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# JAPANESE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: ITS SIGNIFICANCE AS A POLITICAL TOOL

Chiyuki Aoi

## Abstract

Despite rising tensions in East Asia, the Japanese government has not adopted a comprehensive policy, doctrine, or institution for strategic communication (StratCom) to date. The lack of a formal StratCom concept or framework, however, does not mean that Japan is not engaged in strategic communication. The review provided in this article reveals the heavy reliance of the government on the machineries of public diplomacy to communicate its policy and intent, through which it wishes to integrate its messages. Moreover, Japan is an avid practitioner of ‘messaging via deeds’, an aspect hitherto not understood as a Japanese StratCom practice. Japan’s de facto practice of strategic communication reflects the fundamentally political nature of strategic communication, building as it must upon the particular political and historical landscape of the nation, in which the rise of China is a central factor. The analysis outlines the key challenges for Japanese StratCom practice, namely, the danger of miscalculations occurring as a result of uncoordinated messaging, especially via deeds; the ‘say-do gap’ as the government struggles to fulfil some of its aspirations under the rubric of ‘proactive contribution to peace’, and the difficulty of sending coherent messages and avoiding unintended messaging.

**Keywords:** *public diplomacy, Japan, China, narratives, strategic communication, strategic communications*

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## Introduction

With the rise of China, mounting hybrid security tensions in the Asia-Pacific region, and the increasingly widening North Korean missile and nuclear programme, the case for Japan to develop a comprehensive policy and institution for strategic communication (StratCom) seems self-evident. To date, however, the Japanese government has not adopted a basic concept or programme to serve as a guide for such StratCom policy.

The lack of a formal StratCom framework, however, does not mean that Japan is not engaged in strategic communication. Japan has fairly well-developed apparatuses for dealing with public diplomacy across the government and has recently endorsed a focus area on ‘strategic transmission’ (*senryakuteki hasshin*). The review provided by this article reveals the rather concerted effort within the government to integrate its messages through the machinery of its public diplomacy, an effort underscored by a tacit understanding of strategic communication *as praxis*. In addition, as some Japanese officials readily acknowledge, actions as well as words do convey messages, intended or unintended. This may be the meaning and method the defence-related arms of the government primarily resort to, especially given that the nation is prohibited by its laws from adopting an offensive posture. The *de facto* practice of strategic communication without a formal framework reflects the fundamentally political nature of strategic communication in practice, building as it must upon the country’s particular political and historical landscape.

Difficulties arise, however, from inevitable gaps or inconsistencies between what the government argues it is doing (as a narrative) and the reality of its political actions, especially in some of what the government calls its ‘proactive contributions to peace’, a term that in itself can be quite broadly interpreted. Further, the need for Japan to balance proactive foreign policy and policy to bridge the legitimacy deficit arising from its negative historical legacy, makes overall coordination of strategic communication a particular challenge. Adding to that is the evolution in what Miskimmon et al. term the ‘international system narrative’ occasioned by the rise of China, which necessitates

adjustments in what is called the ‘identity’ narrative and the ‘issue’ narrative.<sup>1</sup> These overall shifts in the strategic environment make reappraising its messaging practice and policy an urgent task for Japan.

The purpose of this article is to engage in such a reappraisal. The first section establishes the analytical framework of strategic communication. Strategic communication is, conceptually or in practice, *defined politically*, with different states or international entities (such as NATO) adopting different concepts and groups of activities to serve political purposes within a given international and national strategic environment. In essence, it is a political tool designed to influence certain target audiences that also reflects the political culture, historical experiences, and civil-military and other intra-governmental relationships of the state/entity. The way strategic communication is practiced in Japan, even if not formally conceptualized by the various arms of government, is indicative of Japan’s particular political and strategic conditions.

In accordance with the conceptual framework thus established, the second section will discuss specific Japanese communication activities that take the form of ‘public diplomacy’ designed to influence the perceptions of domestic or international audiences through fairly elaborate mechanisms for control of the ‘narratives’. The third section goes on to identify the key narratives put forward by the government in key strategic areas. Various arms of government engage in separate public information/diplomacy campaigns but there has been an effort in response to the rapid evolution in the international system with the rise of China, especially under the Abe administration, to transform domestic and international narratives, integrating messages from various arms of the government. The impact of the rise of China on Japanese narratives is hence discussed in the fourth section. These efforts are influenced by the administration’s particular world view and assisted by newly instituted whole-of-government machinery (the Prime Minister’s office engages in whole-of-government coordination of such narratives, while the National Security Council focuses on the whole-of-government aspects of security policy). In addition, as demonstrated in the fifth section, the Japanese government utilizes ‘messaging via deeds’ (actions, rather than words) quite extensively.

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<sup>1</sup>‘[I]nternational system narratives describe how the world is structured, who the players are, and how the system works. Examples would include narratives such as the Cold War, the War on Terror, and the rise of China. [...] [Identity narratives] set out what the story of a political actor is, what values it has, and what goals it has. [...] Differences in these narratives can shape perceptions about what is appropriate behavior and the possible in terms of policy, and are shaped in an iterative process as elite and public views are considered. [Policy narratives] set out why a policy is needed and (normatively) desirable, and how it will be successfully implemented or accomplished. Issue narratives set political actions in a context, with an explanation of who the important actors are, what the conflict or issue is, and how a particular course of action will resolve the underlying issue.’ SEE Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), p. 8.

The sixth and final section will analyse three of the most challenging issues in the practice of StratCom for the Japanese government. The first is the danger of miscalculations occurring as a result of uncoordinated messaging, especially via deeds, in the absence of established crisis management and de-escalation mechanisms. The second area is the so-called say-do gap; the government, operating under certain constraints, struggles to fulfil some of its aspirations under the rubric of ‘proactive contribution to peace’. In certain areas, the government narrative constrains, rather than enables, further adjustments. The third is keeping its messages coherent, as the government may at times be unaware of unintended images or messages that its actions might send. In particular, given the legacy of negative history Japan must face, government responses may be too ‘controlling’ of narratives, which could compromise its image as a tolerant liberal democracy and hinder the resolution of lingering disputes through neutral and independent fact-finding processes.

As this paper will show, Japan urgently needs policy venues and options to review and integrate the various messages and narratives it has put forward in the last two decades, renewing its focus on strategic communication as a strategy and strengthening its efforts in information analysis. Such a focus should recognize the importance of carefully targeting its messages. This analysis shows that the efforts Japan has been able to make in integrating messages derive from its interest in and concern about China.

### **An Analytical Framework of Strategic Communication**

Strategic communication can be broadly defined as ‘the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission’.<sup>2</sup> In international relations, the main actors in strategic communication are government agencies, both civil and military, although non-state actors—including insurgent groups and terrorist organizations—are increasingly potent communicators of strategic messages.<sup>3</sup> Whether conducted by state or non-state agencies, this author agrees with Mervyn Frost and Nicholas Michelsen that strategic communication makes sense only in the context of the norms of a state system, based upon the ideas of both sovereignty and civil society.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Hallahan, Kirk, et al., ‘Defining Strategic Communication’, *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1 No 1 (2007): 3. This definition focuses on the managerial and organizational contexts where communication is applied. For discussions more directly on the political and bureaucratic spheres, see Paul, Christopher, *Whither Strategic Communication?*, RAND Occasional Paper (Santa Monica CA: RAND Corporation, 2009); Brooks, Rosa, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything*, (New York NY: Simon & Schuster, (2016); Farwell, James, *The Art of Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, (2012).

3 For the use of violent images by terror groups, see Bolt, Neville *Violent Images; Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries* (London: Hurst and Co., 2012)

4 Frost, Mervyn and Nicholas Michelsen, ‘Strategic Communications in International Relations: Practical Traps and Ethical Puzzles,’ *Defence Strategic Communication* Vol. 2 (Spring 2017): 9–34.

Strategic communication communicates ‘narratives’. Narratives, according to Lawrence Freedman, ‘are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events’,<sup>5</sup> hence narratives are about influencing others. Narratives reflect storylines that make sense to the audience, as they are built upon and relate to shared values and experiences, however, over the long term narratives can be used to shape the perceptions and interests of an audience. Conducted at the strategic level, narratives are ‘a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors’.<sup>6</sup>

According to Miskimmon et al., narratives are formed at three levels in international relations: systems, identity, and issues.<sup>7</sup> For example, an **issue narrative** might describe defence cooperation in Southeast Asia: what such cooperation entails (e.g. how many ships visit which ports) and what it is intended for (e.g. capacity building). Issue-specific narratives necessarily include information about the actors involved in the issue, such as who the Southeast Asian nations are, individually and as a group. This information constitutes **identity narratives**; in this case, they would discuss how these states value international cooperation and mutual respect of sovereignty vis-à-vis conflicts. And, looking more closely, these narratives reveal broader assumptions that the Southeast Asian nations may have about the current status of the international system: in our example, the shifting balance of power (i.e. the rise of China). These **system narratives**, therefore, elaborate how security is or ought to be maintained in the international system, e.g. how Southeast Asian nations may accordingly act to ensure security. Each of these types of narrative is a kind of strategic communication.

Strategic narratives can be used to communicate the ‘soft power’ a country wishes to project. Indeed, according to Roselle et al., strategic narrative ‘is soft power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’.<sup>8</sup> One of the key expected function of a strategic narrative is to attract understanding and support from a broader audience. It might be used to convince potential supporters, or to deter adversaries, as will be discussed below. The importance of strategic narrative cannot be overestimated, for, as Joseph Nye has aptly pointed out,<sup>9</sup> no power can consist only of ‘hard power’. The ‘smart interlinking of soft and hard power’,<sup>10</sup> including the use of ‘hard’ military assets for soft-power purposes,<sup>11</sup> is an

5 Freedman, Lawrence, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs* (London: HISS, Adelphi Papers 379, 2006), 22.

6 Miskimmon et al.

7 Miskimmon et al.

8 Roselle, Laura, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin, ‘Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power’, *Media, War and Conflict* 7, № 1, 2014.

9 Nye, Joseph, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

10 Ibid.

11 Heng, Yee-Kuang, ‘Three Faces of Japan’s Soft Power’, *Asian International Studies Review* 18, № 1 (June 2017), 171–188.

important and integral part of contemporary strategic messaging.

Strategic communication is a tool used by governments in times both of peace and of war, although the historical use by governments of information and psychological operations, now considered part of StratCom activities, might focus our attention on wartime or influence operations against adversaries. The last point brings our attention to the transformational and *evolutionary nature* of strategic communication as praxis—as the nature of warfare changes, strategic communication must change with it.

For example, the advancement of information technologies and their availability to the ‘man and woman on the street’ may have made a significant difference. The most important shift may be that as a result of citizens having access to much more horizontally structured information flows (for example, via social media), the boundary between strategic communication aimed at governments and public diplomacy aimed at the general public may be increasingly blurred. Governments are acutely aware that the information campaigns they conduct will be more visible and discernible to the public and under closer scrutiny. In addition, governments can and do use public diplomacy to influence other governments.

In effective strategic communications, targeting plays an important role. ‘Target audience’ is defined by the US military as: ‘An individual or group selected for influence.’<sup>12</sup> The potential blurring of the government/public divide, however, makes targeting a complex matter, and may propel some actors to opt for broad, general messaging. Governments need to be aware of the complex web of influences that their messages would trigger. In a complex information domain, the impact is often non-linear, with multiple counter-narratives forming, creating complex backlash rather than intended effects.

The prominent role that narratives play in warfare has been extensively analysed.<sup>13</sup> The recent increase in interest in strategic communication in the West reflects the ever-more central role it plays in the strategy and defence of states and non-state entities alike, particularly **when warfare is understood as competition for dominant narratives**. In the last quarter century warfare has transformed from what Rupert Smith has termed industrial warfare (and its antithesis, guerrilla warfare) to ‘war amongst the people’.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that Western nations fight in more and more ‘crowded’ battlefields, where civil, military, public, and private actors intermingle, has resulted in a reappraisal of the ‘human terrain’ of warfare, hence focusing our attention on the need to understand

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12 US Department of the Army, JP 3-13, Information Operations.

13 Freedman, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs*; Michaels, Jeffery, *The Discourse Trap and the US Military: From the War on Terror to the Surge* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

14 Smith, Rupert, *The Utility of Force* (New York, Penguin, 2006).



war's local and human contexts.<sup>15</sup> More recently, the rise of so-called 'hybrid' actors both in Europe and in the Far East has triggered a hybridisation of Western strategy. Critically, Western and allied states have realised the need to embrace the information domain in their strategy in order to counter their adversaries' effective use of mis- and disinformation, to counter argumentation laying claim to legitimacy (e.g. ownership of certain territories such as those in the China Seas), or to create ambiguities in order to exploit surprise (such as the use of 'little green men').<sup>16</sup>

Given the diverse strategic and technological environments various nations find themselves in, it is no surprise that there is no universally shared definition or concept of strategic communication. For some, strategic communication refers to forms—such as communicative tools, capabilities, or activities, while others perceive it as a process for engaging or understanding audiences through various communicative activities, or as an art of applying various elements and principles.<sup>17</sup> For example, NATO defines strategic communication primarily as the use of a set of activities: 'the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims.'<sup>18</sup> The precise activities that comprise strategic communication also vary from one country to another, or even across a single government or organization. NATO's composite activities and capabilities are public diplomacy, public affairs, military public affairs, information operations, and psychological operations.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, not all states or agencies possess such broad capabilities or engage in such activities. The precise content of each component may also differ from one state to another.

15 Tripodi, Christian, 'The British Army, "Understanding", and the Illusion of Control' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2016, 1–27.

16 Lanoszka, Alexander. (2016). 'Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe.' *International Affairs*, 92 (1), pp. 175–195; Keir Giles, 2016, Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West ; Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power, Chatham House, Research paper: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/2016-03-russia-new-tools-giles.pdf>.

17 Farwell, James P., *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication* (Georgetown University Press, 2012).

18 NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 'About Strategic Communications', <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/about-strategic-communications> (accessed 23 July 2017)

19 Their precise definitions are as follows: *public diplomacy*: NATO civilian communications and outreach efforts responsible for promoting awareness of and building understanding and support for NATO's policies, operations and activities, complementing the national efforts of Allies; *public affairs*: NATO civilian engagement through the media to inform the public of NATO policies, operations and activities in a timely, accurate, responsive, and proactive manner; *military public affairs*: promoting NATO's military aims and objectives to audiences in order to enhance awareness and understanding of military aspects of the Alliance; *information operations*: NATO military advice and coordination of military information activities in order to create desired effects on the will, understanding, and capabilities of adversaries and other North-Atlantic Council-approved parties in support of Alliance operations, missions and objectives; *psychological operations*: planned psychological activities using methods of communications and other means directed to approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives.

What is fundamental, then, is that these definitions, concepts, capabilities, or the processes they entail are *politically determined*, i.e. they must serve government policy within the historical, institutional, and cultural context of the state or agency. *At its core, strategic communication refers to purposeful use of communication designed to influence others*, and its precise framework and definitions depend upon who, or what entity, engages in such activities.

### Japan's Public Diplomacy: Key Agendas

Japan does not have a comprehensive policy or concept for strategic communication, nor does it rely upon an official framework of strategic communication as such. However, the idea of 'the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission'<sup>20</sup> is not foreign to Japan. Public diplomacy<sup>21</sup> is a recognized official term and in this context provides the key policy and institutional framework; however, the Japanese government views public diplomacy as straightforward public relations rather than as a matter of strategy, although in reality, the substance of policy advocacy in public diplomacy is de facto strategic communication. As a nation bound by a pacifist Constitution, Japan naturally engages in a different range of communication activities than do states with different experience and fewer constraints.

Led and coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office, public diplomacy serves the dual intent of enhancing the understanding of Japanese policy and improving Japan's image abroad. This includes the focus areas of a) communicating the 'proper image' (*tadashii sugata*) of Japan; b) promoting pro-Japan experts and Japan experts in general; and c) promoting the diverse 'attractiveness' of Japan.<sup>22</sup>

The first of these elements—communicating the 'proper image' of Japan—is most akin to strategic communication. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, communicating a 'proper image' of Japan means 'to construct an appropriate message, and strategically engage in external transmission (*basshin*), considering the nature of the target and the timing of the message, while at the same time being mindful of the methods of communication and language in which to communicate [the messages]'.<sup>23</sup>

20 Hallahan et al., 'Defining Strategic Communication': 3.

21 Extensive analyses of Japan's public diplomacy [in Japanese] include Masafumi Kaneko and Mitsuru Kitano eds., *Paburikku dipuromashii senryaku: Imeji o kiso kokokan gemu ni ika ni shori suru ka* [Public Diplomacy Strategy: How to Win in the International Game of Images], (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyujo, 2014); Masafumi Kaneko and Mitsuru Kitano, eds., *Paburikku dipuromashii: Yoron no jidai no gaiko senryaku* [Public Diplomacy: Diplomatic Strategy in the Age of Public Opinion], (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyujo, 2007); Yasushi Watanabe, *Bunka to gaiko: Paburikku dipuromashii no jidai* [Culture and Diplomacy: The Era of Public Diplomacy], (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Sha, 2013).

22 Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan; MOFA], '*Kobo bunka gaiko*,' [Public Affairs Cultural Diplomacy] (June 2017); Shusho Kantei Kokusai Kohoshitsu [Prime Minister's Office, International Public Affairs Office], '*Kantei Kokusai Kohoshitsu no jigyo*' [The Work of Prime Minister's Office] (June 2017).

23 Gaimusho, 'Public Affairs Cultural Diplomacy', p. 2.

The key elements in the area of communicating a proper image of Japan are international security, historical issues, and territorial integrity.

Activities in the first category would include the prime minister's or the foreign minister's speeches at various international conferences on a wide range of security issues and Japan's current policies. They involve conveying messages about the security environment in East Asia, Japan's policy on proactive contributions to peace, and the legal foundations of international security as transparently as possible.<sup>24</sup>

The second category, concerning historical issues, covers the direct responses of Japanese government representatives to diverging interpretations of historical events as put forward by practitioners, journalists, or academics. The Japanese government's more vocal protestations about what it perceives as 'incorrect' or 'distorted' views about Japan are based upon the assessment that remaining silent, as had been done in the past, would not necessarily result in a better image of Japan.<sup>25</sup>

A recent example of this is the well-publicised incident following Prime Minister Abe's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. In an article in *The Daily Telegraph*, Liu Xiaoming, Chinese Ambassador to the UK, compared Japan to Lord Voldemort, a character in the Harry Potter series: 'If militarism is like the haunting Voldemort of Japan, the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo is a kind of horcrux, representing the darkest parts of that nation's soul.'<sup>26</sup> Japanese Ambassador to the UK Keiichi Hayashi responded:

*Our maritime forces never harass neighbours on the high seas and we have upheld in action the values inscribed in the UN charter [...] East Asia is now at a crossroads [...] There are two paths open to China. One is to seek dialogue, and abide by the rule of law. The other is to play the role of Voldemort in the region by letting loose the evil of an arms race and escalation of tensions, although Japan will not escalate the situation from its side.'*<sup>27</sup>

The article also attempted to de-link the (alleged) connection between visits by politicians to the shrine from the (alleged) revival of Japanese militarism of the past, asserting that: '[Democratic] values are so deeply ingrained in Japan that a visit to a shrine cannot undo them.'

The Japanese government position is more starkly presented in various international fora, including the United Nations and other treaty-based bodies. For example, it now

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2-1.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with senior MOFA officials. Such a shift in policy reflects stronger pressure from certain conservative political circles.

<sup>26</sup> Xiaoming, Liu, 'China and Britain won the war together', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Jan 2014

<sup>27</sup> Hayashi, Keiichi, 'China Risks becoming Asia's Voldemort', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Jan 2014.

vocally challenges the assessment of the wartime treatment of so-called ‘comfort women’ by Imperial Japan, as stated in various UN reports concerning the number of victims affected, the authenticity of the sources, the use of the term ‘sexual slavery’, and the nature of the involvement of the wartime leadership.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Japanese government personnel now sometimes aim complaints directly at individuals who publish research considered deleterious to Japan’s international image.<sup>29</sup> A recent example is the Japanese government’s complaint to the publishing house McGraw-Hill Education concerning a passage in the textbook *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* regarding the treatment of the so-called comfort women by the Japanese military forces during World War II.<sup>30</sup> The government’s request to alter the passage triggered a petition published in the March 2015 issue of *Perspectives on History*, the newsmagazine of the American Historical Association, by a group of concerned American historians, who called upon the Japanese government to refrain from attempts to ‘censor history’.<sup>31</sup>

The third category concerns territorial integrity. The Japanese government has produced numerous pamphlets, videos, and web sites to publicize its positions. However, officials concede that care has to be taken not to paint the opponent in an overly negative or provocative manner. Rather, the materials state the government positions simply, in such a way as to promote a general understanding of these positions and to make use of the good image that Japan has cultivated for itself, such as by accentuating the rule of law and the rule-based order that Japan generally upholds.

Recently, the Abe administration has placed renewed focus on the idea of ‘strategic external transmission’ (*senryakuteki taigai hasshin*) with a view to communicating key policy messages more strategically and proactively.<sup>32</sup> In 2015, the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II in the Pacific, the Abe administration pledged ¥70 billion for this strategic communication scheme. Although the funding is spread across various

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28 For the text of the speech, see ‘The Summary of Remarks by Mr. Shinsuke Sugiyama, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Question and Answer Session.’ The review of the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 16 February 2014, United Nations Office in Geneva. available at [http://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/rp/page24e\\_000163.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page24e_000163.html)

29 For a fuller examination of press and academic freedom in Japan, see Snow, Nancy, *Japan’s Information War* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016); Jeff Kingston ed., *Press Freedom in Contemporary Japan* (London and New York: Routledge 2017).

30 Fifield, Anna, ‘U.S. Historians Urge Japan Not to Gloss Over Past Sexual Slavery’, *Washington Post*, 10 February 2015.

31 Dudden, Alexis, ‘Standing with Historians of Japan’, *Perspectives on History*, March 2015: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2015/letter-to-the-editor-standing-with-historians-of-japan> (accessed 25 July 2017).

32 Gaimusho, ‘Public Affairs Cultural Diplomacy’, 2-1.

projects, notably including the initiation of Japan House<sup>33</sup> and the promotion of ‘pro-Japanese’ intellectual leadership, the key aim of this funding is to communicate to the public the ‘correct’ Japanese policy with regard to historical and territorial issues, as well as the policy of proactive contribution to peace (see below).<sup>34</sup> In 2016, that funding was ¥54.1 billion.<sup>35</sup> In 2017, that has been increased to ¥81.8 billion.

Given the fact that public diplomacy covers virtually all areas of government policy, and hence involves a vast amount of information, the priorities of Japanese strategic communication may easily become hazy in the public perception. Media attention tends to go to controversial issues, such as visits by politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine or the ensuing diplomatic row that was fought publicly in the press, causing confusion as to Japan’s intentions. The priority for Japan’s ‘public diplomacy’ is to advance understanding of Japan’s core foreign policy goals, namely, to maintain and advance rule-based order in North and Southeast Asia, centring upon the safeguarding of open and stable seas; in effect tackling various territorial disputes and especially the militarization of the South China Sea dispute. Moreover, the open order based upon rule of law and freedom would cover areas beyond Asia, through the Indo-Pacific to Africa.<sup>36</sup> In this, again, the highly political nature of strategic communication is revealed; it is apparent that the rise of China has had an immense impact on the nature of Japanese narratives and prioritization, as will be discussed further below. With such high stakes in policy and security, public diplomacy becomes essentially a strategic communication issue—to state Japan’s goals clearly and have them understood as a show of intent, making the adversary aware of what is at stake.

### Japan’s Strategic Narrative: ‘Proactive Contribution to Peace’

Narratives are not policy; they are the attempt to ‘sell’ policy by framing it in a storyline that makes sense to a target audience. Japan is now arguably in transition—from an era of foreign policy narratives based on the post-war pacifism of a nation that was content with and benefiting from a liberal world order, to a new narrative aiming to present Japan as a proactive contributor to that order. The Abe administration’s slogan

33 Japan House, now existing in Sao Paolo, with plans to open ones in London and Los Angeles, aims to ‘create hubs overseas to showcase and communicate Japan’ Here, an ‘All-Japan’ approach is taken as part of efforts to strengthen ‘the strategic global communication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan’. See [http://www.mofa.go.jp/p\\_pd/pds/page25e\\_000145.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/p_pd/pds/page25e_000145.html)

34 Sangiin [House of Councillors], ‘Senryakuteki taigai hasshin to gaiko jissi taisai no kyoka’ [Strategic External Transmission and the Strengthening of Institutions for Diplomatic Implementation], *Rippo to chosa* [Legislation and Research], March 2015, p. 57.

35 Sangiin, ‘G7 Iseshima Samitto nado o misueta gaiko yosan’ [Foreign Affairs Budget in View of G7 Iseshima Summit and Other Events], *Rippo to chosa* [Legislation and Research], February 2016, p. 57.

36 Interview with MOFA officials.

of ‘proactive contribution to peace’<sup>37</sup> carries that message, in the expectation of shaping the nation’s public willingness to embrace a more active role in international security. The policy also aims to sell the image of Japan to the global audience as a key ally and partner of nations united by the norms of democracy and freedom.

This Japanese ‘identity narrative’ is a response to the developing ‘international system narrative’, which now holds that the balance of power in the Asian region (and beyond) is shifting rapidly as the result of China’s rising power. In order to prevent that rise from altering the existing international order in disadvantageous ways, Japan needs to present a new identity that appeals to its allies and partners, and that rallies support from the domestic audience.

The *National Security Strategy of Japan*, a document published by the cross-government National Security Council [NSC] in 2013, begins by acknowledging the positive role that post-war Japan has played in promoting world peace and prosperity, and promises to ‘play an even more proactive role as a major global player in the international community’.<sup>38</sup> Analogous to the logic of Western value-based foreign policy, the NSC document goes on to say that Japan will pursue a defence policy based upon the core principles Japan upholds as a nation: ‘universal values, such as freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law’.<sup>39</sup> It also states that Japan is a maritime country that ‘has achieved economic growth through maritime trade and development of marine resources, and has pursued “open and stable seas”’.<sup>40</sup> It goes on to argue that Japan will ‘continue to adhere to the course that it has taken to date as a peace-loving nation, and as a major player in world politics and economy, contribute even more proactively in securing peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community, while achieving its own security as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, as a “Proactive Contributor to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation. This is the fundamental principle of national security that Japan should stand to hold’.<sup>41</sup>

The current policy is to honour the declared objectives and make necessary contributions to international operations in fields such as collective defence and security. The revisions to the relevant laws that took place in 2015, include provisions for proactive

37 Abe’s idea of proactive contribution to peace had, according to Kaneko, several predecessors. See Masafumi Kaneko, ‘Sekkyokuteki heiwashugi no keifu’ [The Genealogy of Proactive Contribution to Peace]: 19 February 2014, <http://research.php.co.jp/blog/kaneko/2014/02/19.php> (accessed 16 July 2017).

38 National Security Council, *National Security Strategy of Japan*. National Security Council, 2013, p. 2.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid. On the maritime identity of Japan, see Patalano, Alessio, “‘Commitment by Presence’: Naval Diplomacy and Japanese Defense Engagement in Southeast Asia”, in James Brown and Jeff Kingston (eds.), *Japan’s Foreign Relations in Asia* (forthcoming).

41 National Security Council: 17.

contributions to collective defence, and to international peace more generally, by allowing the Japan Self-Defence Forces [JSDF] to provide logistical support to coalition forces. Other examples are participation in UN peacekeeping operations, now with the new JSDF authority to conduct limited protection of civilians [the so-called ‘rush and rescue’ operations, or *kaketsuke keigo*], the enhanced and more strategic use of Japan’s Official Development Assistance [ODA], and so on.

Such narratives are backed up further by Japan’s commitment to enhance bilateral and multilateral relations via defence cooperation, as will be further discussed below. In particular, the NSC strategy paper promised that Japan will ‘provide assistance to those coastal states alongside the sea lanes of communication [...] and strengthen cooperation with partners in the sea lanes who share strategic interests with Japan’.<sup>42</sup> Prime Minister Abe, therefore, promised ‘seamless support’ to Southeast Asian nations, including defence equipment and technology cooperation in surveillance and rescue capabilities. He also promised these nations ODA and capability-building assistance from the JSDF.<sup>43</sup> The messages of proactive contribution to peace are often combined with reminders of how post-war Japan has contributed to world peace and prosperity, especially in the Asian region, through various forms of international cooperation and assistance provided to its neighbours. Such *linking of the past to the future* is an attempt to resolve the lingering negative legacy of the last world war. For example, Prime Minister Abe’s address on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war mentioned the four elements included by previous prime ministers Kiichi Murayama and Jun’ichiro Koizumi in their fiftieth and sixtieth anniversary speeches, namely, (the evils of) colonialism, the aggression that Japan had committed, Japan’s regrets, and expression of apology. However, criticism arose that the language with which they were referred to was more indirect than previously (a skepticism expressed in relation to the oft-advertised rightward orientation of the prime minister). Abe then stressed Japan’s post-war role of promoting economic prosperity and maintaining international peace, while pledging to remember the past and to promote the aims of economic prosperity, peace, and women’s rights, and safeguarding democracy, human rights, and freedom even more than before.<sup>44</sup>

In a way, this formulation of ‘proactive contribution of peace’, an idea that has had a number of predecessors in the previous two decades, is the Japanese government’s attempt to negotiate its transition from what some have called a self-regarding, passive

42 National Security Council: 24. See also Heng, ‘Three Faces of Japan’s Soft Power’.

43 Heng, *ibid.*: 175–76.

44 The government has also used visual materials; see the Gaimusho, ‘Communication and Reconciliation in the Post War Era’ (video), 17 May 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIZptgGafhs> (accessed 17 July 2017).

pacifism from a bygone era to a more pro-active, internationally collaborative security policy.<sup>45</sup> One may observe subtle differences in tone in the government narratives targeting its internal and the external audiences. Domestically, attempts have been made to explain to the Japanese public how, since the end of the last war, Japan has become an economic power that gradually expanded its contribution to world stability and prosperity through trade, ODA, human security, and peacekeeping, commensurate with its economic power. The narrative then goes on to argue, as noted, that Japan is in a position to take up an even greater role in the international community.<sup>46</sup>

Towards external audiences, both the first and second Abe administrations have relied on Japan's democratic values and its role as a proactive promoter of international order based upon the rule of law. (This formulation, of course, presents a simplified worldview that is tailored to Japan's interest in depicting its role as a defender and promoter of the status quo.<sup>47</sup>) The focus on values was probably an influence of US policy-making circles during the George W. Bush administration and of Japan's embrace of the notion following its need to tighten the alliance with the United States.<sup>48</sup> Hence, 'arc of freedom and prosperity' was the phrase of choice by the first short-lived Abe administration in 2006–2007.<sup>49</sup> The later Abe administration (2012–present) continued to embrace a value-based foreign policy, adopting the idea of 'proactive contribution to peace', an idea that was also intended to forge stronger relations with liberal democratic countries in the region and beyond, not to mention the United States, through more active Japanese engagement in international security and defence cooperation.

### China's Rise as a Major Driver of Japanese Narratives

The role of values as a pillar of foreign policy is fully embraced by the Abe administration as a counter-balance to China in the Far East. As noted by various analysts, such as Pugliese and Hosoya, the rise of China was a significant factor that drove Japan to reformulate its narrative, accentuating its democratic identity and accompanying role as contributor to world order, a role that Japan now needs to embrace, replacing its

45 Kaneko, 'Genealogy'. See also Nihon Kokusai Forum, 'Sekkyokuteki heiwashugi to Nichi-Bei domei no arikata' [Proactive Pacifism and the Future of US-Japan Alliance], (Nihon Kokusai Forum Seisaku Inkaï, 2011): <http://www.jfir.or.jp/j/activities/pr/pdf/32.pdf> (accessed 24 September 2017).

46 See, for example, the National Security Strategy of Japan (2013).

47 In reality, legality and the modalities of the rule of law are extremely complex issues in many contested cases.

48 Pugliese, Giulio (2017) 'Kantei Diplomacy? Japan's Hybrid Leadership in Foreign and Security Policy', *The Pacific Review* 30:2: 152–68 (161–162).

49 The idea was very much a product of Prime Minister Abe and then Foreign Minister Taro Aso, assisted and substantiated by some influential bureaucratic figures, such as Nobukatsu Kanehara. See Yuichi Hosoya (2011) 'The rise and fall of Japan's grand strategy: The "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" and the Future Asian Order', *Asia-Pacific Review* Vol. 18, No 1 pp. 13–24; Pugliese, 'Kantei Diplomacy?'



passive past.<sup>50</sup> This dynamic was accelerated, moreover, by the particular policy and idiosyncrasies of the first and second Abe administrations, which propelled the mutually reinforcing, antagonistic narratives on both sides of the Sea of Japan.

On the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II, the Japanese government presented a narrative that attempted to link the past with a future characterised by the new Japanese policy of proactive contributions to peace. This narrative was met with a vast Chinese display of pride and patriotism,<sup>51</sup> in which, as Pugliese and Insisa argued, in a somewhat ironic parallel to the case of Japan, the relevant past of a ‘century of humiliation’ at the mercy of Western and Japanese imperialism and the resulting trauma to the national psyche, was linked with the future, the ‘China Dream’,<sup>52</sup> made possible by the re-emergence of China as a major world power.

Japanese officials refrain from using overly alarmist language, but the message that Japan considers China to be a ‘revisionist’ or anti-status-quo power is clear. That tendency is most starkly presented in relation to the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands between Japan and China. Relations between the two nations rapidly deteriorated, to the point where official high-level meetings and exchanges between the two virtually stopped, after Japan (then governed by the Democratic Party of Japan) nationalised the islands to prevent the former nationalist governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, from purchasing them for development. In this confrontation, Japan employed its primary official line, i.e. post-war Japan is a peace-loving member of the liberal world order based upon democracy and freedom, an order that is now proactively being upheld by Japan and actively being challenged by China. The Japanese government’s position with regard to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands has also been constant: Japan does not have any territorial disputes there, as Japan has administered the territory historically since the 1880s; hence the Japanese position is that Japan would not submit the matter to international judicial resolution.<sup>53</sup>

50 Hosoya, ‘The Rise and Fall’; Pugliese, ‘Kantei Diplomacy?’

51 Pugliese, Giulio and Aurelio Insisa, *Sino-Japanese Power Politics: Might, Money and Minds* (Palgrave, MacMillan, 2017), 5; see also Erickson, Andrew S., ‘China Military Parade: 3 September 2015, Your Complete Hardware and Logistics Guide (Updated Version)’, 2 September 2015: <http://www.andrewerickson.com/2015/09/china-military-parade-3-september-2015-your-complete-hardware-and-logistics-guide-updated-version/>. China displayed 500 units of its latest weaponry, 84 per cent of which were revealed in public for the first time.

52 Pugliese and Insisa, p. 2.

53 On the detailed history of the disputes, see, see Drifte, Reinhard, ‘The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Territorial Dispute between Japan and China: Between the Materialization of the “China Threat” and Japan “Reversing the Outcome of World War II”?’ UNISCI Discussion Papers, № 32 (May 2013).

China argues, on the other hand, that Japan's nationalization of the islands violated a previous bilateral agreement whereby both nations were committed to shelving territorial disputes, and hence altered the status quo. China also emphasised its assertion that the Diaoyu Islands were Chinese territory before Japan claimed them, backing it up with various documents and videos uploaded to the internet. As Pugliese and Insisa point out, China's narrative presents Japan as revisionist and militarist, and China as the defender of the status quo.<sup>54</sup>

China's creation of an Air Defence Identification Zone in 2013 in the East China Sea is another example where contrasting narratives developed. Both the Chinese claim to such a zone, and the demand of Chinese authorities that others who enter the zone identify themselves, were rejected by Japan and the United States, which refuse to recognise the zone. The question expressed by the US about the legitimacy of 'a unilateral change to the status quo [...] that raises regional tensions and increases the risk of miscalculation, confrontation and accidents'<sup>55</sup> was matched by Japan's remark: 'Setting up such airspace unilaterally escalates the situations surrounding the Senkaku Islands and has the danger of leading to an unexpected situation.'<sup>56</sup>

Despite the seeming tit-for-tat escalation of retaliatory narratives, the communication strategies of the two countries can be interestingly contrasted. It is normally more difficult for democracies to officially engage in propaganda than for centralized authoritarian systems, although, given the covert nature of certain branches of information operations, some would argue that it is possible that the differences are only of degree, rather than of substance. Japan's means of advertising its position are officially limited to its mechanisms of public diplomacy, and the nation does rely predominantly on them.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, the Chinese government possesses a broader range of tools to advertise and promote its position, including public diplomacy. For example, building on the tradition dating back to the early communist era, China places propaganda at the highest position of government activities; this is recognized by the Japanese leadership. China also reaps benefits from a centralised and controlled press, and from various controls over social media and internet use.

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<sup>54</sup> Pugliese and Insisa, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Reuters, 'China says U.S. should respect China's air defense zone', 23 March 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-defence/china-says-u-s-should-respect-chinas-air-defense-zone-idUSKBN16U0SB> (accessed 9 October 2017).

<sup>56</sup> Cited in BBC, 'China establishes "air-defence zone" over East China Sea', 23 November 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Recently, however, press reports revealed that the Japanese government was caught hiring a British consultancy firm to engage in propaganda against Chinese interests in Britain. Kerbaj, Richard and Michael Sheridan, 'Rifkind a Stooge in Secret PR War on China', *Sunday Times*, 29 January 2017.

Behind the rather reticent Japanese practice of sticking to official public diplomacy is the perception that Japan cannot even dream of matching the immense resources that China spends on its state-run television and other information apparatus, reputed to top ¥1 trillion.<sup>58</sup> Japanese officials also acknowledge that Japan cannot afford to paint adversaries provocatively or in a negative light. Rather, the logic should be to make Japan more attractive to its allies and to the global public by accentuating its ‘soft power’ (hence the importance of resorting to values or, in the context of territorial disputes, the rule of law)—in which case China would lose some of its legitimacy in the eyes of the global public. This demonstrates a certain degree of understanding by Japanese officials about how messaging through public opinion is possible and can be utilised.

It is also important to appeal to like-minded Western states. The Shangri-La Dialogue, organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in 2014, is a good example of the value of an international diplomatic coalition. Prime Minister Abe’s keynote address at the event was notable as it articulated for the first time what rule of law amounts to in East Asia; it assumes, namely, that states will make ‘claims that are faithful in light of international law, not resorting to force or coercion, and resolving all disputes through peaceful means’.<sup>59</sup> His address was followed by a speech by US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel. While the Japanese prime minister reaffirmed the Japanese foreign and defence policy goal of keeping Asia safe and prosperous by ensuring that the international rule-based order would be pursued, the US Defence Secretary went even further and accused China of actively disrupting the regional order, indicating also that the United States would act in cases of breaches of international law.<sup>60</sup>

In sum, Japan’s messages in relation to disputes with China suggest that despite the seeming lack of focus on StratCom, Japan routinely monitors and controls its narratives with strategic intent, in light of the shift in international power balance and also the role that normative frameworks play in foreign and defence policy narratives. Its strategy has many fronts, some of which may comprise more controversial attempts to control certain counter-narratives. Even with these difficulties, it is apparent that the importance of strategic communication as a policy tool is well understood by the Japanese leadership.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with senior MOFA officials.

<sup>59</sup> The 13th IISS Asian Security Summit – The Shangri-La Dialogue-Keynote Address by Shinzo ABE, Prime Minister, Japan ‘Peace and prosperity in Asia, forevermore: Japan for the rule of law, Asia for the rule of law, and the rule of law for all of us’, 30 May 2014: [http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e\\_000086.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_000086.html)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., see also: Inkster, Nigel, ‘SLD 2014 – the gloves come off’, Shangri-La Voices Latest news and views from the 16th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, 2 June 2014: <https://www.iiss.org/en/shangri-la%20voices/blogsections/2014-363a/sld-2014---the-gloves-come-off-0387>

## Messaging via Deeds: ‘Deterrence through Engagement’

While Japanese public diplomacy (with its new focus on strategic transmission) plays an important role in its strategic communication, Japan also sends its messages by deeds and actions. As theories of strategic interdependence would imply, action-based messaging is a fundamental part of strategic communication,<sup>61</sup> and, in the case of Japan, a political necessity when it has to avoid overly provocative verbal exchanges with adversaries, as well as a necessity under the exclusively defence-oriented policy that Japan subscribes to under its Constitution. Specifically, Japan tries to send the message of *deterrence through engagement* to those deemed adversarial in certain contexts (such as, most notably, in the China Seas), by accentuating partnerships that Japan has cultivated with nations in Southeast Asia, the Indo-Pacific including India, Australia, and beyond, through defence engagement, through such means as defence exchanges, cooperation, and joint military training and exercises. Deterrence is *not* the official term justifying these activities (as Heuser and Simpson argue, there are good diplomatic and strategic reasons for not calling it that),<sup>62</sup> and these exchanges and exercises carry more neutral messages as well, such as commitment and stabilisation (natural disaster relief, for example).<sup>63</sup> However, the intended effect is to show that Japan is engaged in the region and committed to cooperation and the maintenance of stability. Japan expects that such an assurance strategy will help safeguard the rule-based order and security in the region, preventing adversaries from taking escalatory actions.

Defence engagement has attracted attention globally, most notably with the UK developing a specific doctrine for Defence Engagement Strategy in 2017 following adoption of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review.<sup>64</sup> Japan, recognized by the UK as a key ally in Asia, has also embraced an enhanced level of defence engagement both in bilateral and multilateral terms. The Japanese Ministry of Defence [JMOD] hence notes that ‘for Japan, it is important to strengthen multi-layered frameworks for multinational and bilateral dialogue, exchange and cooperation, while based upon the

61 The classic example of this is deterrence and strategic interaction theory. See Schelling, Thomas, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

62 On the multiple purposes that military exercises and training serve, see Beatrice Heuser and Harold Simpson, ‘The Missing Political Dimension of Military Exercises,’ *RUSI Journal*, 162:2 (2017), pp. 1–9. It notes that throughout the Cold War, NATO exercises simultaneously served both purposes of deterrence and building allies’ confidence in deterrence (see p. 3). Russia’s actions in Crimea and Ukraine since 2014 have triggered NATO members to adapt assurance measures, including exercises. Exercises, they argue, have effects not only for those that participate in them but also to broader audiences.

63 For an exploration of how Japan utilizes naval diplomacy across the spectrum spanning from coercion to stabilisation and commitment, see Patalano, ‘Commitment by Presence’.

64 See the UK Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *The UK’s International Defence Engagement Strategy* (2017); [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/596968/06032017\\_Def\\_Engag\\_Strat\\_2017DaSCREEN.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596968/06032017_Def_Engag_Strat_2017DaSCREEN.pdf) (accessed 20 July 2017).

US-Japan alliance, in order to secure peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region'.<sup>65</sup> It further notes that not only dialogues but 'action-oriented exchanges' (*kodo o tomonau koryu*) are becoming more important, leading, in some cases, to elevation of exchange to defence cooperation.<sup>66</sup>

In this respect, Abe pursued the policy of enlarging defence partnerships with Australia and India, arrangements that, one way or another, send messages to China. The main justification in advancing relations with both countries, again, is shared values. Hence, in Prime Minister Abe's 2007 address 'Confluence of the Two Seas', his first address to the Parliament of India, he justified the formation of a 'Strategic Global Partnership' between Japan and India from a standpoint of shared 'fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the respect for basic human rights as well as strategic interests'.<sup>67</sup> This continued along the same lines as the earlier plan, the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity'<sup>68</sup> along the outer rim of the Asian continent, arguing that a partnership between India and Japan is key to the success of such a region. It was noted also that India stands at a strategic mid-point in the sea lanes stretching from Africa and the Middle East to East Asia, on which Japanese and global trade rely.

India-Japan defence cooperation has progressively grown since 2007. In 2008, Japan and India concluded a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, followed by a 2009 Action Plan to advance security cooperation based on the Joint Declaration. In 2014 the Ministry of Defence of Japan and the Ministry of Defence of India signed an agreement on defence co-operation and exchanges. Based on these agreements, there have been a number of joint exercises involving these two countries and beyond. The most recent example was the July 2017 Malabar exercise, involving US, Indian, and Japanese naval units. This exercise had a scenario of targeting submarines deployed to the Indian coastline.<sup>69</sup>

As for Australia, Japan had a brief experience of working with the Australian army while being deployed to Iraq's Al Samawah province in 2005–2006. Immediately thereafter, defence ties were developed. In 2007 Australia became the second country with which

65 Ministry of Defence of Japan, 'Kakoku to no boei kyoryoku/koryu' [Defense Cooperation and Exchange with Other Countries], <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/nikoku/> [translation by the author].

66 Ibid., 'Cooperation' was not further elucidated.

67 Abe, Shinzo, 'Confluence of the Two Seas', Gaimusho, 22 August 2007: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pm0708/speech-2.html>

68 Speech by Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons', Gaimusho, 30 November 2006: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html> (accessed 1 August 2017).

69 Kumar, Hari and Ellen Barry, 'India, U.S. and Japan begin War Games, and China Hears a Message,' *New York Times*, July 10, 2017.

Japan issued a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (the first was the United States in 1996). In January 2017, the two countries signed the Australia-Japan Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement [ACSA]. The ACSA facilitates closer bilateral defence logistics support. It also supports closer cooperation between the two in combined exercises, training, and peacekeeping operations.

Again, common values between these two countries provided the primary justification. They recognized each other as key allies of the United States, and as sharing values related to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the liberal economy, as well as sharing many strategic interests. They engage in routine ministerial and defence exchanges, and participate in multinational exercises involving the United States and other countries. The most recent example of the latter is the 2017 exercise Talisman Sabre at Australia's Shoalwater Bay Training Area, in which an elite Japanese force—the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force 1st Airborne Brigade, 3rd Infantry Battalion—participated; the exercise has taken place every other year since 2005.<sup>70</sup>

Japan's most extensive defence cooperation in Europe is with the UK, with which it has important historical ties; this cooperation takes place in various formats and particularly involves issues such as peace support, counter-piracy, and counter-terrorism. In January 2017, the UK and Japan also signed a Defence Logistics Treaty (also referred to as an Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement or ACSA). In October 2016, the UK and Japan held their first joint military exercise, Guardian North 16, involving fighter jets near Japan's Misawa Air Base. This was the first joint exercise that the JASDF has held with any country other than the United States. Furthermore, in May 2017, a four-nation (UK, Japan, France, and the US) joint exercise involving amphibious capabilities was held in Guam.

Prime Minister Abe has also expressed interest in promoting NATO-Japan ties, although this discussion is still in its early stages. Japan currently sends a Self Defence Force [SDF] officer to NATO headquarters on a rotational basis. The basic rationale provided for Japan's defence cooperation with Europe/the UK is, again, shared values—rule-based order, democracy, and fundamental freedoms.

For advancing its defence engagement and cooperation, Japan particularly focuses on the maritime domain. As an island nation, Japan has historically depended upon the open sea to achieve and maintain its prosperity and international status.<sup>71</sup> In the post-war era in particular, it was the maritime domain that was at the front lines of

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70 Burke, Mathew M., 'Elite Japanese Paratrooper Unit Joins Talisman Saber Drills for the First Time,' *Stars and Stripes*, 18 July 2017: <https://www.stripes.com/news/elite-japanese-paratrooper-unit-joins-talisman-saber-drills-for-the-first-time-1.478500#.WYBA9q3APdc> (accessed 1 August 2017).

71 Patalano, 'Commitment by Presence'.

defence diplomacy and exchange, involving both the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force [JMSDF] and the Coast Guard, while it was harder for the Ground Forces to be as active internationally.

Most recently, in May 2017, Japan sent the DDH [helicopter destroyer] *Izumo* to the South China Sea for three months. This was for defence engagement, but the mere presence of the *Izumo*, the largest of the JMSDF DDH vessels weighing in at 19,500 tons, in itself sent a message of military might.<sup>72</sup> The *Izumo* first sailed to Singapore together with the DD *Sazanami* to participate in the Singapore Navy's International Maritime Review 2017, commemorating its 50th anniversary, and to hold joint exercises. The JMOD/MSDF website stated that the purpose of the mission was 'to participate in the International Maritime Review 2017 and to advance mutual understanding and friendship with other participating countries, while nurturing the international awareness of JMSDF officers'.<sup>73</sup> The *Izumo* then visited Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, and was also dispatched to the Indian Ocean to participate in exercises in Malabar jointly with India and the United States. The JMOD stated that the purpose of the JMSDF's participation in the Malabar exercises was 'the enhancement of JMSDF tactical capabilities and the strengthening of cooperation with participating navies'.<sup>74</sup> Although no further explanation was put forward by the JMOD, such exercises naturally carry many messages, both for the general public and for (potential) adversaries: a show of solidarity and assurance, and an expression of the will to cooperate in heightening capabilities.

Also worth noting is the major US-Japan joint naval and aerial exercise in the Sea of Japan in June 2017, in which both the JMSDF and the JASDF [Japan Air Self Defence Force] took part. Japan participated with the DDH *Huyuga*, the DDG [guided missile destroyer] *Ashigara*, and F-15s, while the US deployed the aircraft carriers *Carl Vinson* and *Ronald Reagan*, as well as FA-18s. According to the JMOD, this was the first joint exercise involving two US warships. The stated purposes were 'to improve JASDF and JMSDF's tactical capabilities and to enhance collaboration with the US Navy'.<sup>75</sup> The *Carl Vinson* had earlier conducted joint exercises with the Republic of Korea Navy near the Korean Peninsula, and was already close by. This exercise was reported widely by the press for its deterrent effect vis-à-vis North Korea.<sup>76</sup>

72 *Izumo* 'cut through' the so-called 9 Dash line, and this was not mentioned anywhere by the government, as this line does not exist in the eyes of the Japanese government.

73 Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, 'Press Release', 26 April 2017: <http://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/formal/info/news/201704/20170426-01.pdf>

74 Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, 'Press Release', 15 June 2017: <http://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/formal/info/news/201706/20170615-01.pdf>

75 Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, 'Press Release', 1 June 2017: <http://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/formal/info/news/201706/20170601-01.pdf>

76 'Jietai, Beikubo ni-seki to kyodo kunren: Kita Chosen ni Nichi-Bei no renkei shimesu' (Joint Exercises between JSDF and Two US Aircraft Carriers), *Asahi shimbun*, 1 June 2016.

Ground capabilities also have a part in the deeds-oriented dimension of strategic communication. Here the messaging is more conventional, in that deterrent effect is achieved (or communicated) via presence, i.e. strategic placement of capabilities in certain geographical locations. For example, the JGSDF Western Army conducts annual exercises (*bomentai jitsudo ensbu*), and these have involved the temporary deployment, for training purposes, of the surface-to-ship-missile [SSM] units in Okinawa prefecture, including Miyako, Amami Oshima, and other southwestern islands.<sup>77</sup> It was also decided, under the adoption of the last National Defence Program Guidelines (for FY 2014),<sup>78</sup> that SSM units will be stationed on the southwestern islands, including Amami Oshima, Miyako, and potentially Ishigakijima.<sup>79</sup> Japan's interest in defending these islands can be explained by their obvious strategic location, where Chinese vessels often move between the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, but more importantly, Japan hopes through its presence to deter any escalatory measures.

Furthermore, a major development in terms of ground capability for Japan was the creation of a 3,000-strong amphibious force in the Western Army Infantry Regiment. The US and Japan conduct joint training in amphibious capabilities, for example, during the RIMPAC 2014 exercise, in which the JGSDF Western Army Infantry Regiment first participated, and the Iron Fist exercises in California. The Iron Fist training in 2017 focused on the use of this capability, with an emphasis on training in the use of the Assault Amphibious Vehicles [AAV] 7.<sup>80</sup>

Another example of 'presence' with more global implications is Japan's counter-piracy operation in Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, to which Japan not only sends MSDF vessels, but also deploys two P-3Cs to its base in Djibouti. Japan also participates in CTF151 [Combined Task Force 151], which provides for zone defence. The fact that Japan now has an overseas base in Djibouti adds another dimension to its maritime counter-piracy operations. This too is a show of presence, which also provides operational experience with the US and coalition naval forces in this strategic location.

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77 'Heisei niju-nana nendo Jieitai togo ensbu kakuchi de daikibo ni Riku-Kai-Ku kyodo kunren' [Fiscal 2015 Self-Defense Forces Joint Exercises: Large-Scale Joint Drills by Ground, Maritime, and Air Forces Around the Country], *Bouei News*. Bouei News, 15 November 2015, [http://www.boueinews.com/news/2015/20151115\\_1.html](http://www.boueinews.com/news/2015/20151115_1.html)

78 'National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond', p.20: <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/20131217.pdf> (accessed on 22 July 2017)

79 See also Gady, Franz-Stefan, 'Deterring China: Japan to Develop New Anti-Ship Missile for Defense of Senkakus': <http://thediplomat.com/2016/08/deterring-china-japan-to-develop-new-anti-ship-missile-for-defense-of-senkakus/>

80 Gady, Franz-Stefan, 'US, Japan Practice Defending Ryukyu Islands', 10 February 2017: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/us-japan-practice-defending-ryukyu-islands/> (accessed 16 July 2017).



In sum, Japan's strategic communication comprises not only verbal messages, but also communication via deeds. Many of these activities involve territorial defence and have not acquired an extensive expeditionary dimension, but the base in Djibouti might add to the global and operational dimension of Japan's StratCom.

### Gaps and Contradictions in Emerging Japanese StratComs

Japanese StratCom thus primarily takes the form of public diplomacy, with an important role being played by 'messaging via deeds'. As noted at the outset, however, the management of strategic communication is no easy task when narratives need to balance diverging factors, including the rapidly changing international power balance, the negative legacy of history, and commitment to a proactive, future-oriented policy. Evidence indicates that although Japan already engages in extensive de facto StratCom and appreciates its importance, there are some emerging gaps that could harm its efforts. Such gaps result mostly from an inadequate understanding of how certain actions or inactions impact the overall message.

One area where the current Japanese understanding of StratCom needs further development is in improving communication via actions to reduce potential for miscalculations. As noted, Japan relies quite heavily on messaging via deeds (primarily through engagement and presence). However, it is not always easy or straightforward to send 'intended' messages via actions, unless those actions are also properly *explained*. As Heuser and Simpson argue (citing Noble and Pym): 'Every exercise of power is a potential revelation of its limitations'.<sup>81</sup> For example, at the time of writing, it is not clear how the belated development of Japanese amphibious capabilities, relative to the already well-developed South Korean and Chinese amphibious capabilities, will be perceived globally, although Japan's allies are largely supportive, considering that this addition is both rational and necessary over the medium to long term. Heuser and Simpson also note the possibility that even deliberately benign 'engagement' could be destabilising in the short term, as it might provoke the targeted adversary, should the exercises be perceived as threatening.<sup>82</sup> The exercises could even be used as justification for a tougher response, which the adversary may have planned already, without the exercises or any other unilateral show of force. This concern might be applicable to at least some of the multinational exercises now frequently conducted in the Asia-Pacific region, as no visible confidence building or de-escalatory measures have been instituted by the potential adversaries.

<sup>81</sup> Heuser and Simpson, citing Trevor Noble and Bridget Py, 'Collegial Authority and the Receding Locus of Power,' *British Journal of Sociology* 21, No 4 (December 1970), 439.

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

Japanese officials concede that the key goal for Japan's strategic communication is still attracting support for treating China and North Korea as threats to regional security. Although many nations are engaged in territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea and elsewhere, they nevertheless rely on Chinese help so ASEAN as a whole must remain lukewarm regarding Japan's position. Mixed messages thus seem inevitable, possibly frustrating Japanese attempts to show engagement and unity.

There are also issues concerning the so-called say-do gap. A significant example is the credibility of Abe's key strategy of 'proactive contribution to peace'. As Hornung has argued, while Abe's narrative of proactive contribution to peace has formed a part of national discourse, '...there has been little examination of whether his actions translate into contributions to peace that differ substantially from those of his predecessors, who relied primarily on various forms of financial assistance'.<sup>83</sup>

As is well known, Japan has, since the end of the Cold War, gradually expanded the non-financial aspects of its international contribution to peace. Some examples are Japan's participation in UN peacekeeping operations since 1992, refuelling missions in the Indian Ocean, the reconstruction mission in Iraq, and counter-piracy operations since 2009. Defence cooperation, as well as JSDF disaster relief activities, have been a focus for quite some time. But, as Hornung points out, these activities were limited in scope, and exceptions, rather than the rule. Important though these were, financial and in-kind contributions have comprised the most central and notable segment of Japanese 'contributions to peace'.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, calls for Japan to play a more pro-active role in supporting the liberal order often seem devoid of any concrete proposals about what further actions should be undertaken. Under the current Abe administration, various limitations remain in Japan's substantive contribution to international peace beyond financial dimensions.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the above-noted additions to JSDF authority made in the 2015 defence-related legislation, namely the provision of logistical support for coalition forces and very limited protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping contexts, are yet to be implemented.

Given the political and legal climate in Japan, which is shaped by a risk-averse and casualty-shy public, it is very difficult for the Abe administration, and the majority of Japanese politicians across the spectrum, to comprehend the centrality of operational-level cooperation and common experiences in fighting global instability. This is especially important for Japan's key Western partners on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. For

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83 Jeffrey W. Hornung, 'Gauging Japan's Proactive Contributions to Peace: The Rhetoric Has Been Strong, but Has It Been Matched by Action?' *The Diplomat*, 27 October 2015.

84 Ibid.

85 The National Security Strategy of 2013 prescribes actions to 'create a stable and predictable international environment, and prevent the emergence of threats'.

example, during the last decade and a half Japan has abstained altogether from sending forces to the stabilisation mission in Afghanistan.

Japan's framework of international peace cooperation still sets extremely limited parameters for itself, as the 2015 reform of defence-related laws failed to change the conditions for JSDF deployment in peacekeeping missions, continuing to limit them to traditional peacekeeping situations. The existing framework for Japan's contribution to international peace and security seems to have served as a blindfold, rather than an educational opportunity for understanding the realities of global conflicts, for both Japanese practitioners and the general public. The legal constraints on Japan against deploying its armed forces in unstable areas under the relevant interpretation of its Constitution and related laws, and the accompanying lack of experience of its personnel with contemporary stability missions, significantly limit broader Japanese understanding and sensitivity in this area.<sup>86</sup> Japan's recent withdrawal from the South Sudan peacekeeping mission, which left the country with no peacekeeping troops for the first time in 25 years, was a sorry commentary on this situation. Prime Minister Abe says that Japan wants to come closer to NATO, but this is easier said than done, given the government's lack of parity in experience and understanding of international conflicts. Japan needs to fully understand and manage the messages, intended or unintended, that are sent by its actions or inactions in this now-critical area.

Last but not least is the gap that emerges from the Japanese government's sometimes misplaced attempts to control negative narratives—those deemed by the government as perpetuating a 'wrong' view of Japan. Such efforts, when overplayed, have served to advertise globally the range of domestic opinions currently existing within Japan, for example, on historical issues, allowing negative historical events to colour the image of Japan. Attempts to intervene directly in academic or journalistic publications, where freedom of views and thought must be ensured, are a case in point—the aforementioned incident involving the US history textbook, for example. Generally speaking, rather than directly intervening in historical debates, efforts should be directed towards facilitating a neutral and professional academic environment where disputes over historical facts where they exist are resolved or informed by independent experts. The Japanese government may be well-advised to exclude certain activities for 'correcting' historical interpretations from the range of 'public diplomacy' so that the government does not engage in self-conscious manoeuvring on the issue.

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86 For research in this area, see Chiyuki Aoi, 'Conditions for Effective Intelligence and Information-Sharing: Insights from Dutch–Japanese Cooperation in Iraq, 2003–2005', in Irina Goldenberg, Joseph Soeters, and Weylo H. Dean (eds.), *Information Sharing in Military Operations* (New York: Springer, 2017).

## Conclusion

Although Japan does not have an official concept of strategic communication, the existing agencies of government essentially perform StratCom functions, particularly through public diplomacy. The rise of China has triggered an activation of Japanese StratCom practices with a focus on linking the international system narrative to identity and issue narratives. Japan has also forged a stronger whole-of-government response to rising communication challenges. Not surprisingly, given the strategic and political environment in which it finds itself, Japan is an avid practitioner of communication via deeds—i.e. ‘deterrence through engagement’.

Japan faces a number of ongoing issues with regard to its strategic communication. The primary issue today is how to make its messages more coherent, an effort made all the more complex by the need to combine and balance all of the current administration’s policy of proactive contributions to peace, the legacy of historical events, and shifting narratives at the level of the international system. Although new government institutions have evolved, particularly the creation of the National Security Council and its secretariat, and the government has recently renewed its focus on making the ‘transmission of messages’ more strategic, Japanese strategic communication and its overall architecture require further consideration. Rather than merely taking stock of existing tactical or operational communication tools and evaluating their impact, what is called for is a more fundamental understanding of the dynamics of such communication as strategy. As stated at the outset, strategic communication is essentially political, and as a political tool, it rests upon the identification of clear political goals. Without recognising the primacy of policy in strategic communication, short-sighted efforts and misplaced efforts to control narratives will not be so conducive to strategic effects.

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