



The range of a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy

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The Indo-Pacific strategy is a regional concept that emerged from the history of the long-term development of the global economy, and has never been a simple geopolitical concept for countering China. Japan is expected to conduct strong multilateral diplomacy in the wide region composed of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans.

Japanese diplomacy in 2018 is facing the major challenges of the imminent issue of North Korea and the long-term systemic issue of maintaining a liberal world order. The difficult issue of how to stop North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles development and make it move toward denuclearization while maintaining Northeast Asian peace is the most pressing issue for Japan's diplomacy now. In addition, Japanese diplomacy is facing another major challenge of striving to steer the future world order in a more sound and liberal direction at a time



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when the US Trump administration seems to be showing no interest in issues related to a liberal international order except for national security. This is because a liberal world order not only embodies Japanese values and visions but also is essential for the long-term interests of Japan. Because the issue of the Korean Peninsula and Japanese security policies are discussed in greater detail in other chapters of this magazine, this paper examines how to implement and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, which Prime Minister Abe proposed, as a strategy to maintain and promote a liberal world order.

The regional concept of the Indo-Pacific

The media often explain that a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy is Japan's diplomacy to counter China's One Belt and One Road initiatives. Certainly, when the political relationship between Japan and China turned extremely sour after 2012, China made diplomatic onslaughts on Japan all over the world. Under such circumstances, Japanese embassies abroad had to counter Chinese verbal attacks. China's presence as a trading power is growing significantly in many parts of the world, and some are concerned that if Japan does nothing, it will fade away in the face of the giant China. However, it is short-sighted to conceive of a strategy toward such a broad and promising region as the Indo-Pacific only to counter activities of other countries. The free and open Indo-Pacific strategy is an essential part of Japan's pursuit of liberal world order.

In fact, the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a regional concept combining the Indian and Pacific Oceans reflects the long-term development of the global economy. The center of the global economy after the Industrial Revolution was the Atlantic region until the late twentieth century. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, the center shifted to the Pacific region. Prime Minister Ohira Masayoshi advocated a strategy of Pacific Basin Cooperation and Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi established an advisory panel to devise an Asia-Pacific strategy because they believed that the Pacific Basin or the Asia-Pacific would become a global growth center. That is, Japanese diplomacy always focuses on a global growth center. Japanese diplomacy attempts to maintain Japan's prosperity by securing close relationships with that growth center.

A new situation emerged in the twenty-first century. India, inward-looking for many years, shifted gear to liberalization on a full scale, participated fully in the global economy and achieved high-level growth. Sub-Saharan Africa, stagnant until the late twentieth century, also started high economic growth. Considering the future increase in population in India and Sub-Saharan Africa, the center of gravity of the global economy is likely to shift to somewhere in a huge ocean combining the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The region surrounding the Indian and the Pacific Oceans will become the global center of growth. It

is therefore no accident that the concept of the Indo-Pacific has emerged in the global discourse since the beginning of the 21st century and especially sometime around 2010.

Japan's recent emphasis on the Indo-Pacific, therefore, is based on the country's more fundamental view of national interests, rather than on merely reacting to the action of another country in the short term. Accordingly, when the Prime Minister first announced this strategy at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) VI in August 2016, he said, "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. ... Let us make this stretch that is from Asia to Africa a main artery for growth and prosperity."

The importance of the Indo-Pacific strategy

In what sense is a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy a strategy? Judging from the remarks made by public officials and documents published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the goal is clear. In the abovementioned speech made by Prime Minister Abe at TICAD VI, in which the strategy was officially announced, he said, "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." That is, the goals of this strategy are to transform the Indo-Pacific region into a region without force and coercion, a region of freedom, a region ruled by law, a region focused on the market economy and a prosperous region. If the vast Indo-Pacific region can make progress toward these goals, it can contribute a great deal to the enhancement of liberal order globally.

But if a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy is to be a "strategy," it must be equipped with effective means to realize its goals. As official documents and speeches have not fleshed out the policy measures in detail, I would like to present in the following what I consider the major components of Japan's strategy.

(1) Policy for promoting wide-area connectivity

Infrastructures enhancing connectivity among regional countries are essential for the social and economic development of the vast Indo-Pacific region. Port facilities need to be developed to connect countries by seas, and corridors (roads and railways) that connect from seas to inland areas also need to be developed. In Southeast Asia, Japan has contributed to developing traffic infrastructures that stretch from east to west for many years. It is necessary to connect this with South Asia. In addition, in Africa, it is particularly important to develop corridor infrastructures that connect inland countries with seas. As there is enormous demand for regional infrastructure, Japan's efforts to help develop "quality infrastructure" can be complementary to what China attempts in its Belt and Road Initiatives. Given the actual situation of the development of economies and societies in Indo-Pacific countries, there are countless vitally important infrastructures, even in areas where Japanese companies are not so competitive or not so interested. Japan therefore should aim to cultivate cooperative relationships with China in the development of infrastructure.

(2) Nurturing human resources

One of the pillars of Japan's international cooperation has always been human resources development. In particular, the nurturing of human resources from developing countries through long-term training programs in Japan contributed to the economic development of Southeast Asia and China. It is essential to continue to invite talented human resources from Indo-Pacific countries to Japan so that they can grow into leaders in the future. High-level human resources are necessary in the public and private sectors of developing countries if they are to avoid falling into the "middle income trap" and to maintain sustainable growth. Japan's contribution in this area will certainly be appreciated. On the other hand, it is also important to develop Japanese human resources who can work well in the Indo-Pacific region. The globalization of university and graduate school education has been pointed out

for many years. It is necessary to develop education related to the Indo-Pacific region in terms of recurrent education in the public and private sectors as well. The programs of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers and other JICA volunteers are extremely popular and highly rated in the Indo-Pacific countries and should actively be maintained.

(3) Human security and support for fragile countries

The Indo-Pacific region is a region of high growth. However, areas in this region or adjacent to this region are global hot spots that involve extremely fragile societies. In Myanmar's border area, including Rakhine state, India's eastern states, the border between India and Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia and South Sudan, "human security" of the people is facing daily threats due to lingering civil wars, frequent terrorism and massive numbers of refugees.

For the Indo-Pacific region to get on track to stable prosperity, peace must be brought to these fragile neighboring countries and areas, and human security must be improved there. Cooperation in Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) and assistance for peace-building by Official Development Assistance (ODA) programs must be continued. Among other things, assistance to conflict-affected countries that are troubled by the influx of refugees should be continued, along with humanitarian assistance to refugee camps. In addition, it is also necessary to ensure that Japanese refugee application procedures are appropriate and build a structure that will make Japan a more attractive country to refugees as a host country.

(4) The management of power politics

For the efficient implementation of a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, it is necessary to properly manage relationships among "great powers" in this region. This is not to suggest that Japan engage in a classical balance of power policy against China. But policies that are necessary to reduce the probability of military conflicts must be implemented even if China may not like some of them. It is necessary for countries in the region to secure and develop moderate defense capabilities and maritime law-enforcement capabilities, and Japan should

provide support for these areas where it can. It is necessary for Japan to continue to develop security cooperation with the United States, Australia and India and further emphasize close dialogues with China in the future for the management of power politics.

(5) Seeking wide-area and multilateral diplomacy

In the Indo-Pacific region, an international framework that includes all the countries concerned does not exist. Currently, it is not particularly constructive to establish huge international conferences and systems immediately. For the present priorities of Japanese diplomacy, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) 11 should be launched immediately; the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) must be agreed on to strengthen the structure of free trade from the Pacific side of the Indo-Pacific.

In any event, Japan's relationships with ASEAN countries that are located in the geographical center of the Indo-Pacific region are extremely important. In addition, Japan must further utilize top-level diplomatic frameworks with related countries, such as TICAD and the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM).

(6) Formulation of integrated policies and steady implementation systems

The implementation of a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy is related to almost all sections of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, the North American Affairs Bureau and the Latin American and Caribbean Affairs Bureau. The implementation of a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy is also related to almost all government ministries and agencies, including the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, and it is also essential to collaborate with implementation organizations, such as JICA and Japan Bank for International Cooperation, as well as private companies and NGOs. A system for facilitating collaboration among these diverse stakeholders and implementing Japanese policies is necessary.

Currently, Japan's exports of "infrastructure systems" are deliberated by the "Economic Cooperation Infrastructure Strategy Conference" under the Prime Minister. However, the present Economic Cooperation Infrastructure Strategy Conference is not an appropriate arena for formulating and promoting the entire Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy as the strategy cannot be reduced to infrastructure development alone however important it is (let alone exports of infrastructure systems). The strategy should not be mistaken to be a narrow-minded promotion of Japan's exports. Since the strategy is about the world order, it should be deliberated by the National Security Council (NSC). In this case, it is necessary to build a system under which the National Security Secretariat of the Cabinet Secretariat and the International Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can undertake close collaboration. A strong body is necessary for diplomacy that handles such a vast region. It is necessary to further increase the personnel of embassies throughout the region. It may be also desirable to introduce an official airplane for the foreign minister, which was recently suggested by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kono Taro. In any case, a system that enables the foreign minister, other ministers and the President of JICA to visit foreign countries frequently and easily should be established, including the flexible use of a chartered plane. Island countries in the Pacific, which are part of the Indo-Pacific region, have never been visited by the foreign minister of Japan, yet. The current network of commercial flights among these countries is so inconvenient for a busy foreign minister to set aside sufficient time to visit them.

As noted above, this paper regards a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy as put forward by Prime Minister Abe as a strategy for Japanese diplomacy to maintain and develop a liberal world order, and the author has expressed his personal opinions about the way this strategy should be. It is desirable for the Japanese government to publish an official strategy that comprehensively outlines the necessary measures to realize the Indo-Pacific free and open.

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