

On March 10th, 2023, the Japan Forum on International Relations (JFIR) convened a group of scholars to discuss maritime security.

President of JFIR, Watanabe Mayu, delivered the opening remarks for the webinar. In light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is a blatant violation of international law, Watanabe stressed the need to also look towards regions such as the Indo-Pacific, which may also be threatened by unilateral changes to the status quo by force. Watanabe outlined the various challenges in the Indo-Pacific relating to maritime security, such as China's military buildup in the region, as well as mounting tensions in the East and South China Seas. Because of these challenges, Watanabe noted that the webinar, which seeks to advance conversations regarding ownership of the ocean and how to stabilize maritime affairs, is a timely and important event.

Chairperson Ito Go gave an overview of the closed session dialogues, which occurred on March 8th, as well as the agenda for the March 10th open public symposium. In the two closed session dialogues, panelists discussed China's rising assertiveness in the maritime space as well as countermeasures needed to respond to such assertions. Ito emphasized that without deterrence in the form of countermeasures, China will continue to try and expand their influence in maritime space. In the public symposium, Ito said that in addition to China's assertiveness, he hoped to facilitate dialogue on how to maintain order in maritime space by focusing especially on the various tensions between coastal and inland states regarding maritime claims. Ito highlighted how there is a need to reconcile territorial sovereignty claims over oceans, which are primarily championed by coastal states, with the competing claims of inland states who advocate for oceans as a "public good."

In the first panelist presentation, Thi Lan Anh Nguyen, the Director of Research at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, reiterated President Watanabe's point about the relevance of the Ukraine War for Asia and the future threat of conflict in the region. In her presentation, Nguyen highlighted five practices that hinder freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. First, military assertiveness or use of military grade technologies like lasers have increased tensions between countries such as the Philippines and China. Second, Nguyen underscored how national legislation of countries tends to limit the freedom of navigation of other countries; for example, China's interpretation of innocent passage is much more limited than UNCLOS. Some national legislation even authorizes use of force in maritime disputes. Third, the increased density of hundreds of maritime militia in the South China Sea can negatively impact freedom of navigation. Fourth, live fire drills also restrict ocean passages in certain locations. Lastly, land reclamations can increase a country's control over the region while limiting the freedom of navigation of others. In conclusion, given the increase in all five of these practices, Nguyen warned that miscalculations or misunderstanding in the maritime space could lead to conflict.

Komori Yuta, Senior Fellow at the Sasakawa Peace foundation, presented on the stable utilization of the ocean in the context of Japan's revised Basic Plan on Ocean Policy. The new Basic Plan will be introduced in spring of 2023. Komori highlighted how the Sasakawa Ocean Policy Research Institute has conducted surveys of over 6,000 individuals in order to help revise the Basic Act based on feedback from Diet Members, academics, private sector executives, and NGOs. The surveys revealed that in addition to maritime security, promotion of industrial use of the ocean as well as preservation of the marine environment are also important. These results suggest that the Plan should go beyond security and place

more importance on economic development and environmental conservation. Komori also expressed concern about the fact that ocean policy and security policy in Japan may be implemented in a less integrated manner in the future, given that the three Japanese documents released in December do not refer to the Basic Plan on the Ocean at all. Komori argued that the Japanese government must try to resolve these inconsistencies in order to create an ocean policy that is integrated across security, economic, and environmental fronts.

The third panelist, Virginia Watson, focused on two specific areas in her presentation. First, Watson discussed the geometries of architecture in the region to argue that the type of configuration of the alliance and partnership matters for the maritime situation in the South China Sea. More specifically, Watson showed that smaller alliances and partnerships of three to five countries can achieve thicker and deeper cooperation. Watson noted that this is due to the fact that smaller partnerships are more manageable, are functionally based, make efficient use of limited resources, and are able to establish habits of cooperation. However, in Southeast Asia, the maritime response has mainly been through ASEAN, which is a much larger grouping. Watson highlighted some suggestions to reduce the number to countries that have claims in the South China Sea. Second, Watson argued that the role of technology plays a key role in determining the fate of the Indo-Pacific as well as the international order. Therefore, innovation in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and the cyber domain are needed for countries in order to develop capable defense systems.

Yamada Yoshihiko, Professor at Tokai University, provided an overview of the centrality of the Senkaku Islands to Japanese maritime policy and to Japanese security strategy more generally. Yamada outlined his project conducting maritime surveys of the Senkaku Islands with sponsorship from Ishigaki City. In particular, Yamada highlighted the importance of conservation of small-scale fisheries and other wildlife in the Senkaku area. Yamada provided personal anecdotes about encountering Chinese Coast Guard ships while conducting surveys of the islands. Yamada argued that in order for Japan to create a comprehensive maritime policy, it must also focus beyond security and into areas such as ocean conservation and environmental protection. A focus on ocean conservatorship will also demonstrate Japan's commitment to peaceful management of maritime space.

John Bradford, a Senior Fellow at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies, echoed Yamada's statements about the importance of a comprehensive approach towards ocean governance. Bradford argued that focusing away from maritime security and towards maritime governance is a better approach to improve the stability of oceans. Multilateral documents such as UNCLOS have established the common rules of the ocean, whereas enforcement of such rules are left up to states. Bradford highlighted threats to ocean governance such as gray zone tactics, piracy, and environmental threats and climate change. Bradford noted that these threats persist because many states lack capacity to address these issues, or because some states enable poor governance or are even sources of poor governance themselves. Bradford argued that the U.S. and Japan together can offer maritime governance leadership on areas beyond naval defense. Bradford recommended that the two countries should create a bilateral coordination mechanism that involves stakeholders beyond the defense ministries. In addition, he recommended that they should coordinate with other countries to improve ocean governance.

The final panelist, Stephen Nagy, a professor at International Christian University, discussed the convergence of Indo-Pacific strategies by focusing on three areas in particular: stability through rules, governance, and coordination. Nagy argued that stability of the Indo-Pacific through a rules-based order is critical because all countries have economic interests in the region's sea lanes for energy and trade. Nagy also suggested that governance and coordination of maritime policies should focus on traditional security, non-traditional security, as well as resilience. Nagy argued that it is important to coordinate on non-security areas such as environmental protection or climate change in addition to traditional security. For resilience, Nagy stated that areas such as supply chain resilience are areas for future cooperation between different countries in the region. Lastly, he stressed that countries that do not have claims on the South China Sea, such as Canada or Germany, should also play roles in ensuring that areas such as the Taiwan Strait remain international waterways for trade.

During the panel discussion, panelists answered various questions from colleagues as well as from the public. In her answer about Vietnam's perspectives towards the South China Sea, Nguyen stated that as a more regional power, Vietnam's best strategy is to stick to the rules based order, but also to build up its comprehensive capacity in terms of economics and defense. Other panelists also emphasized this "comprehensive approach" to maritime governance; for example, Komori stated that the emphasis on non-traditional and traditional areas of security will be present in Japan's upcoming Basic Plan on Ocean Strategy. Virginia Watson argued that ASEAN centrality would not be undermined if a small subset of the countries formed a group to promote their claims to the South China Sea, in response to a question from Bradford. Other scholars such as Nagy distinguished China's claims in the ocean between the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and Taiwan.