the CTF151 for three months in 2015. The record of Japan has been quite strong: the MSDF escorted a total of 3,800 commercial ships, while the P-3Cs conducted 1,568 flights,<sup>38</sup> accounting for approximately 60% of the warning and surveillance operations in the Gulf of Aden.

A more controversial step that enhanced Japan's security profile in the region was the build-up of a "semi-permanent facility" in Djibouti to support the anti-piracy activities. Tokyo is paying a rent of \$30m per year for the base and is offering a whole package of development assistance.<sup>39</sup>

Set up next to the US Camp Lemonnier, the 12-hectare base, accommodating 180 troops, was initially designed to last about ten years, but is now likely to remain on a mid-term basis. In addition, the extension of the base was announced in October 2016, officially with the objective of preparing to evacuate Japanese citizens in case of political instability or natural disasters: "Japan is considering deploying C-130 transport aircraft, Bushmaster armored vehicles and extra personnel to the base but has not yet decided on how many".<sup>40</sup> Indeed, when troubles broke out in South Sudan in July 2016, three C-130 were sent from Japan to evacuate Japanese civilians. The merit of maintaining the base is also to allow for a sustained Japanese military presence, thus favoring cooperation with US military and NATO forces, including through the sharing of terrorism-related information.

---

38. Press conference by Defense Minister Nakatani, June 17, 2016, [www.mod.go.jp](http://www.mod.go.jp).

39. Rolling Plan for the Republic of Djibouti, Country Assistance Policy, MOFA, April 2014. Available on the website of the Japan Embassy to Djibouti: [www.dj.emb-japan.go.jp](http://www.dj.emb-japan.go.jp).

40. "Japan to Expand Djibouti Military Base to Counter Chinese Influence", *Reuters*, October 13, 2016.

## ***SDF participation in UNMISS: a symbol of the difficulties in acting overseas***

Japan's participation in the UNPKO in South Sudan (UNMISS) allowed Japan to demonstrate its strong will to be seen by the international community as a responsible stakeholder.<sup>41</sup> But it also highlighted the limitations on SDF missions overseas.

In December 2011, Tokyo decided to deploy an engineering unit of the Ground Self-Defense Forces in South Sudan. The 350-personnel unit started operating in March 2012, conducting road and facility construction activities first within and then outside the UN facilities. In May 2013, the SDF were allowed to work beyond the radius of 20km around the capital Juba, a constraint that had been decided for safety reasons and that, until then, had greatly limited engineering work by the SDF, much needed in areas remote from the capital.<sup>42</sup>

As the security situation in the country worsened, amounting to a quasi-civil war, the mandate of the UNMISS evolved in May 2014 from nation-building to protection of civilians. Accordingly, the tasks of the engineering unit were also supposed to shift from infrastructure development to supporting civilian protection, "through tasks such as road and other construction site preparation".<sup>43</sup>

Despite the further deterioration in security conditions since July 2016, with the killing of more than 270 people in Juba, the Japanese government strived to keep the SDF there to demonstrate its will to "proactively contribute to peace". Tokyo considered that the Sudanese rebels were not organized enough to qualify as a "quasi-state organization" that can legally be party to a conflict.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the SDF would be withdrawn immediately in case of armed conflict.

Despite mounting concerns for the safety of the deployed troops, the visit in October 2016 by Defense Minister Tomomi Inada to the UN camp in Juba was intended to reassure and confirm that security was sufficient to allow the continuation and upgrade of the SDF mandate to include the

---

41. MOFA's view that Japan should carry some risk in its efforts to be seen as a responsible actor on the international scene was more decisive than MOD's concerns about the lack of security in South Sudan, in the decision to deploy SDF there. See M. Endo, "From 'Reactive' to 'Principled': Japan's Foreign Policy Stance toward Africa", 2013, p. 13. Translated into English in 2016 and published by Japan's Diplomacy Series, Japan Digital Library, <http://www2.jiia.or.jp>.

42. A. Boutellis and A. C. Smith, *Engineering Peace: The Critical Role of Engineers in UN Peacekeeping*, International Peace Institute, January 2014, p. 12.

43. R. Takezawa, "Japan's Peace Building in Africa" in Y. Tatsumi and P. Kennedy (eds), *Peacebuilding and Japan. Views from the Next Generation*, The Stimson Center, March 2017, p. 55.

44. "New SDF Mandate in South Sudan", *The Japan Times*, November 18, 2016.

“rush and rescue” mission.<sup>45</sup> The decision was subsequently made in November 2016.

Faced with public skepticism, the government explained that the SDF would go to the rescue of geographically distant UN-related troops and personnel in “extremely limited cases”, considering that the unit would not consist of infantry: it was stated that the Japanese unit was an engineering unit engaged in road-building and facility construction, and that search and rescue would be implemented only in an emergency, from a humanitarian perspective and within the limits of what the unit could do<sup>46</sup> – that is, only in or near the capital Juba when no other troops were available, and to rescue primarily civilian personnel. So the Japanese troops, Inada argued, were still dealing with nation-building, and not primarily with the protection of civilians.

Nevertheless, there is still strong sensitivity in Japan regarding the possibility of any casualties in the ranks of the Japanese SDF taking part in UNPKO operations. Abe himself suggested that he would resign in the event of any casualty or injured personnel in South Sudan.<sup>47</sup> In February 2017, the Defense Minister was strongly criticized as she attempted to downplay the seriousness of South Sudan's security situation.

Eventually, Prime Minister Abe announced on March 10, 2017 that the SDF mission in UNMISS would end in May. This marks the temporary end of meaningful SDF participation in any UNPKO. The authorities argued that the security situation in South Sudan was not the primary cause of the retreat, and instead highlighted that the five-year mission was the longest for the SDF in any UNPKO.<sup>48</sup> However, in the previous weeks, the state of civil war had reached catastrophic proportions for civilians, and a state of famine was declared, while the Sudanese authorities decided to increase work-permit costs, making it difficult for NGOs to conduct humanitarian aid.<sup>49</sup> This, combined with the insecure situation, would make the political legitimacy of such a mission very difficult to uphold.

---

45. “Inada's S. Sudan Visit an Appropriate Step for Authorizing New SDF Tasks”, *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 12, 2016.

46. Press conference by Defense Minister Inada, Tokyo, Ministry of Defense, November 11, 2016, [www.mod.go.jp](http://www.mod.go.jp).

47. “Abe Hints He Is Ready to Resign if SDF Members Killed, Injured in S. Sudan”, *The Mainichi Shimbun*, February 2, 2017.

48. Over the years, the troops have repaired a total of 210km of road and finished preparing 500,000 square meters of land to allow for construction projects to be started. See R. Yoshida, “Japan to End SDF's South Sudan Mission in May”, *The Japan Times*, March 10, 2017.

49. J. Aglionby, “South Sudan Fees Rise Imperils Life-saving Aid, Agencies Warn”, *Financial Times*, March 9, 2017.

This withdrawal shows that the government is still very much constrained when dispatching its forces abroad, and the passing of the Legislation on Peace and Security changed nothing. Indeed, the legislation simply offers tools and options that need to be used and upheld by political leaders. But, even in the case of a popular figure such as Shinzo Abe, Japan's deeply rooted reluctance to be associated with any combat situation abroad, and to risk casualties, is strongly constraining his decisions. If a law-enforcement mission such as in the Gulf of Aden is possible, risky operations on the ground are not. This raises doubts about the ability of Japan to play a greater proactive peace role, as championed by Abe.<sup>50</sup> One of Tokyo's initial ambitions for the TICAD was to announce a new deployment of the SDF to another UNPKO in Africa, but it was not possible to find a suitable one.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, these limitations pushed Tokyo to develop an original way of contributing to international peace and stability. Through the flexible concept of “peacebuilding”,<sup>52</sup> Japan can find ways to combine economic assistance and development aid, as well as capacity-building and SDF activities, while mitigating risks. By the same logic, Japan favors a partnership-based approach.

## Japan's approach to peacebuilding

Japan showed early enthusiasm for a “peacebuilding” approach, derived in part from the principle of “human security” behind its ODA policy since 1992.<sup>53</sup> The flexibility of the “human security” concept, which encompasses both “freedom from fear” (i.e. conflict-related contributions, human rights and freedom) and “freedom from want” (i.e. development-related issues) enables Japan to adjust its contribution to the situation, as well as to its own constraints.<sup>54</sup> Traditionally, Japan has focused more on the development dimension of the concept, and emphasized economic and social infrastructure assistance (still representing most of its ODA). Gradually, since the 2000s, it has also invested in the conflict-related dimension. For Tokyo, thus, peacebuilding refers to the provision of

---

50. Y. Tatsumi, “Japan Self-Defense Force Withdraws from South Sudan”, *The Diplomat*, March 13, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com>.

51. Interview with an official from the National Security Secretariat, Tokyo, April 2016.

52. The 2008 *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* defined peacebuilding as “a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development”, p. 18.

53. For example, the UN Peacebuilding Commission was established in 2005 on the initiative of Japan.

54. K. Koga, “Toward Effective Institution-building in Peacebuilding”, in Y. Tatsumi and P. Kennedy (eds), *Peacebuilding and Japan*, *op. cit.* [43], p. 15.

seamless support, which includes terminating conflicts, restoring public security, stabilizing society, and promoting development and economic growth. It also converges with the “All-Japan approach”, which aims to achieve integrated coordination between governmental agencies,<sup>55</sup> non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and ministries, as well as between civilian and military tools, so as to create synergy and better implement activities ranging from development and capacity-building to peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It allows maximizing efforts and reducing costs, as well as increasing the visibility, effectiveness and coherence of the action.<sup>56</sup>

Since the Third TICAD in 2003, the “consolidation of peace” has been one of the three key policy pillars of Japan’s assistance to Africa, along with “human-centered development” and “poverty reduction through economic growth”. Japan’s peacebuilding approach, initially focusing on civilian means and development activities, gradually sought to involve the Self-Defense Forces. As Japan usually dispatches SDF engineering units to peace operations, it actually facilitated this process. Civilian-led post-conflict reconstruction and development missions with SDF participation were implemented, for example, in East Timor (2002-2004), Iraq (2003-2006) and Haiti (2012-2013). Participation in the UNMISS in South Sudan also provided an opportunity to implement this approach. Beyond their UN mandate, the SDF were thus conducting “non-mandate” activities that were coordinated with JICA-led projects and personnel. For example, the SDF built a road as part of the UNMISS mandate, with construction materials bought by local government with the support of Japanese ODA.<sup>57</sup> However, the dangerous security situation in South Sudan since December 2013 led to the evacuation of most of the civilian personnel of JICA and NGOs operating in the country, thus putting an end to the All-Japan experiment.

Given the changing nature of the PKOs and the continuing limitations of Japan’s military contributions, some experts criticize Japan’s persistence in sending troops there with the “primary aim of establishing a track record of overseas operations”.<sup>58</sup> They recommend, instead, developing Japan’s contribution in other fields of peacebuilding such as capacity-building in

---

55. Mainly the Ministry of Defense (MOD), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in charge of the implementation of the development assistance policy.

56. It follows the trends set by the UN, NATO and other organizations and countries to build up comprehensive approaches in international peace operations. See Y. Uesugi, “All-Japan Approach to International Peace Operations”, in B. Howe and B. Kondoch, *Peacekeeping and the Asia-Pacific*, Brill, 2017, p. 115-122.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

58. K. Isezaki, “Japan Self Defense Forces Participation in UN Peacekeeping: An Idea whose Time Is Past”, *Nippon.com*, December 5, 2016, [www.nippon.com](http://www.nippon.com).

law enforcement or security sector reform (SSR). Institution-building in Africa was, indeed, the topic of Foreign Minister Kishida's speech at the Open Debate of the Security Council that he chaired in July 2016.<sup>59</sup> Japan is already making modest contributions in this field, such as the training of 20,000 police officers in the Republic of Congo.<sup>60</sup> Greater commitment would require participation by the Japanese police forces, which are still reluctant to join operations overseas, especially since one of their members was killed in a UNPKO in Cambodia in 1993. Another path would see Japan implementing SSR activities through the MOD's "capacity-building assistance" budget.<sup>61</sup> So far, the MOD assistance program has been focused on East Asian recipients.<sup>62</sup>

Based on this peacebuilding approach, three main trends can, therefore, be seen in Japanese security policy in Africa: the securitization of development assistance, the focus on capacity-building, and the willingness to make greater use of the SDF. To further maximize efforts and minimize costs and risks, Japan is reinforcing its approach in terms of partnerships, with international and regional organizations, as well as with third countries (see below).

## Extensive securitization of aid

The securitization of aid is part of the "strategic use" of ODA that prioritizes countries and projects with maximum strategic benefit for Japan's security and prosperity. There are multiple interpretations of what should be considered as truly "strategic". One of these focuses on Japan's national security, and leads to a greater share of ODA being devoted to security-related issues. Despite the strong aversion of officials in charge of ODA to hard security matters, public aid has been gradually used to fund responses to "non-traditional" security issues such as anti-terrorism and anti-piracy measures in the Philippines, Indonesia and, later, in Afghanistan. Disguised as law-enforcement issues, these "gray security activities" became eligible for Japanese aid. This kind of ODA in particular is expected to increase, to support Japan's security stakes from Southeast Asia to Africa.

---

59. Statement by Foreign Minister Kishida at the Open Debate of the UN Security Council, "Peacebuilding in Africa", July 29, 2016, available on MOFA's website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

60. "Japan's Peacebuilding Efforts in Africa Should Be Seen as Mutually Beneficial", *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 2, 2016.

61. T. Honda, "Combining JSDF's International Cooperation Activities in South Sudan: Dispatching JSDF Unit to UNMISS and Capacity Building Assistance", *Column*, Canon Institute for Global Studies, 26 May 2016, [www.canon-igs.org](http://www.canon-igs.org).

62. Japan's Defense Capacity Building Assistance, Ministry of Defense, Tokyo, February 2016. Available on the website of the MOFA: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

The adoption of a new Development Cooperation Charter (which encompasses assistance larger than ODA) in 2015 facilitates this security-related assistance. The new charter, for the first time, allows the provision of assistance to foreign military forces, but only for non-combat objectives and missions (post-disaster relief activities, for example).

This trend toward securitization of aid has been embodied by the last two presidents of JICA: Akihiko Tanaka (2012-2015), a well-known professor of international affairs and strategy, who supported more convergence between aid and security. His successor, Shinichi Kitaoka, is a core security expert, and took part in several major blue-ribbon committees to shape future security strategy and new security legislation for the country.

An example of how ODA is extensively used for security issues is Japan's counter-terrorism policy: In February 2015, Foreign Minister Kishida pledged \$15.5m in ODA for counter-terrorism capacity-building assistance in the Middle East and Africa (border control and the improvement of investigation and prosecution capacity, as well as support for equipment relating to counter-terrorism), the expansion of humanitarian assistance, totaling \$200m, and assistance in creating societies resilient to radicalization (people-to-people exchanges).<sup>63</sup> As the deputy press secretary for the Foreign Ministry clarified at the time: "Japan's assistance for countering the Islamic State is basically to provide food, medical care and education. It is absolutely nonmilitary assistance."<sup>64</sup> Again, using ODA, Japan addresses the root causes of insecurity rather than the insecurity itself. However, some experts question the relevance of using the ODA budget to fund counter-terrorism measures. These are some examples of inconsistencies that are created by simultaneous attempts to, on the one hand, securitize aid, and, on the other, frame security issues as development issues.

## Building up African security capacities

Since Japan is limited to using its military forces in peace operations, capacity-building activities are important to show its commitment, while using its Self-Defense Forces in a secure manner.

One important objective is to train African troops for peacekeeping activities. As UNPKO mandates are becoming more robust, Western troop

---

63. Press conference by Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, Tokyo, February 17, 2015. Available on MOFA's website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

64. Quoted by Mina Pollman, "Japan's 'Mercantile Realism' in the Middle East", *The Diplomat*, January 23, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com>.

contributors, including Japan, are more reluctant to join the operations and bear the risks. However, the African contributors might be more willing to take on this role as they are politically more involved, and show less reluctance to deploy their troops in risky environments. So the trend is to train the African troops and provide technical support to enable them to conduct the new PKO mandates. The Western troop-contributing countries (TCCs) are evolving into technology-contributing countries (TechCCs).<sup>65</sup>

Japan began in 2008 to fund PKO training centers in Africa; it now supports 13 centers,<sup>66</sup> which provide training for civilians, police and military personnel. So far, the government of Japan has provided support worth more than \$39m and dispatched 39 experts, including 24 SDF personnel, as instructors.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, since 2014, Japan has been accepting civilian candidates from Africa in its program to train peace-builders, delivered in Hiroshima. Since 2015, Japan has also been taking part in the UN-launched Project for African Rapid Deployment of Engineering Capabilities (ARDEC), in which Japanese SDF personnel are training engineering units in African countries. This type of activity is important to advertise the skills and expertise that the engineering units of the Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF) have developed over time through their participation in UNPKOs.<sup>68</sup> For example, the GSDF published the first manual for engineering work for UNPKOs.

Another focal point is maritime capacity-building. Building on their extensive experience in Southeast Asia, the Japan Coast Guard, with JICA support, trained coastguard forces in Yemen up to 2013. Tokyo is now helping to build the capacity of the Djiboutian Coast Guard, providing two patrol boats in 2015 through ODA, and training the personnel.<sup>69</sup> Since 2013, Japan has also been providing assistance to Somalia on maritime law-enforcement procedures.<sup>70</sup>

---

65. M. Suda, "New Dimensions for Japan's Contributions to UN Blue Helmets", in Y. Tatsumi (ed.), *Japan as a Peace Enabler: Views from the Next Generation*, Stimson Center, March 2016, p. 75.

66. Egypt, Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Cameroon, Ethiopia (two locations), Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa.

67. "Dispatch of an Instructor to Ecole de Maintien de la Paix in the Republic of Mali", July 9, 2015. Available on MOFA's website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

68. In total, 1,200 GSDF engineers operated in Cambodia (1992-2003), 680 in East Timor-UNTAET (2002), 1,607 in UNMISSET (2002-2004), 2,184 in Haiti (2012-2013), and more than 2,500 in South Sudan (2012-today). Source: Japan's MOFA.

69. "Djibouti Receives New Patrol Boats", *DefenseWeb*, December 8, 2015.

70. "Somali Officials Attend Maritime Law Enforcement Training in Japan", June 1, 2014, available on JICA's website: [www.jica.go.jp](http://www.jica.go.jp).

## A partnership-based approach

Since Japan is not so familiar with the African security context and does not possess sufficient expertise and information, it cannot conceive of acting alone on security issues there. Traditionally, a significant part of Japan's contributions has, therefore, been channeled through multilateral organizations, such as UN or African Union agencies. For example, most of the \$60m promised by Tokyo at the 2006 TICAD Conference on Consolidation of Peace was distributed through international, regional organizations or NGOs. As a result, Japan's direct contribution is less visible.<sup>71</sup> Another example is the announcement in January 2014 by Prime Minister Abe of \$320m in support to the African Union for responding to conflicts and disasters, including contributions to improve the situation in South Sudan, the Sahel region and Central African Republic.<sup>72</sup> As Tokyo seeks to expand its presence in Africa, it is also expanding its partnerships with third countries. European countries, such as France, are possible candidates.

A Joint Plan for Africa<sup>73</sup> was adopted by Tokyo and Paris in October 2015; it set three domains of cooperation: sustainable development, health and security. The document, mainly drafted by the French side, takes note of modest ongoing bilateral security cooperation, such as the co-funding of peacekeeping schools on the continent or the joint support for the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa, and suggests initiatives to move forward. If it has the merit of providing a basis for discussion, the plan was perceived by the Japanese side as more like a unilateral proposition, as it is still very difficult for Tokyo to respond to Paris's expectations in terms of reciprocity.

As expected, Tokyo seems to benefit most from this bilateral security cooperation in Africa: it can take advantage of France's extensive knowledge of and expertise in the African security environment, especially in the context of growing terrorist attacks. Indeed, Japanese defense attachés based in African countries benefited from a first briefing from French defense officers in January 2016. Tokyo is also relying on the French and other Europeans for evacuation of its nationals in emergency cases, as in Ivory Coast in 2011.

---

71. Japan's Support for the Consolidation of Peace in Africa, February 2006, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

72. Prime Minister Abe's visit to Africa, January 17, 2014. On MOFA's website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

73. "Plan franco-japonais pour le développement durable, la santé et la sécurité en Afrique", Tokyo, October 5, 2015. Available on MOFA's website: [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

In return, France is expecting Japan to step up its contribution to security-related activities in the Sahel and West Africa. But so far, the Japanese response has been quite cautious. For example, France has been hoping for Japanese support for its Sahel Cross-Border Cooperation Assistance Program (ACTS) to bolster transboundary security in Sahel between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, but, while Japan is the second humanitarian and food aid contributor to the Sahel region, it has not responded so far to this invitation.<sup>74</sup> The main reasons are that this is a risky zone, and less economically important for Japan than the Ivory Coast or Senegal.<sup>75</sup> Also, Paris would like Tokyo to increase its participation in UNPKOs, even in a low-profile fashion. But, as explained earlier, it is still difficult for Japan to commit to these operations. The current negotiation of an Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) between France and Japan might help to develop their bilateral military cooperation in international peacebuilding operations.

Overall, Japan-France cooperation in Africa, especially in the area of security, is thus quite limited, and, so far, it has been more to the benefit of Tokyo. Certainly, for political reasons, Japan wants to show the flag and demonstrate that it is a significant actor in Africa – but it finds it difficult to take concrete steps forward.

Beyond France, Japan is very interested in developing its cooperation with the European Union, with upgraded participation in Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions in Africa.<sup>76</sup> These civilian or civilo-military missions take a holistic approach to security that is very close to Japanese understanding. The ratification of a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA) would facilitate the conditions of Japan's involvement in these EU crisis-management missions.<sup>77</sup>

---

74. Japan donated \$427.96m between 2000 and 2014, second only to the US contribution (\$2,199.43m dollars). See C. Laville, "Les dépenses militaires et l'aide au développement au Sahel : quel équilibre ?", *Working Paper*, FERDI, November 2016, p. 65.

75. Interview with an official from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, April 2016.

76. Interview with Japanese experts on African security issues and Japanese aid to Africa, Tokyo, April 2016.

77. The cooperation has already taken place on an *ad hoc* basis, from ODA funding for CSDP missions in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2003 to joint exercises with the EUNAVFOR Atalanta mission since October 2014 in the Gulf of Aden, and financial and technical assistance to EUCAP Sahel since December 2014. See: E. Pejsova, "EU and Japan: Stepping Up the Game", *ISSUE Brief*, EUISS, May 2015; M. Tsuruoka, "Japan-Europe Relations: Toward a Full Political and Security Partnership", in Y. Tatsumi (ed.) *Japan's Global Diplomacy: The View from the Next Generation*, Stimson Center, March 2015.

# Conclusion: The Dawn of a Strategic Approach to Africa?

Japan's approach to Africa remains essentially non-strategic. Tokyo maintains a development-oriented and partnership-based approach to a continent that remains unfamiliar. Japanese interests in Sub-Saharan Africa are still mostly of an economic nature, and remain quite modest. The importance given to keeping up with China highlights the survival of the traditional Japanese "reactive approach". Finally, since Japanese strategic security interests remain first and foremost located in its immediate neighborhood, an upgraded, ambitious military commitment to Africa is unlikely to happen.

That being said, this paper has documented new features of Japan's diplomacy that tend to gradually integrate Africa into Japan's strategic interests. First, despite limitations in terms of mandates and ROEs, SDF deployments to Africa are now facilitated. The proactive commitment of Japan to a peacebuilding approach is providing opportunities for the SDF to act in a safer way, in synergy with development assistance activities. This can constitute the real value-added of Japan's security contribution in Africa. Second, Africa is now being associated more tightly with Japan's strategic core interests. Terrorist attacks on the continent pose a direct risk to Japanese nationals. Threats to the security of vital maritime shipping routes, transiting from the Middle East to the Indian Ocean and all the way to Japan, are directly undermining Tokyo's interests. The inclusion of Africa in the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" demonstrates Japan's will to adopt a more strategic approach to Africa. This might lead to greater engagement, with respect to investment in infrastructures, maritime capacity-building, and peacebuilding operations. The expansion of the Djibouti base is an important symbol of this longer-term security commitment in the region.

These recent developments, however, have not yet led to a strategic approach. Despite political declarations of interest, there is still a big gap between the discourse and the reality of what Japan wants and can achieve in Africa. In May 2017, after the withdrawal of troops from South Sudan, Japan is no longer participating in any UNPKO – which contradicts the official line about a "proactive contribution to peace". The extreme caution Japan is showing with regard to its security partnership with France in

Africa is another example. Also, Japanese companies remain extremely risk-averse. Insufficient or unsustainable interest in Africa on the part of Japan's private sector would jeopardize the current ambitions to increase Japan's economic and politico-strategic profile on the continent. Finally, Japan still lacks expertise in African affairs, which undermines its capacity to design a proper strategic approach based on refined understanding of African's complex situations.

If Japan truly wants to engage more deeply in Africa, and develop a more strategic approach to the continent, it will need to sustain political and economic interest in Africa over the long term and build up its expertise in African affairs.



**ifri**

institut français  
des relations  
internationales

