

## Foreign Policy Analysis of Japan's Militarization of The East China Sea under the Abe Administration 2014 - 2015

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*In the face of the volatility in the East China Sea, marked with the rise of assertive China, Japan's decision to militarize the region in 2014 and 2015 under the Abe administration represented a significant shift in its foreign policy orientation. This paper will analyze Japan's militarization of the East China Sea, with particular focus on its consequences and implications. The paper is conducted as a qualitative phenomenological study, which draws upon existing relevant literature and a wide range of primary sources such as statements and speeches of Japanese key political figures as well as officials of other countries concerned. As opposed to the objective illustration of particular events, the primary sources illustrate the growing first-hand threat perceptions among the Japanese policy-makers who found themselves trapped in the destabilizing regional environment, which compelled them to embrace the hardline approach. This paper demonstrates that Japan's militarization not only failed to achieve the Abe administrations desired outcomes, but also culminated in worsening Japan's diplomatic ties with its neighboring states and generating a regional security dilemma. This examination is useful for understanding how Japan's militarization contributed to forming the current volatile security situation in East Asia, especially in its relation with China. Additionally, Japan's militarization is representative of its changing foreign policy orientation toward China, which is becoming more confrontational and uncompromising. The originality of this work lies in the use of unfiltered perspectives and voices in Japanese political sphere, documented in primary sources.*

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**Keywords:** Japanese Militarization, East China Sea, Abe Administration, Japanese Security Policy, Japanese Foreign Policy, Japan-China Relations, Assertive China

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## Introduction

The years of 2014 and 2015 represented a significant shift in Japan's foreign policy posture in security areas, as Tokyo, under the leadership of Shinzo Abe, decided to militarize<sup>2</sup> the East China Sea. The beginning of Japan's militarization of the East China Sea dates back to April 2014 when Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera announced the deployment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) on Yonaguni Island, Japan's westernmost inhabited island in the construction of a radar facility on the island, installed to better monitor areas in the vicinity of the Chinese mainland in general and the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in particular.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the military build-up on Yonaguni Island, Japan was set to gradually boost the number of the JSDF personnel on its island chains in the East China Sea to 10,000 in the next five years.<sup>4</sup> Coupled with the substantial numerical increase in its military personnel, Japan has deployed a line of anti-aircraft and anti-ship missile batteries along the islands between the Japanese mainland and Taiwan since 2015 in order to monitor Chinese military influence and activities.<sup>5</sup>

The militarization under the Abe administration was indicative of Japan's growing anxieties over the rise of assertive China, which was evidenced by repetitive incursions of Chinese vessels into Japan's territorial waters and Beijing's unilateral military and development projects. Considering the strategic and economic significance of the East China Sea, China's increasing assertiveness in the region was perceived as threatening to Japanese national and energy security.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this examination, the notion of militarism is defined as a combination of a build-up conception of militarization and a behavioral understanding of militarism. While the former is concerned with quantitative military build-ups in weapon, military personnel and expenditure, the latter pertains to the tendency to employ force to settle conflicts. The reason for this particular choice is two-folded. First, Japan's militarization of the East China Sea is a clear case of quantitative military build-ups, as seen the deployment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces and defense systems in the region. Second, conceptualization of Japan's militarization entails a behavioral element as it can be interpreted as representing its potential future trajectory of foreign policy orientation in security areas, which is seemingly becoming more uncompromising and willing to take military actions, if necessary. See Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby, "Militarism and International Relations in the Twenty-First Century," in *Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security and Theory*, eds. Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "Japan to Station Troops on Yonaguni, Near Disputed Islands," *The Diplomat*, April 19, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/04/japan-to-station-troops-on-yonaguni-near-disputed-islands/>.

<sup>4</sup> Justin McCurry, "Japan Steps Up Military Presence in East China Sea," *The Guardian*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/18/japan-steps-up-military-presence-east-china-sea>.

<sup>5</sup> McCurry, "Japan Steps Up Military Presence in East China Sea".

<sup>6</sup> Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe Following the G20 Summit, the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, and the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, November 22, 2015, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/statement/201511/1214703\\_9932.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201511/1214703_9932.html).

militarization, Japanese policy-makers embraced more peaceful and conciliatory foreign policy options toward China. However, China's unilateral violation of those agreements and continuous development and military activities in the region, coupled with the rising value of the East China Sea, crystalized the limitation of such non-binding cooperative approaches, leaving the militarization as the only seemingly feasible option for the conservative Abe administration.

This paper will analyze Japan's militarization of the East China Sea under the Abe administration in 2014 and 2015, with particular focus on the consequences and implications of this particular foreign policy decision. The practical implication of this paper lies in the idea that this particular shift in the Japanese foreign policy orientation played a significant role in deteriorating Japan's diplomatic relations with its neighboring countries in the region in general, and with China in particular. As discussed in the paper, Japan's militarization of the East China Sea generated strong anxieties in South Korea and the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), both of which became increasingly suspicious of Tokyo's enhanced security role. In addition, the event created a security dilemma between Japan and China as Beijing reacted to Tokyo's action in a bellicose manner, illustrating the further destabilization of the East Asian regional security environment. Furthermore, given the fact that Japanese-policy makers, prior to the militarization, embraced cooperative diplomacy with China regarding the management of the East China Sea, this particular policy can be interpreted as representing the potential future trajectory of Japan's interactions and diplomacy with China, which is becoming increasingly confrontational and uncompromising.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first section will examine the factors and rationales behind Japan's militarization of the East China Sea. In particular, the failure of conciliatory measures that existed prior to Japan's militarization and the emergence of the militarization discourse will be explored, which is followed by the discussion of how the Abe administration and Japanese policy-makers perceived this particular foreign policy choice. The second section will examine and evaluate Japan's militarization in relation to both the intended outcomes mapped out in the first section and the unintended outcomes that resulted from this foreign policy choice. This paper is conducted as a qualitative phenomenological study, which draws upon existing relevant literature and a wide range of primary sources such as statements and speeches of Japanese key political figures as well as

officials of other countries concerned. As opposed to the objective illustration of particular events, the primary sources reflect unfiltered real voices in the Japanese domestic political sphere, as well as the ways in which the Japanese policy-makers interpreted the situation at the individual level. In other words, such primary sources are valuable assets that illustrate the growing threat perceptions among the Japanese policy-makers who found themselves trapped in the destabilizing regional security environment, which compelled them to embrace the hardline approach. By analyzing the Japanese foreign policy choice, with particular focus on its consequences and implications, this paper will argue that Japan's militarization of the East China Sea manifestly failed to achieve the Abe administration's desire for a more autonomous security position under the U.S. security umbrella and to retain Japan's regional power and leverage. In addition to those failures, this paper will argue that Japan's militarization of the East China Sea entailed unintended outcomes. While contributing to the further destabilization of the regional security environment by fueling the assertive rise of China, Japan's militarization culminated in its regional isolation.

### **Factors and Rationales behind Japan's Militarization of the East China Sea**

#### *Alternative Foreign Policy Options on the Table*

Prior to its militarization of the East China Sea, Japan embraced more peaceful and conciliatory measures in its relations with China. For instance, Japan and China, despite Tokyo's relative reluctance, reached the China-Japan Fishery Agreement in 1997.<sup>7</sup> The agreement stipulated that the two parties were to refrain from applying "one another's fishery laws to each other's vessels"<sup>8</sup> in the waters surrounding the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Thus, the agreement was designed to and did indeed reduce the likelihood of minor incidents in the East China Sea that could potentially escalate into a diplomatic row or potential conflicts between Japan and China.<sup>9</sup> The fact that the agreement was reached amid their strained relations, caused particularly by the 1996 incident in which members of the Nihon Seinensha built a lighthouse and raised a Japanese national flag in the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, also crystallized the ability of the both parties to respect their mutual economic interests and

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<sup>7</sup> Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Waters*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82.

foster cooperation in the disputed waters.<sup>10</sup> Japan's commitment to cooperation, rather than confrontation, in its relations with China was also evidenced by the willingness of the government to bear domestic costs imposed by the agreement, including its reduced excess fishing capacity and financial costs associated with policing illegal coastal fishing.<sup>11</sup>

The 2008 China-Japan Principled Consensus on the East China Sea Issue is another illustration of the Japanese policy-makers seeking a conciliatory approach to managing the tension in the region.<sup>12</sup> The Consensus provided a framework for joint developments between the two parties by delimiting and defining small resource-rich areas of the East China Sea, including the Chunxiao oil and gas field, on a quasi-legal basis.<sup>13</sup> Dealing with the terms of the joint development, the Consensus entailed much broader implications for Japan-China relations and positive spillover effects into their broader territorial disputes. While the purview of the Consensus was confined to pre-defined areas, it was agreed that Japan and China would "continue consultations for the early realization of joint development in other parts of the East China Sea."<sup>14</sup> By stipulating consultations and dialogues as the primary means of settling matters in the region, the Consensus restrained the use of force and unilateral action, thereby mediating the overall diplomatic tensions between Japan and China.<sup>15</sup> Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Akira Amari, noted that the Consensus entailed "an even larger meaning in terms of the political realm."<sup>16</sup> In this respect, it is important to note that the impacts of the Consensus were expected to trickle down into the broader security and political dimensions of the Japan-China relations in the East China Sea by making the region "a sea of peace, cooperation and friendship."<sup>17</sup>

*Collapse of the Conciliatory Measures and Emergence of the Militarization Discourse*

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-52.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> According to the 2008 China-Japan Principled Consensus on the East China Sea Issue, both Japan and China should seek a peaceful and cooperative relation in the disputed waters, and specific matters pertaining to their joint development in the region are to be decided through consultations and bilateral agreements. See Gao Jianjun, "A Note on the 2008 Cooperation Consensus Between China and Japan in the East China Sea," *Ocean Development & International Law* 40, 3 (2009): 302-303, doi:10.1080/00908320903077100.

<sup>13</sup> Gao, "A Note on the 2008 Cooperation Consensus," 291-294.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>16</sup> "Joint Press Conference by Minister for Foreign Affairs Masahiko Koumura and Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Akira Amari (Regarding Cooperation between Japan and China in the East China Sea)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, June 18, 2008, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm\\_press/2008/6/0618.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm_press/2008/6/0618.html).

<sup>17</sup> Gao, "A Note on the 2008 Cooperation Consensus," 302.

As much as the aforementioned conciliatory and corporative measures provided temporal stability in the East China Sea, such non-binding measures were destined to be short-lived. China's neglect of the 2008 Consensus, evidenced by its repetitive incursions into the Japanese territorial seas, illuminated the limitation of cooperative agreements between the two regional powers.<sup>18</sup> The number of the Chinese-to-Japanese territorial incursions totaled 32 times with 88 Chinese vessels in the year of 2014 alone, escalating the maritime tension between the two parties.<sup>19</sup>

Of particular importance was the 2010 collision incident near the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which came to be remembered as a watershed moment for Japan-China relations.<sup>20</sup> The incident occurred as a Chinese fishing boat collided with the Japanese Coast Guard's boat after ignoring the coastguard's request to leave the area under its control.<sup>21</sup> China's response to the incident remained conservative. Leaving no room for alternative peaceful measures to ease the situation, the government of China mobilized domestic nationalist and anti-Japanese movements,<sup>22</sup> contending that "what was necessary to assert its claim to the disputed islands"<sup>23</sup> needed to be done.

The collision incident equally played a role in affecting Japan's threat perception of China. The heightened threat perception was reflected in the ensuing Japanese public responses to the incident. The government under the then Prime Minister Naoto Kan came under heavy public criticisms for its meek response to the incident, and anti-Chinese protests<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "The Current Status of China's Unilateral Development of Natural Resources in the East China Sea," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, September 27, 2018, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/page3e\\_000356.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/page3e_000356.html).

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan's Foreign Policy that Takes a Panoramic Perspective of the World Map* (Chapter 2) (Tokyo: Japanese Government, 2015), 28, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/00106464.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Katherine Tseng Hui-Yi, "Crisscrossing Law, Politics and History: Dilemmas in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island Dispute," in *Assessing Maritime Disputes in East Asia: Political and Legal Perspectives*, eds. Barthelemy Courmont, Frederic Lasserre, and Eric Mottet (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 94.

<sup>21</sup> Justin McCurry, "Japan-China row escalates over fishing boat collision," *The Guardian*, September 9, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/09/japan-china-fishing-boat-collision>.

<sup>22</sup> In the wake of the 2010 collision incident, the Chinese media lionized the boat captain for his provocative actions within the disputed territories. Other harsh approaches included the cancellation of a visit to the Shanghai Expo by Japanese students, the suspension of talks regarding joint resource developments in the East China Sea, the arbitrary arrest of four Japanese for espionage, and the reduction of its rare earth imports to Japan. See Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Waters*, 55.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>24</sup> In response to the incident, roughly 5,000 people gathered in Tokyo for anti-Chinese protests. Throughout the protest, strong languages such as "Stop the Chinese invasion of Japan" were used to stress the issue of sovereignty. See Mark Willacy, "Japanese Rally for Anti-Chinese Protest," *Australia Broadcasting Corporation*, November 8, 2010, <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2010/s3060046.htm>.

insisted on “a more assertive Japanese policy toward China.”<sup>25</sup> As anti-Chinese sentiment grew in both Japanese political and public domains, the incident helped consolidate Tokyo’s unwavering position to counter any unilateral or provocative actions by Beijing to alter the regional status quo through force and to safeguard Japan’s sovereign territory.<sup>26</sup> Such a domestic environment also coincided with the return of the nationalistic government led by Abe, which further pushed Japan’s political tilt toward more hardline approaches and rendered the militarization of the East China Sea seemingly inevitable.

A series of unilateral military and development activities by China further disincentivize Japan’s commitment to upholding the conciliatory approaches.<sup>27</sup> In 2013, China initiated development activities and resource extraction in the East China Sea where the EEZ and continental shelf were yet to be delimited at that time.<sup>28</sup> As China’s resource extraction violated existing bilateral agreements for the joint exploration of natural resources, the deterioration of Japan-China relations was an inevitable outcome.<sup>29</sup> The diplomatic cleavage between the two states was evidenced by a strong statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan on Beijing’s resource extraction, which was denounced as “extremely regrettable that China is advancing unilateral development.”<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, giving much fuel to Japan’s anxiety over its national security was China’s unilateral announcement of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the same year that overlapped with the existing ADIZ delimitations of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.<sup>31</sup> Immediately following the announcement, Junichi Ihara, Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, denounced the ADIZ declared by the Chinese government as “extremely dangerous as it could unilaterally escalate the situation

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<sup>25</sup> Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Waters*, 56.

<sup>26</sup> “Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan’s Response,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, September 6, 2018, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e\\_000021.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html).

<sup>27</sup> Key-young Son and Ra Mason, “Risk in Japan’s Militarization of Okinawa against China,” in *Risk State: Japan’s Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, eds. Sebastian Maslow, Ra Mason, and Paul O’Shea (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 57.

<sup>28</sup> “The Current Status of China’s Unilateral Development,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas Szechenyi, “China and Japan: A Resource Showdown in the East China Sea?,” *The National Interest*, August 10, 2015, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/china-japan-resource-showdown-the-east-china-sea-13540>.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *The Current Status of China’s Unilateral Development*.

<sup>31</sup> “China’s Air Defense Identification Zone: Impact on Regional Security,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 6, 2013. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-air-defense-identification-zone-impact-regional-security>.

surrounding the Senkaku Islands.”<sup>32</sup> It is also to be noted that China's unilateral announcement of the ADIZ was perceived as severely threatening, as it occurred in the context of the steady rise in the Chinese defense expenditure, which increased by the unprecedented rate of 12.2 percent in 2014.<sup>33</sup>

China's growing assertiveness in its continuous unilaterally military and development activities in the region led to a significant shift in the perception of China among the Japanese political elites. On the one hand, the administration led by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi interpreted the rapid development of China as an “opportunity”<sup>34</sup> for Japanese economy. On the other hand, Prime Minister Abe views the rise of assertive China as a threat to Japan's sovereignty and the regional stability.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in the annual Defense of Japan white paper published in 2016, then Minister of Defense Gen Nakatani stated that Chinese unilateral activities created “an increasingly severe security environment surrounding Japan.”<sup>36</sup> The white paper further intensified its rhetoric on China, stating that Beijing's unilateral activities to alter the status quo in the East and South China Seas have generated “security concerns to the region including Japan and to the international community.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, China's announcement of the new ADIZ, coupled with its unilateral development and military activities in the vicinities of the Japanese territorial waters, implied that the Japanese policy-makers were now compelled to calculate “the prospect for a more militarized interaction between Chinese and Japanese forces in the East China Sea.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “China's Establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea (Protest by Mr. Junichi Ihara, Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, MOFA, to Mr. Han Zhigiang, Minister of the Chinese Embassy in Japan),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 23, 2013, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_000100.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000100.html).

<sup>33</sup> Michael Martina and Greg Torode, “China's Xi Ramps Up Military Spending in Face of Worried Region,” *Reuters*, March 5, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-defence/chinas-xi-ramps-up-military-spending-in-face-of-worried-region-idUSBREA2403L20140305>.

<sup>34</sup> “Boao Forum for Asia Meeting Between Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Zhu Rongji (Overview),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 12, 2002, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/boao0204/china.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Gavan McCormack, “Much Ado over Small Islands: The Sino-Japanese Confrontation over Senkaku/Diaoyu,” in *The China-Japan Border Dispute: Islands of Contention in Multidisciplinary Perspective*, eds. Tim F Liao, Kimie Hara and Krista Wiegand (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 21-23. See also Shannon Tiezzi, “Beijing's ‘China Threat’ Theory,” *The Diplomat*, June 3, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/beijings-china-threat-theory/>.

<sup>36</sup> On the Publication of Defense of Japan 2016: Minister of Defense Gen Nakatani,” n.d., [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/pdf/2016/DOJ2016\\_Foreword\\_web.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2016/DOJ2016_Foreword_web.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2016* (Part 1 Security Environment Surrounding Japan) (Tokyo: Japanese Government 2016), 2, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/pdf/2016/DOJ2016\\_1-1-1\\_web.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2016/DOJ2016_1-1-1_web.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Sheila Smith, *Japan's New Politics and the U.S.-Japan Alliance*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2014), 19.

Furthermore, the increasing economic value of the East China Sea and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands paved the way for the collapse of the conciliatory approaches.<sup>39</sup> In 1968, the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East announced the potential existence of natural resources such as hydrocarbon in the seabed of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.<sup>40</sup> The East China Sea is also a part of Japanese main waterways for oil imports mainly from the Middle East on which 75 percent of the Japanese oil consumption is dependent, indicating the economic value of the region to Japan.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for a resource-poor country like Japan, China's development activities and resource extraction in the East China Sea were deemed to severely jeopardize its energy security. In response to the situation, Prime Minister Abe condemned China's unilateral activities in the East China Sea as "increasingly ambitious",<sup>42</sup> generating a concern for the region and the international community. Fumio Kishida, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, also stressed Japan's unwavering intolerance of China's unilateral development projects, noting that "the Government of Japan's fundamental stance will not change."<sup>43</sup> In this respect, it is not surprising that the militarization came to gain prominence as the most feasible foreign policy choice in the Japanese security discourse as those marine resources and economic values of the East China Sea were vital to Japan's "national pursuit of wealth and power."<sup>44</sup>

### *Perceptions of and Rationales behind the Militarization*

Within the Japanese security and political discourse, the Abe administration and the Japanese policy-makers interpreted the militarization of the East China Sea as beneficial in multiple ways. For them, the militarization was expected to yield bargaining leverage by presenting "Japan's tough resolve"<sup>45</sup> in its territorial disputes. It is to be noted that historically the diplomatic position of China in negotiating territorial disputes was relatively subordinate to that of Japan. This power

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<sup>39</sup> Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Waters*, 55.

<sup>40</sup> Jingdong Yuan, "Stuck over the Barren Rocks: the Diaoyu: Senkaku Islands Dispute and Sino-Japanese Relations," in *Security and Conflict in East Asia*, ed. Andrew T.H. Tan (New York: Routledge 2015), 83.

<sup>41</sup> Jae-hyung Lee, *China and the Asia-Pacific Region: Geostrategic Relations and a Naval Dimension* (New York: Writers Advantage, 2003), 185.

<sup>42</sup> "Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe Following the G20 Summit".

<sup>43</sup> "Press Conference by Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 23, 2015, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken4e\\_000202.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken4e_000202.html).

<sup>44</sup> Hui-Yi Katherine Tseng, *Lessons from the Disturbed Waters: The Diaoyu/Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Disputes* (London: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2015), 99.

<sup>45</sup> Krista Weigand, "How Japan Benefits from the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island Dispute," in *The China-Japan Border Dispute: Islands of Contention in Multidisciplinary Perspective*, eds. Tim F. Liao, Kimie Hara, and Krista Weigand (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 169.

relation was a by-product of China's heavy reliance on Japanese economy, foreign direct investment, and economic assistance during the years of its modernization project.<sup>46</sup> China's growing military and economic capabilities, particularly since the 1990s, however, signaled a relative decline in Tokyo's historical leverage over Beijing.<sup>47</sup> Considering the relative decline of Japan's historical diplomatic leverage, the Japanese policy-makers were compelled to defend and retain control and influence in the East China Sea at all costs, which was believed to serve as a "tangible reminder to China of Japan's power in the region."<sup>48</sup> In this light, Japan's militarization of the East China Sea was also designed to project Tokyo's diplomatic stance that it would not compromise on its broader territorial disputes including the issues of the Takeshima/Dokdo Islets with South Korea and the Northern Territories/Kurile Island with Russia.<sup>49</sup>

Japan's militarization of the East China Sea was also closely intertwined with the Abe administration's nationalistic agenda to gain Japan's foreign policy autonomy in security issues, particularly in its position vis-à-vis the U.S. Since his accession in 2012, Abe has embraced an image of a more independent Japan – an unfinished business that he inherited from Nobusuke Kishi, his grandfather who, as the 37th Japanese Prime Minister between 1957 and 1960, turned the imposition of an unequal security treaty with the U.S. into a more equal security alliance.<sup>50</sup> The very motive of the Abe administration's agenda derives from the worry that Japan's current excessive reliance on the U.S. security umbrella compromises its ability to forcefully present dissenting and opposing views to the U.S.<sup>51</sup> At the annual Shangri-La Dialogue held in 2014, Abe constantly stressed the imminent need for Japan to activate a more potent security role in the face of the increasing provocation from China. "Japan intends to play an even greater and more proactive role than it has until now in making peace in Asia and the world something more certain,"<sup>52</sup> Abe stated. Abe's speech can be interpreted as representing the very image of truly independent Japan to which he has been aspiring. In this sense,

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-167.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Hein, "Leadership and Nationalism: Assessing Shinzo Abe," in *Asian Nationalisms Reconsidered*, ed. Jeff Kingston (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 84.

<sup>51</sup> Kazuhiro Togo, "Revision of the Article 9 and Its Implications," in PacNet no. 70, September 2, 2014, <http://csis.org/files/publication/Pac1470.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> "The 13<sup>th</sup> IISS Asian Security Summit -The Shangri-La Dialogue-Keynote Address by Shinzo ABE, Prime Minister, Japan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, May 30, 2014, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e\\_000086.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_000086.html).

Japan's militarization of the East China Sea was indeed a symbolic foreign policy move that was designed to, as the Abe administration envisioned, demonstrate Japan's ability to project military power and to serve as the first stepping stone to achieve "a more independent and autonomous position vis-à-vis the United States."<sup>53</sup>

### **Evaluation of the Outcomes of Japan's Militarization of East China Sea**

As discussed in the previous section, Japan's militarization of the East China Sea was reflective of the Abe administration and the Japanese policy-makers' desire to strengthen its foreign policy autonomy under the U.S. security umbrella and to retain its regional power. However, a deeper investigation into this particular foreign policy choice reveals that Japan's militarization of the East China Sea not only failed to achieve those outcomes, but also entailed unintended outcomes.

#### *Japan's Foreign Policy Autonomy vis-à-vis the U.S.*

In the domestic political sphere, Japan's militarization proved unsuccessful in achieving the Abe administration's original ambition for Japan's more autonomous position in relation to the U.S. in security matters. This failure was illuminated by the U.S. foreign policy reorientation under the Obama administration, known as the 'Pivot to Asia.' Under the Pivot to Asia, the Obama administration placed the U.S. strategic focus on the global power reconfiguration toward Asia caused by the rapid economic growth of Asian states. The policy of the Pivot to Asia was designed to retain U.S. power projection capabilities in the Asia-Pacific theater and to balance against China, which has been rapidly consolidating military, political, and economic capabilities.<sup>54</sup> In other words, China's growing powers in those areas were a vital factor that would determine the depth and breadth of the U.S. engagement in the region.<sup>55</sup>

In this light, the growing degree of the confrontation between Japan and China following the former's militarization of the East China Sea was a recipe for further incentivizing the U.S. to increase its military presence in the region. In 2015, the U.S. State Department requested a

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Matteo Dian, *Japan and the US Pivot to the Asia Pacific* (London: LSE, 2013), 1, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/59084/1/\\_lse.ac.uk\\_storage\\_LIBRARY\\_Secondary\\_libfile\\_shared\\_repositor\\_y\\_Content\\_LSE%20IDEAS\\_Strategic%20Update%20Japan%20and%20the%20US%20Pivot%20to%20the%20Asia%20Pacific\\_SU13-1-Japan-USPivot-LoRes.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/59084/1/_lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repositor_y_Content_LSE%20IDEAS_Strategic%20Update%20Japan%20and%20the%20US%20Pivot%20to%20the%20Asia%20Pacific_SU13-1-Japan-USPivot-LoRes.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-4.

budget of USD 1.2 billion for East Asia and the Pacific, which marked a 5 percent increase compared to the financial year of 2013.<sup>56</sup> The increasing influence of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region was also evidenced by the U.S. diplomatic thaw with former enemies in the region, including Vietnam and Myanmar.<sup>57</sup> The U.S. further implemented a series of economic and commercial initiatives with other states in the Asia-Pacific in a bid to become an “indispensable nation”<sup>58</sup> in the region. Given that the militarization reflected the Abe administration’s desire to achieve more autonomy in its security agendas, the policy achieved little success. The militarization gave much fuel to the rise of assertive China, which in turn provided a pretext for the enhanced security role of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region and rendered Japan ever more ever close to the U.S. security umbrella.

### *Japan's Regional Power and Leverage*

Although the Abe administration and the Japanese policy-makers hoped that the militarization would be conducive to retaining Japan’s diplomatic leverage and countering the rise of assertive China, Japan’s militarization of the East China Sea manifestly failed to achieve this end. As opposed to the original purpose of countering China’s unilateral actions in the region, Japan’s militarization in turn, fueled the escalation of China’s assertiveness. In response to Japan’s militarization of the East China Sea, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Air Force deployed jetfighters in the East China Sea to keep a close check on Japanese political and military activities.<sup>59</sup> In January 2016, the People’s Daily, a news outlet run by the Chinese Communist Party, responded to Japan’s militarization by hinting the availability of warships at its disposal and the potential military engagement if necessary. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei, who warned against the militarization, stating that Japan “will have to accept responsibility for everything that happens,” echoed this view.<sup>60</sup>

A similar response was obtained from Russia. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu commented on the potential development of a naval base as well as the deployment of missile defense systems and

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<sup>56</sup> Zachary Keck, “US Reduces Security Assistance to Asia,” *The Diplomat*, June 20, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/us-reduces-security-assistance-to-asia/>.

<sup>57</sup> Dian, “Japan and the US Pivot,” 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> “Expert: China capable of defending East China Sea ADIZ,” Ministry of National Defense: The People’s Republic of China, December 2, 2015, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Opinion/2015-12/02/content\\_4631301.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Opinion/2015-12/02/content_4631301.htm).

<sup>60</sup> Ben Blanchard, “China Warns Japan against 'Provocation' around Disputed Islets,” *Reuters*, Jan 13, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-japan-islands-idUSKCN0UR12G20160113>.

drones on the disputed Kurile Islands/Northern Territories.<sup>61</sup> The bellicose reactions from China and Russia thus were illustrative of the fact that Japan's militarization culminated in creating a regional security dilemma. Japan's foreign policy move not only ran counter to the Abe administration's original intention to counter and balance the rise of assertive China, but also entailed an unintended outcome of rendering Japan's broader territorial disputes more intractable and destabilizing the regional security environment.<sup>62</sup>

*Unintended Isolation in the Region: Cases of South Korea and ASEAN*

While failing to address the Abe administration's desires, Japan's militarization of the East China Sea entailed an unintended outcome of isolating Tokyo in the region. From a point of view that zeros in specifically on the longstanding debate of the 'comfort women' issue with South Korea, a claim that Japan's militarization deteriorated Japan-Korea relations appears to be a difficult one to make. The years following Japan's militarization of the East China Sea was indeed a period that brought a surprising thaw in their diplomatic deep-freeze. In December 2015, amid the continuing militarization by the Japanese government, Japan and Korea managed to reach a historical agreement on settling the 'comfort women' issue. The agreement, in which Japan made an apology and agreed to provide funds as a means of compensation, illuminated a rapprochement between the two states.<sup>63</sup> It is thus essential to point out the fact that Japan's militarization did not necessarily hinder or nullify the diplomatic efforts of both Japan and South Korea to overcome the lingering memory of Japan's imperial past and move forward.

Nevertheless, what appeared as a historical agreement should not overshadow the extent of Japan's regional isolation as a result of its militarization. Following the 2010 collision incident that signaled the beginning of its maritime tension with Japan, China has carefully, yet rapidly, consolidated its diplomatic and economic ties with South Korea, emerging as Seoul's leading trading partner.<sup>64</sup> Immediately following

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<sup>61</sup> Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Japan Concerned at Possible Russian Base on Disputed Island Chain," *Reuters*, Mar 28, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-russia-idUSKCN0WU0XI>.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew J. Nathan & Andrew Scobell, *China's Search for Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 115.

<sup>63</sup> Yuki Tatsumi, "Japan, South Korea Reach Agreement on 'Comfort Women,'" *The Diplomat*, December 28, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/japan-south-korea-reach-agreement-on-comfort-women/>.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Javad Heydarian, "China-Japan-Korea: A Foreign Policy Reset," *Al Jazeera*, April 10, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/04/china-japan-korea-foreign-policy-reset-150407071213108.html>.

Japan's militarization of Yonaguni Island in 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping cancelled his trip to North Korea in order to make an official visit to South Korea instead. Considering China's close diplomatic ties with North Korea, it is hard to resist the argument that Japan's militarization of the East China Sea was perceived as one of the first-order national security issues in China and thus explains Xi's unprecedented decision to cancel his trip to Pyongyang in order to visit Seoul. In other words, the security threat posed by Japan's militarization compelled Xi to consolidate its diplomatic ties with another regional power, namely South Korea, in an effort to isolate Japan in the region.

During his visit to South Korea, Xi delivered a speech at Seoul National University. In his speech, he made a reference to the wartime sufferings shared between China and South Korea by stating that "Japanese militarists carried out barbarous wars of aggression against China and Korea, swallowing Korea and occupying half of the Chinese mainland."<sup>65</sup> Given the fact that Xi made a visit to South Korea immediately following Japan's militarization of the East China Sea by cancelling his trip to North Korea, such a speech that explicitly stressed the legacy of Japan's imperialism can easily be interpreted as entailing a political connotation and his intention to strategically isolate Tokyo from Seoul.

Xi's appeal to the memory of the historical legacy of the Japanese aggression proved successful in widening the existing cleavage between Seoul and Tokyo. In response to Abe's statement on the 70th anniversary of the end of the World War II in August 2015, Chinese state media denounced that Abe's speech was nothing but "a crippled start to build trust"<sup>66</sup> among Japan's neighboring states. The following day, Park Geun-hye, then President of South Korea, sympathized with China's dissatisfaction, condemning that Abe's statement "did not quite live up to our expectations."<sup>67</sup> The widened diplomatic distance between Japan and South Korea was also observed in the presence of Park at celebration of the 70th anniversary of the end of the World War II held in China in September 2015.<sup>68</sup> Two clarifications must be made regarding Park's attendance. First, Park, while appearing at the event held in China, did

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<sup>65</sup> Heydarian, "China-Japan-Korea: A Foreign Policy Reset,"

<sup>66</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "China, South Korea Not Convinced by Abe's WW2 Anniversary Speech," *The Diplomat*, Aug 18, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/08/china-south-korea-not-convinced-by-abes-ww2-anniversary-speech>.

<sup>67</sup> Tiezzi, "China, South Korea Not Convinced by Abe's WW2 Anniversary Speech,"

<sup>68</sup> Donald Kirk, "S. Korea's Park, Star VIP At China's 'Victory' Bash, N. Korea's Kim, Odd Man Out," *Forbes*, September 3, 2015, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/donaldkirk/2015/09/03/s-koreas-park-the-guest-of-honor-n-koreas-kim-the-odd-man-out-at-chinas-victory-party/#343b423a51f9>.

actually make a decision not to attend a similar occasion that celebrated the end of the World War II in Russia in May 2015.<sup>69</sup> Second, Park made a decision to attend the celebration in China despite diplomatic pressures from the U.S. officials who were wary of the potential negative implications Park's attendance would have for the U.S.-South Korea security alliance and South Korea-Japan diplomatic relations.<sup>70</sup> In this sense, Park's attendance can be interpreted as a symbolic move that was representative of the growing ties between South Korea and China, which in turn crystalized Japan's diplomatic isolation in the region.

South Korean public opinions further underscored Seoul's distancing of Tokyo. According to a survey jointly conducted by Genron NPO in Japan and the East Asia Institute in South Korea, 58.1 percent of South Korean nationals identified Japan as a military threat in 2015, which marked a substantial rise from 46.3 percent in 2014.<sup>71</sup> The survey also found that approximately 40 percent of the respondents foresaw the potential outbreak of military conflict between Japan and Korea, illuminating the growing perceived threat toward Japan's militarization in the eye of the South Korean populace.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, nearly 45 percent of the respondents answered that they valued South Korea-China relations over South Korea-Japan relations.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, Japan's militarization of the East China Sea seemingly promoted "South Korea's flirtation with closer ties to China"<sup>74</sup> at both diplomatic and public levels, placing Tokyo in a further isolated position in the region.

As with the case of South Korea, there is a kernel of truth in the argument that Japan's militarization of the East China Sea did not necessarily distance Japan from the ASEAN member states. Against the backdrop of its militarization, Japan indeed accelerated the process of defense cooperation with the ASEAN member states. The scale of Japan-

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<sup>69</sup> Jack Kim, "South Korea's Park to Skip Russia World War Two Event that North's Kim Will Attend," *Reuters*, April 13, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-russia-anniversary/south-koreas-park-to-skip-russia-world-war-two-event-that-norths-kim-will-attend-idUSKBN0N403K20150413>.

<sup>70</sup> Jin Kai, "Will South Korea's President Attend China's WW2 Anniversary Parade?," *The Diplomat*, August 13, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/08/will-south-koreas-president-attend-chinas-ww2-anniversary-parade/>.

<sup>71</sup> The Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, *The 3rd Japan-South Korea Joint Public Opinion Poll (2015): Analysis Report on Comparative Data* (The Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, 2015), 25, [http://www.genron-npo.net/pdf/forum\\_1505\\_en.pdf](http://www.genron-npo.net/pdf/forum_1505_en.pdf).

<sup>72</sup> The Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, *The 3rd Japan-South Korea Joint Public Opinion Poll (2015): Analysis Report on Comparative Data*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, "Japan's Response to China's Rise: Regional Engagement, Global Containment, Dangers of Collision," *International Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2009): 840, [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/people/hughes/researchandpublications/articles/japan\\_responds\\_to\\_china\\_rise\\_international\\_affairs\\_hughes.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/people/hughes/researchandpublications/articles/japan_responds_to_china_rise_international_affairs_hughes.pdf).

ASEAN defense cooperation began to expand in the form of bilateral and multilateral joint military exercises particularly from late 2014 when Japan and the ASEAN member states held the first-ever meeting involving their respective defense ministers.<sup>75</sup> For instance, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) conducted a joint military exercise with the Royal Malaysian Navy in April 2016. In the same month, the JMSDF destroyers made a port call at Subic Bay in the Philippines for the first time in nearly 15 years, and subsequently made a first visit to Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam.<sup>76</sup> As part of its defense diplomacy toward ASEAN, Japan also promoted a series of capacity-building programs and cooperation in the form of defense equipment and technology transfers with countries including Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, which demonstrates the active security cooperation in place between Japan and the ASEAN member states despite the former's militarization of the East China Sea.<sup>77</sup>

Despite their relatively deep cooperation in security issues, Japan's militarization of the East China Sea generated an opportunity as well as need for China to intrude into Japan's "traditional economic space of ASEAN."<sup>78</sup> In parallel with its diplomatic approach to South Korea, China's strategic regional isolation of Japan has yielded a success in accelerating its regional partnerships and cooperation with the ASEAN member states. The development of economic cooperation through a series of free trade agreements and development aid demonstrates the growing connectivity between China and ASEAN in recent years.<sup>79</sup> For instance, China and ASEAN sealed a deal to upgrade the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area in 2015. This provided momentum for China-ASEAN economic relations by boosting the volume of their trade to USD 368 billion in 2016.<sup>80</sup> In the same year, China also provided USD 10 billion in the form of infrastructure loans to the ASEAN member states and additional USD 560 million to particularly underdeveloped states within the association.<sup>81</sup> As with the case of South Korea, the fact that China's economic cooperation with ASEAN became particularly accelerated in

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<sup>75</sup> Tomohiko Satake, "Japanese Defense Diplomacy and ASEAN," *The Diplomat*, August 26, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/japanese-defense-diplomacy-and-asean/>.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Hughes, "Japan's Response to China's Rise," 841.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> NACT Laos, "2030 Vision for ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership: Lao PDR's Perspective," in *2030 Vision For Asean - China Strategic Partnership: Perspectives From Think-Tanks*, ed. Guo Yanjun (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2018), 65-66.

<sup>81</sup> Megha Rajagopalan, "China Offers \$10 Billion in Infrastructure Loans for Southeast Asia," *Reuters*, November 22, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-summit-china-aid/china-offers-10-billion-in-infrastructure-loans-for-southeast-asia-idUSKBN0TB0BA20151122>.

the context of Japan's militarization of the East China Sea and the maritime tension between Tokyo and Beijing, which consolidates the argument that Japan's militarization culminated in its regional isolation.

It is also worth noting that the ASEAN member states have traditionally expressed a shared expectation for Japan's positive economic role and rejection of Japan's enhanced security role. There seems to be a traditional suspicion among ASEAN political elites that Japan's civilian use of technology and economic power can readily be converted to military use.<sup>82</sup> This idea, coupled with ASEAN's fear for "the emergence of a militarily independent Japan",<sup>83</sup> played a role in forging a consensus among the ASEAN member states on the undesirability of Japan's enhanced security role.<sup>84</sup> In fact, in the height of China's growing assertiveness<sup>85</sup> in the region, the expectations of ASEAN officials and diplomats for Japan remain confined to the areas of economic cooperation and infrastructure development, whereas there seems little, if any, voice calling for Japan's enhanced security role in the region.

The dichotomous opinions regarding Japan's economic and security roles can also be found in the public domain of ASEAN. Research conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan found that 77 percent of respondents from the seven countries from ASEAN – Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam – answered that they wanted Japan to play a more active role in promoting economic and technical cooperation through official development assistance while 67 percent expected Japan to provide more financial contribution in the form of trade and private investment.<sup>86</sup> This was in sharp contrast to their reluctance to accept Japan's increased military presence to maintain regional peace and security, which was supported only by 19 percent of the total respondents.<sup>87</sup> Thus, in an economic sense, "Japan's previous 'special relationship' with the Association of South-East Asian Nations...has been jeopardized by

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<sup>82</sup> Bih-jaw Lin, "Asia Pacific in a Time of Change," in *The Future of the Pacific Rim: Scenarios for Regional Cooperation*, ed. Kimberly Weichel (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 134.

<sup>83</sup> Sueo Sudo, *Southeast Asia in Japanese Security Policy* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991), 59.

<sup>84</sup> Sueo Sudo, *Southeast Asia in Japanese Security Policy*.

<sup>85</sup> For instance, in 2016 satellite images confirmed China's unilateral island-building project and construction of defensive facilities in the disputed Spratly Islands. The Spratly Island chains are part of the South China Sea dispute whose claimants include China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. See Tara Davenport, "Island-Building in the South China Sea: Legality and Limits," *Asian Journal of International Law* 8, no. 1 (2018): 76-77, doi:10.1017/S2044251317000145.

<sup>86</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "ASEAN Study", [Powerpoint], March 31, 2014, 43, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000036094.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

China's southward engagement with this subregion."<sup>88</sup> Additionally, Japan's foreign policy decision to militarize the East China Sea came at the expense of amplifying the traditional suspicion about its enhanced security role and tarnishing its long-standing pacifist credential as an economic and civilian power among the ASEAN member states, both at diplomatic and public levels.

### **Conclusion**

Japan's decision to militarize the East China Sea under the Abe administration between 2014 and 2015 emerged first and foremost as a reaction to the rise of assertive China, characterized by Beijing's unilateral actions against the status quo. Japan's perceived threat of China intensified due to the repetitive incursions of Chinese vessels into the Japanese territorial waters. Prior to the militarization, Japanese diplomatic orientation tilted toward more conciliatory and cooperative approaches, represented in a series of agreements for governing the East China Sea through peaceful means, including the 1997 China-Japan Fishery Agreement and the 2008 Principled Consensus on the East China Sea Issue. However, the fragility of such non-binding conciliatory measures soon became apparent as China continued its unilateral military and development activities in the East China Sea. Additionally, what the discovery of natural resources in the East China Sea, particularly in the vicinities of the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands meant for a resource-poor country like Japan was that Tokyo was left with the militarization as the only seemingly feasible foreign policy option in order to counter Beijing's unilateral actions and to safeguard its own national interests.

Although Prime Minister Abe and his entourage envisioned the militarization as a useful foreign policy instrument to retain Japan's regional power and strengthen its autonomous security role, especially in its relations with the U.S., their ambitions manifestly failed in multiple ways that had and continue to have adverse implications for Japan's diplomatic relations with its neighboring states in the region. The growing confrontation in the East China Sea between Japan and China was a recipe for the deeper regional engagement of the U.S. under its foreign policy strategy of the Pivot to Asia. This culminated in drawing Japan ever closer into, and rendering it more dependent on, the U.S. security umbrella, which came out contrary to the Abe administration's desired outcome of achieving a more autonomous position within the Japan-U.S. security

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<sup>88</sup> Hughes, "Japan's Response to China's Rise," 841.

alliance. While the militarization widened the existing cleavage in Japan-China relations by inviting Beijing to respond in a provocative and belligerent manner, it had repercussions on Japan's broader territorial disputes, particularly the unsolved issue of the Northern Territories/Kurile Island with Russia, contributing to the further destabilization of the regional security environment.

Amid Tokyo's decision to militarize the East China Sea, some positive developments were seen in the historical agreement on the settlement of the 'comfort women' issue between Japan and South Korea, as well as the enhancement of Japan-ASEAN defense cooperation. Nevertheless, Japan's militarization of the East China Sea set itself up to its further isolation in the region. Japan's militarization came to be perceived as a first-order security issue in China, inviting Beijing to respond by encouraging the distancing of Japan from influential regional actors including South Korea and the ASEAN member states. Such positive changes also indeed did not completely cast away the lingering memory of Japan's imperial past, which was evidenced in the image of Japan as a military threat and the shared reluctance among South Korea and the ASEAN member states to support Tokyo's enhanced security role in the region.

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