



JAPAN'S NEW OCEAN POLICY

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An island nation surrounded by sea, Japan has traditionally developed the foundations of its society and economy through fisheries, shipping, shipbuilding and other industries, as well as prepare for threats from the sea such as tsunamis and storm surges. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan has been taking initiatives to create and use new value provided by the sea, such as marine energy and mineral resources, marine renewable energy, deep-sea living resources and marine leisure activities. Special attention has also been given to the development of maritime security, economy and alliance formation. From developing the Afro-Asian Growth Corridor¹ to signing maritime agreements with regional actors², expectations for active development and use of the sea have reached new heights.

According to Japan's Basic Act on Ocean Policy (Act No. 33 of 2007), "the development and use of the oceans are the basis of existence for the economy and society of our State, and ... securing the marine biological diversity and conserving other better marine environment are the basis of the existence of mankind."³ The Basic Act on Ocean Policy also states that it is important to aim to "realize a new oceanic State in harmonization of the peaceful and positive development and use of

¹ Asia Africa Growth Corridor, Economic Research Institute for Asean and East Asia <http://www.eria.org/Asia-Africa-Growth-Corridor-Document.pdf>

² M.A Hassan, "India- Japan Maritime Cooperation: Implications for Pakistan", Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, September 26, 2017 http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/IB_Abbas_dated_26-9-2017.pdf

³ Basic Act on Ocean Policy (Act No. 33 of April 27, 2007, English translation, <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/jap75593.pdf>)

the oceans with the conservation of the marine environment, under the international cooperation based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other international agreements.”⁴

To ensure its effective role in the region, Japan first formulated its Ocean Policy in 2008 subject to a review after every 5 years. With the latest developments and keeping in view the maritime challenges in the region, Japan announced its third Ocean Policy on May 15, 2018. This is another piece to the puzzle of Japan's quest to become a regional power.⁵ The region already has two nuclear powers in the form of China and North Korea, and both the countries are treated as an adversary in this policy. The third policy primarily focuses on maritime security amid perceived growing threats from North Korea and China, and is a reversal from the previous versions which focused largely on sea resource development.

The first Ocean Policy, which was released in 2008, was based on promoting smooth and sustainable utilization of the marine zone where Japan can exercise its jurisdiction. The policy also focused on marine peace and security needs to be secured globally, and emphasized on the country playing an active leading role for realizing this. The second policy focused on development of sea resources.

The third Ocean Policy underscores the need for cooperation between the coast guard and the Fisheries Agency to enhance responses to illegal operations by North Korea and fishing vessels from other countries, amid a surge in the number of such cases in the waters surrounding Japan.⁶ According to UN Panel of Experts on North Korea, North Korea defied global sanctions to earn nearly \$200 million in 2017 from illicit maritime trade in goods like coal, oil and arms to 11 African countries, in part by borrowing tactics like ship to ship transfer and changing of flags from the golden age of piracy.⁷ In addition to this, the North Koreans are also using diplomatic pouches to transfer money from this trade.⁸

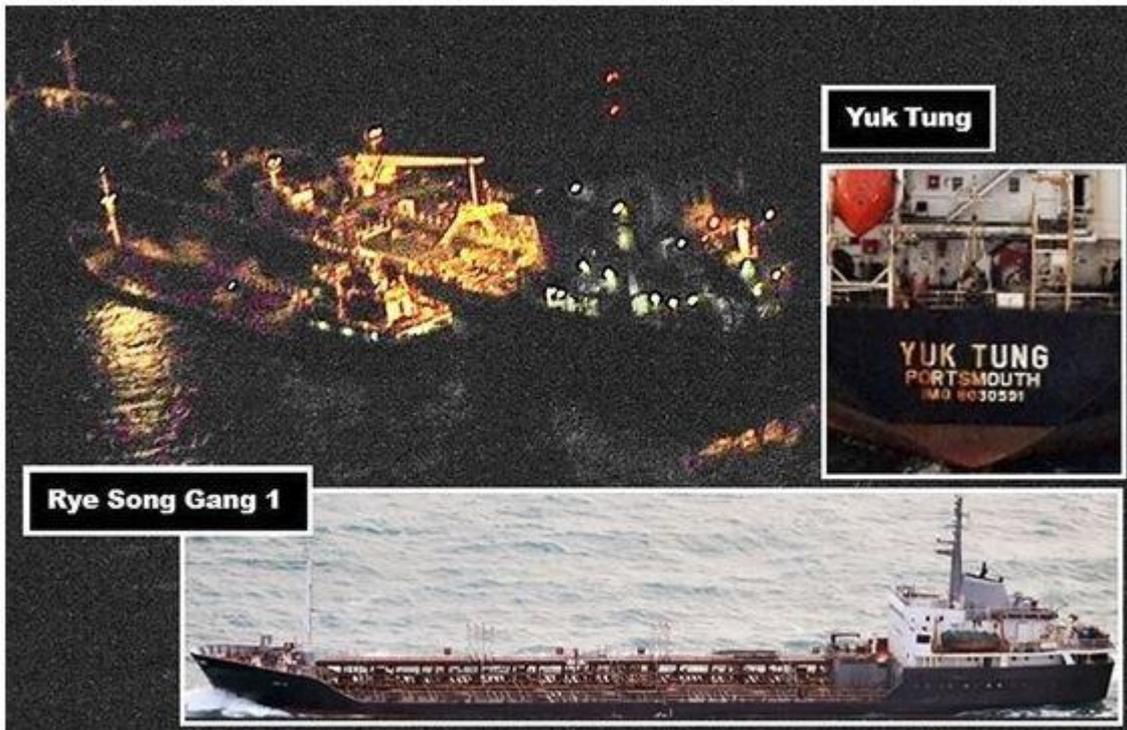
⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Japan focuses on maritime security in new ocean policy, *The Mainichi*, May 15 2018
<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180515/p2g/00m/0fp/066000c>

⁶ Japan focuses on maritime security in new ocean policy, *The Mainichi* May 15 2018
<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180515/p2g/00m/0fp/066000c>

⁷ North Korea uses pirate tactics to earn millions from sanction busting, *NBC NEWS* March 17 2018
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/north-korea-uses-pirate-tactics-earn-millions-sanction-busting-n856921>

⁸ Report: North Korea aims to expand illegal trade network, *UPI* March 1 2018
<https://www.upi.com/Report-North-Korea-aims-to-expand-illegal-trade-network/6801519877946/>



A ship-to-ship transfer of petroleum products between the North Korean-flagged tanker Rye Song Gang 1 and the Dominica-flagged Yuk Tung at night this January⁹

In an attempt to beef up Japan's intelligence gathering ability, the third ocean policy also plans to utilize aircraft and vessels of the Self-Defense Forces and the Japan Coast Guard, as well as high-tech optic satellites of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency and coastal radar equipment.

The new policy points out that the maritime security situation facing Japan is highly likely to deteriorate if no measures are taken.¹⁰ Moreover, the policy realizes that due to a number of ballistic missile tests conducted by North Korea which had their flight path crossing over Japan, and operations by Chinese vessels around the Japanese-controlled and China-claimed Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, it is necessary for Japan to secure its territorial waters and interests at sea.

The timing of this policy was a little flawed as it was announced at a time when North Korea and United States of America were looking forward to a historic summit. Although the Ocean Policy was not single handedly responsible for damaging the peace process, but it fell in line with a sequence of events like the Max Thunder exercises which ultimately led to a violent reaction by North Korea and US withdrawal from the summit. In an effort for the reconsideration of this all important summit, North Korea has sent its top delegates to US, but the fate of the summit is still unclear.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Japan 3rd Ocean policy http://www8.cao.go.jp/ocean/english/plan/pdf/plan03_gaiyou_e.pdf

The South China Sea has been in the lime light for quite a few years now and a bone of contention for peace in the region. There can be little doubt that the new ocean policy will carve the way for further competition in the region as it would challenge both China and North Korea. With the historical baggage among China and Japan, this policy could act to further strain the relations, and work towards serving the larger American interests in the Pacific Ocean.