Japan’s military involvement in out-of-area security missions began more than 20 years ago. Most prominent in this respect are a series of UN PKOs, but also the mine-sweeping missions after the First Gulf War, the refueling mission in the Indian Ocean in support of the Operation Enduring Freedom, and the humanitarian and reconstruction mission in Southern Iraq. What all these missions have in common is that their domestic justification was that they were either humanitarian or in support of Japan’s alliance partner, the United States.

In 2009, the Japanese government decided to deploy the JMSDF and the JCG half way around the world to fight the then increasing problem of maritime piracy off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden. For the first time, the ultimate justification for this mission is Japan’s national security.

While Japan’s dependence on maritime trade in general and energy supplies from the Middle East in particular make it vulnerable to any disruption of its SLCs, the fact that China, Russia, South Korea and India have also deployed their forces, its competitive interest in Africa and its energy reserves, and the fact that a long-term maritime mission, the running of the first out-of-area base in Djibouti, the close cooperation with over 30 other military forces in a complex security environment, and Japan’s experience in setting up the ReCAAP provides valuable lessons for Japan’s own defense capability and global strategy, and a “proof of concept” that ‘Japan is back’ in global security affairs.

This presentation will introduce the decision for this mission and its development over the last five years, the types of cooperation especially with European and NATO forces, and will ask whether this also provides Prime Minister Abe with more arguments for his re-interpretation of the Japanese Constitution.

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