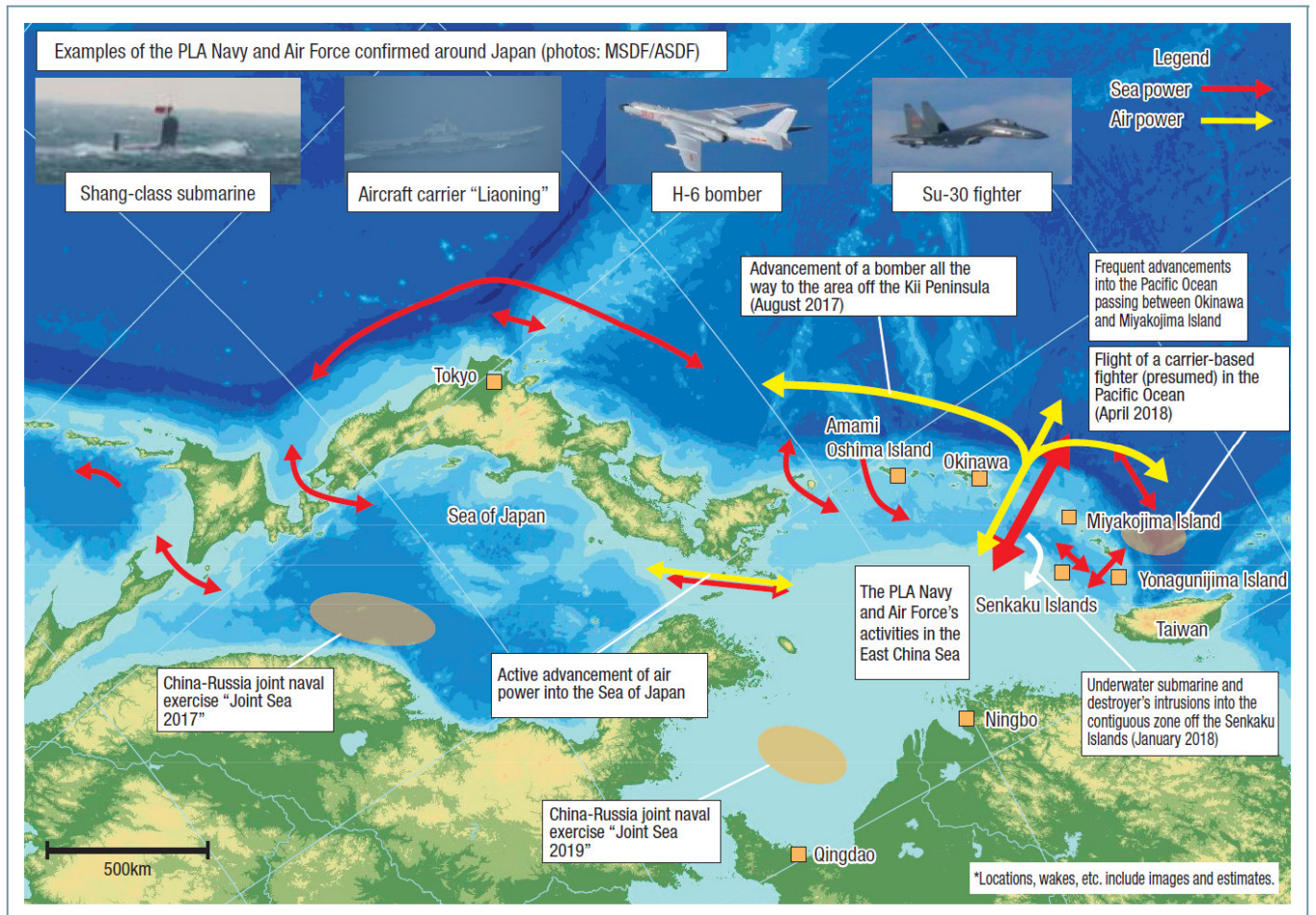


continue to make every effort to cautiously monitor the waters around the Senkaku Islands with a sense of tension.”

Despite the South China Sea Arbitration in 2016, China has kept extending effective control over the South China Sea and is increasing efforts to change the status quo around the East China Sea too.

People’s Liberation Army (PLA)’s Recent Activities in the Surrounding Sea Area and Airspace of Japan (image)



People’s Liberation Army (PLA)’s Recent Activities in the Surrounding Sea Area and Airspace of Japan
Source: DEFENSE OF JAPAN 2019, Annual White Paper published by Ministry of Defense, Japan

On July 7, Japanese Minister of Defense Kono Taro, Australian Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds, and US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper held a virtual trilateral defense ministerial meeting and issued a joint statement on commitment to enhance security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the statement, the ministers reinforced their strong opposition to any destabilizing or coercive unilateral actions that could alter the status quo and increase tensions in the East China Sea. They expressed their intention to continue to coordinate closely on the security environment in the region, with a view to deterring such actions.

On the issue of the South China Sea, the statement read:

With regard to the South China Sea, the ministers reinforced strong opposition to the use of force or coercion to alter the status quo, and reaffirmed the importance of upholding freedom of navigation and overflight. They expressed serious concern about recent incidents, including the continued militarization of disputed features, dangerous or coercive use of coast guard vessels and “maritime militia,” and efforts to disrupt other countries’ resource exploitation activities. They emphasized the importance of peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, in particular as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and called for all countries in the region to take meaningful steps to ease tension and build trust. The ministers also called for any Code of Conduct in the South China Sea to be consistent with existing international law, in particular as reflected in UNCLOS; not to prejudice the interests of third parties or the rights of any State under international law; and to reinforce existing inclusive regional architecture.

(Source: The Australian Defence Force)

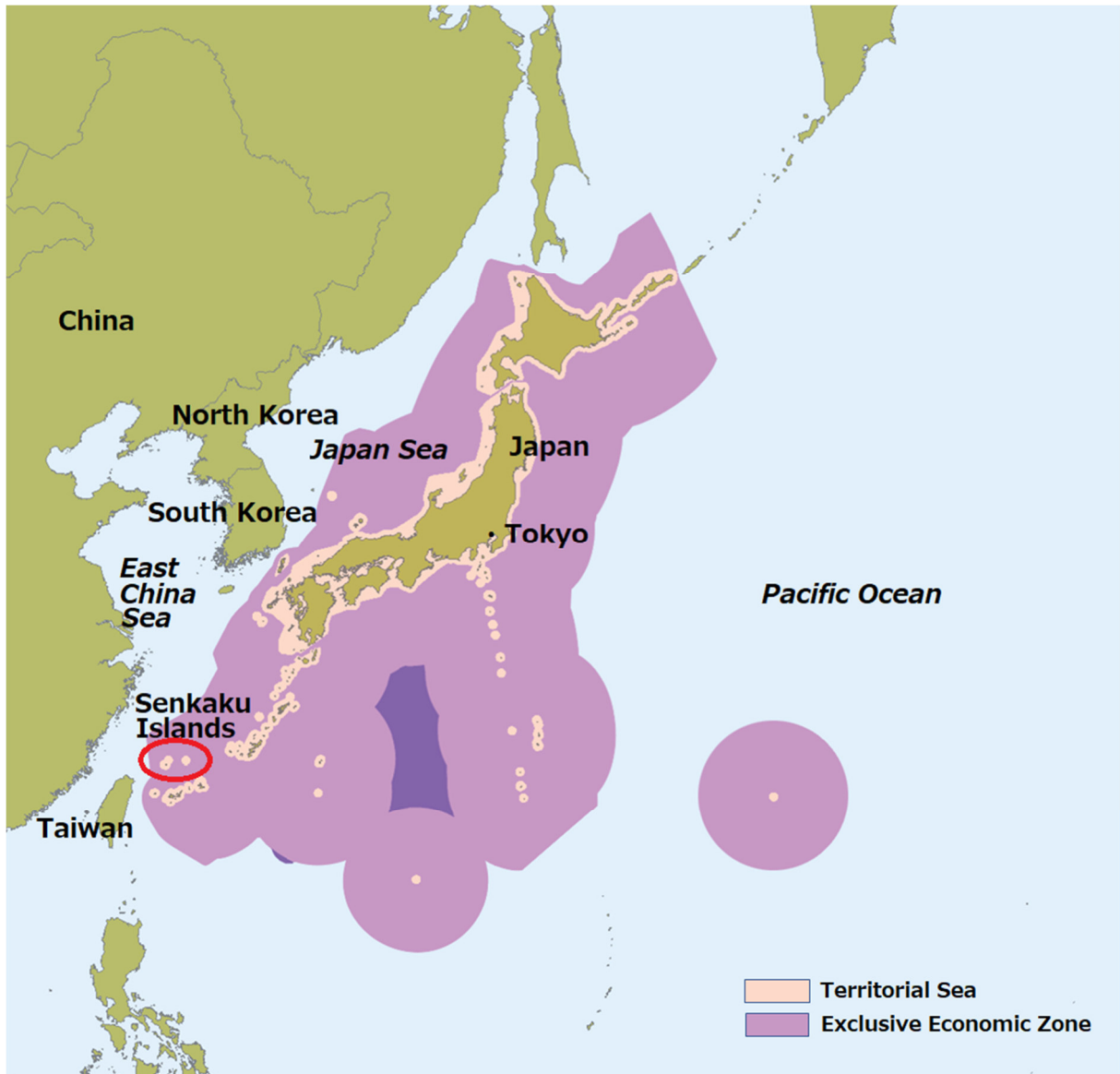
Explaining the term “maritime militia” used in the statement above, Tomisaka Satoshi, a professor at Takushoku University, comments, “[Maritime militia is] already an obsolete term in Chinese society. It was originally formed with tensions in the Taiwan Strait in mind, and in response to Mao Tse-tung’s slogan that ‘all people are soldiers,’ when males between the ages of 18 and 50 were automatically inducted into military or militia forces. This age requirement was later reduced to those between the ages of 18 and 35, and while it still continues to this day, activities such as regular training are not a part of the system.” Professor Tomisaka further notes, “An increasing number of ‘amateurs’ are crewing Chinese government vessels, adding to fears that some might act unpredictably and heighten tensions.” (*Discuss Japan*, No. 37, Mar. 28, 2017)

Japan is a maritime nation at the western edge of the Pacific Ocean. The land area is about 380,000 km², of which about 67% is forests, but the combined area of inland and territorial waters as well as the exclusive economic zone, which includes the contiguous zone, is about 4,470,000 km². It goes without saying that securing the protection, development, utilization and safe navigation of the seas is extremely important to Japan.

Japan’s ocean policy is summarized in the “Basic Plan on Ocean Policy.” The most recent plan is the “3rd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy” that was adopted by the Cabinet in May 2018. This plan is supposed to be revised every five years. Meanwhile, the Councilors’ Meeting of the Headquarters for Ocean Policy put together proposals to deal with the variously changing circumstances.

Hao Ichiro, then-Director General of the National Ocean Policy Secretariat said of the proposal, compiled for the 3rd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy in spring 2018 by the Councilors’ Meeting, that the report stressed the need to fully take into account factors such as recent environmental changes and threats in the oceans surrounding Japan, and progress with

initiatives aimed at creating open and stable oceans based on the rule of law. The report also recommended that the existing Basic Act on Ocean Policy be fundamentally restructured, to encompass maritime security on a broader scale, and that proactive measures be taken to guarantee safety and peace of mind for the people of Japan, and safeguard the country's marine interests.



Japan's Territorial Waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)
Source: Outline of the Third Basic Plan on Ocean Policy

Hao added, “The oceans are governed by international rules that have long been debated and acted upon by many countries around the world, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The first key point is that countries comply fully with these rules, and establish the rule of law at sea. Maintaining and reinforcing order on the seas through

international cooperation, in a free and open manner in accordance with these rules, will in turn enable us to establish a more peaceful and stable international community.”

Hao further noted, “As well as actively contributing to the establishment of a comprehensive oceanographic observation network, based on international cooperation and coordination, it is also important that Japan works to acquire further scientific knowledge through observation, and uses that knowledge to implement rational policies.” (*Highlighting JAPAN, April 2018*)

The Councilors’ Recommendations



Prime Minister Abe receives the recommendations of the Councilors’ Meeting of the Headquarters for Ocean Policy from Chairman Tanaka Akihiko, June 30, 2020.
CABINET PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

In response to the 3rd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy, the Councilors’ Meeting of the Headquarters for Ocean Policy set up project teams in September 2019. They put together recommendations after holding focused evaluations and discussions about (1) strengthening ocean industry cooperation and the international competitiveness of the ocean industries with sea-lane countries, (2) strengthening the capacity of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), and (3) implementing marine environment protection as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as regards the oceans.

Among these, the 3rd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy had a special focus on MDA and called for focus initiatives from the following perspectives: (1) systems for gathering information, (2) structures for gathering and sharing information, and (3) international coordination and cooperation.

The Councilors' Meeting discussed collecting, summarizing, and sharing information about ship movements with the aim of early detection of threats and risks at sea. This was based on the understanding (1) that various issues relating to illegal operations by foreign fishing vessels and maritime security have occurred in recent years in waters under Japanese jurisdiction and in Japan's major sea lanes, including the areas around the Senkaku Islands and the Yamato Bank (approximately 400 meters in water depth), (2) that Japanese government agencies need to work in unison to establish efficient information gathering and sharing mechanisms in order to precisely implement law enforcement, fishery resource management, and other missions with limited assets in response to the abovementioned circumstances, and (3) that threats and risks, including international terrorism, piracy and armed robbery at sea, and regional conflicts, exist in Japan's key sea lanes.

They concluded that a crisis management system capable of appropriately dealing with these various circumstances in waters under Japanese jurisdiction and Japan's key sea lanes can only be created if MDA capacities contributing to maritime security are enhanced, a government platform for sharing information particularly about ship movements is developed, systems for cooperation between public and private sectors as well as for international cooperation and coordination are established, and efficient information gathering and sharing as well as timely information analysis is made possible.

Furthermore, they concluded that as Japan becomes able to provide useful information, Japan will likewise be able to receive useful information from allies and friendly countries, which will have the effect of solidifying international cooperation and coordination.

Another relevant initiative is that in September 2017, Japan invited the heads of the world's coast guard agencies to exchange views on maritime security together in Tokyo. In the next month, the Japanese government established the Japan Coast Guard Mobile Cooperation Team to support capacity building in maritime law enforcement among Southeast Asian countries. Japan has promoted such international cooperation.

Future Maritime Order

On June 30, 2020, Chairman Tanaka Akihiko (President of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and a former Professor of the University of Tokyo and President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency) handed the Councilor's Meeting recommendations to Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, stating, "We request that the government thoroughly consults these recommendations for future initiatives."

Chairman Tanaka added, “With the current spread of COVID-19, a variety of matters in ocean policy are coming to require our attention. Even so, these three suggestions remain immensely important and we would like to see the government advance proactive efforts.”

Prime Minister Abe responded, “As pointed out, the spread of COVID-19 is leading to various discussions about new social changes in the world. In the post-coronavirus world, it will be important for us to have a firm vision about the future maritime order.”



Prime Minister Abe speaks at the opening session of TICAD VI in Nairobi, Kenya, August 27, 2016.
CABINET PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

Prime Minister Abe referred to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) for the first time at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) held in Nairobi, the Republic of Kenya, on August 27 and 28, 2016.

“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 force or coercion, and making it prosperous,” he said, speaking as a leader of a maritime nation at the western edge of the Pacific Ocean.

Prime Minister Abe announced a diplomatic strategy of connecting Africa, which is rich in potential, with a growing Asia through the seas. Since then, he has repeatedly asserted the following as an important Japanese strategy: “We must share our values about the free and open

maritime order based on the rule of law with relevant countries in order to realize the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy that we are promoting. We will thoroughly protect the peaceful and bountiful seas of Japan.” (Ministerial Council on the Strengthening of the Maritime Security System, December 18, 2017).

It goes without saying that as a maritime nation, Japan has no choice but to strive for prosperity and development through international cooperation and coordination based on international law and the UN Charter.

Reprinted from “Maritime Security: Japan’s Plans in a Changing World,” The Japan Journal, July/August 2019 (Vol. 17 No. 2), pp. 25-29. [August 2020]

MIZUNO Tetsu

Freelance writer
