



AMPHIBIOUS SEAPLANE SALE COULD TRIGGER CLOSER JAPAN-INDIA DEFENCE RELATIONS

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US-2 is an amphibious short take-off and landing (STOL) aircraft manufactured by Japan-based ShinMaywa Industries. Designed for air-sea rescue missions, the US-2 is operated by the 31st Fleet Air Wing of the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF)ⁱ.

Photo Source: http://www.shinmaywa.co.jp/english/products/us2_index.html

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to India from January 25- 27, 2014 as chief guest at India's Republic Day parade has led to further strengthening of Japan-India defence relations. The two prime ministers discussed the planned sale of ShinMaywa's US-2i (Utility Seaplane- Mark 2 international) amphibious aircraft to the Indian Navy, and "expressed satisfaction" at the outcome of the first meeting of the 'Joint Working Group (JWG) on the US-2 amphibian aircraft in December 2013 in Delhiⁱⁱ.' The joint statement

issued at the end of the two Prime Ministers meeting stated that the next meeting of the JWG will be held in Japan in March 2014.

India and Japan have been discussing the US-2 sale since 2011 in response to an Indian Navy request for information for an amphibian aircraft issued in late 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ In addition to Japan's ShinMaywa, US-2, the other companies to respond were Canada's Bombardier for its CL-415 amphibian, Russia's Beriev for its Be-200 twin jet amphibian, and the German Dornier Seastar CD2. The ShinMaywa US-2 was the only one of the four contenders which could meet the Indian Navy's requirement for the aircraft to be able to operate in sea state 5^{iv} (in sea state 5 the wave height is up to 2 m). The US-2 can operate in wave heights of up to 3 m (refer diagram below).



Diagram source : ShinMaywa website http://www.shinmaywa.co.jp/english/products/us2_index.html

The US-2 is a one of its kind unique amphibious aircraft which will provide the Indian Navy the capability to patrol the island territories like the Andaman & Nicobar islands which are at a distance of almost 1300 km from Chennai airfield in south India. Japan's offer for the sale of the US-2 is a major departure from its self imposed policy since 1967 of not doing any sale of military equipment in deference to its anti war stance after the Second World War. In 2011, the Japanese cabinet issued a waiver to allow the US-2 to be supplied to India. The US-2 can be used for both military and civil purposes like search and rescue, and anti smuggling activities. However, to overcome Japan's self imposed export regulations on sale of military hardware, the aircraft IFF (Identification of friend or Foe)

system is likely to be removed.^v This will not be much of an issue for India because India can always install an indigenous IFF on its own, if required.

The Indian Navy plans to place an order for 15 aircraft at a cost of about \$ 110 million each with the total deal being worth \$ 1.65 billion^{vi}. The aircraft has excellent STOL (Short Take-of and landing) capabilities and can land in water in a distance of just 310 m and takeoff in just 280 m. With a maximum takeoff weight of 47.7 tonnes, the US-2 can carry a payload of 18 tonnes and is powered by four powerful Rolls-Royce AE2100J turboprop engines – these are the same aero engines used by the C-130J tactical transport already operated by the Indian Air Force. This is a proven and reliable power plant which was the first to use dual FADECs (Full Authority Digital Engine Control) to control both engine and propeller^{vii}.

The US-2 has an operational range of over 4500 km and cruising speed of 480 kmph, maximum speed is 560 kmph, and a maximum cruising altitude of 6000 m.^{viii} The US-2 offers multiple options to planners, it can carry 38 passengers and in troop transport role it can be configured to carry 30 fully armed soldiers.

The Japanese Prime Ministers presence at India's Republic Day celebrations and the growing bilateral strategic partnership augurs well for the region as a counterweight to the increasing assertiveness of China. The Chinese were probably not happy to hear of this proposed sale and the state media criticised Japan for trying to make the first export deal of military hardware since its own 1967 ban on weapons export.^{ix} To this, the Japanese Defence Minister, Itsunori Onodera, reacted by saying that "China is perhaps one of the largest weapon exporters in the world. While China is selling many weapons to the world, Japan is just dealing with flying boats. There's something strange [about this criticism] and the rest of the world should share it too^x."

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India must not be concerned about China's reactions to its close ties with Japan or other regional countries in pursuance of its national interests. China does not worry about India's concerns to their supplying nuclear technology to Pakistan. Therefore, there is no need for India to fear China's reaction to India cultivating close ties with any country. China may like to see a unipolar Asia with China as the sole Asian power but this may not be acceptable to regional countries like Japan, India and others. India and Japan must counter the Chinese challenge and stymie the "Chinese dream" to dominate the **region**.

Endnotes:

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)

ⁱ ShinMaywa US-2 STOL Search and Rescue Amphibian, Japan. <http://www.naval-technology.com/projects/shinmaywa-us-2-stol-search-and-rescue-amphibian>

ⁱⁱ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Joint Statement on the occasion of Official Visit of the Prime Minister of Japan to India (January 25-27, 2014), dated January 25, 2014, <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/22772>, accessed on February 04, 2014

ⁱⁱⁱ "Shinmaywa US-2 seaplane could be showpiece of defence partnership" by Ajai Shukla, New Delhi, Business-Standard dated January 25, 2014, http://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/shinmaywa-us-2-seaplane-could-be-showpiece-of-defence-partnership-114012401116_1.html accessed on February 04, 2014.

^{iv} "Japan, India agree to push for US-2 amphibian deal" by Kosuke Takahashi, Tokyo - IHS Jane's Navy International dated January 06, 2014, <http://www.janes.com/article/32120/japan-india-agree-to-push-for-us-2-amphibian-deal> accessed on February 04, 2014.

^v n2 ibid.

^{vi} Reuters report <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/04/us-japan-military-exports-idUSBRE9A30YA20131104> accessed on February 07, 2014.

^{vii} Rolls-Royce website http://www.rolls-royce.com/defence/products/transporters/ae_2100.jsp, accessed on February 07, 2014.

^{viii} Performance data on the US-2 plane is from ShinMaywa website http://www.shinmaywa.co.jp/english/products/us2_index.html accessed on February 07, 2014.

^{ix} "Japan, India agree to push for US-2 amphibian deal" by Kosuke Takahashi, Tokyo - IHS Jane's Navy International dated January 06, 2014 <http://www.janes.com/article/32120/japan-india-agree-to-push-for-us-2-amphibian-deal>, accessed on February 07, 2014.

^x Ibid. n7.