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ANALYSIS

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# THE QUIET ACHIEVER: AUSTRALIA-JAPAN SECURITY RELATIONS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*In the last decade, Australia has quietly and quickly become a close security partner to Japan, second only to the United States. For Australia, no security relationship outside our foundational one with the United States has deepened more in this same period.*

*Changes of government often provide the best test of the strength of a bilateral relationship and its future prospects. The political changes in Australia and Japan over the last three years have provided a very good test of this burgeoning security relationship, a test it has passed easily despite initial worries.*

*The quiet achievements look set to continue into the foreseeable future due to four inter-linked factors:*

- *Australia and Japan now have multiple opportunities for closer operational cooperation for a very diverse range of contingencies*
- *the mutual strategic concerns that have motivated these quiet achievements are intensifying not moderating*
- *US defence policy is increasingly reliant and demanding of support from its regional allies*
- *both Australia and Japan are committed to increasing their force projection capabilities in similar manners.*

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Australia provided the necessary armed support for Japan's iconoclastic deployment to Iraq in 2003, so different in nature and reaction to Japan's diplomatically disastrous approach to the first Gulf War.<sup>1</sup> Four years later, Prime Ministers Howard and Abe signed in Tokyo a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation that became the model for Japan's 2009 Joint Declaration with India, and Australia's similar, if weaker, declarations with South Korea and India. There is now even talk (louder in Tokyo than Seoul) of Japan and South Korea agreeing to a similar if toned-down declaration in the future.

This year, under the auspices of the Joint Declaration's renewing action plans, Australia and Japan signed their first treaty-level defence agreement, the Acquisitions and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), in May 2010. This is patterned on the US-Japan ACSA and is aimed at increased military-logistical interoperability. Even before the ink has dried on this historically symbolic treaty for Japan, both sides are now actively negotiating an information-sharing agreement that would open the door to much closer cooperation, particularly in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations (ISR). While ACSA may be more important symbolically than operationally, a wide-ranging information-sharing agreement would be the opposite. In both cases, Japan and Australia's close cooperation as members of the four-nation 'Core Group' in response to the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami exemplified the needs for such closer, more institutionalised security relations, particularly in the areas being addressed.<sup>2</sup>

New bilateral naval exercises between the two countries; Japan's greater integration into the

annual RIMPAC exercises (the largest multinational naval exercises in the world); Japan's and Australia's keen active support for the Proliferation Security Initiative; the possibility that Japan could join the bilateral Talisman Saber bilateral exercises between the United States and Australia; and mooted joint exercises between the two armies all provide an important operational underpinning to this expanding relationship. This bilateral defence relationship and its embedding within the regional US alliance system was further strengthened when Australia and Japan both sent observers to the latest US-South Korea exercises in the Yellow Sea that took place in the wake of North Korea's shelling of its southern neighbour.

**Turning the tables**

Taking a step back from the present and looking at this last decade in an historical light shows just how significant an achievement this has been for the bilateral relationship and for Australia's larger Asian engagement project. More than any other country in Asia, Japan has represented the tensions between Australians' deep economic interests in and security anxieties emanating from Asia, tensions today that are the most noticeable in our relations with the People's Republic of China.

Well before Japan became the first and only country ever to directly attack Australia back in 1942, fears of Japan shaped defence policy in Australia and Australian views of 'our near North.'<sup>3</sup> After the war, the ANZUS alliance was an Australian initiative driven by our fears of Japan and was the quid pro quo for Australian support for the US-Japan alliance

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incorporated in the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty.<sup>4</sup>

After this peace was reached, the Australia-Japan commercial and diplomatic relationship took off with the signing of the 1957 bilateral commerce agreement, Japan's economic boom and the two countries' very similar interests in forging an Asia-Pacific diplomatic and economic community. A further economic agreement followed in 1976 (The Nara Treaty) and later both countries worked closely to establish APEC. The defence relationship, though, did not follow suit, despite both countries being on the same side of the Cold War and serving as the so-called northern and southern anchors of the US alliance system in East Asia.

Despite this extreme strategic closeness, the first post-war bilateral visit by the head of the Japan Defense Agency only took place after the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>5</sup> Japan was greatly limited by its 'Peace Constitution' and overwhelming focus on its alliance relationship with the United States. Australia did not face such constraints, as is evident in the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). Yet Australia's Asian engagement on the security and defence side stayed largely focused on the archipelagic states of Southeast Asia that straddle Australia's most important sea lines of communication.

Particularly in the last five years, the tables have turned. The defence relationship has been the most active and dynamic element while the commercial regional diplomatic ones have moderated. It is now arguably the least politically contentious element bilaterally, one reason its achievements have been so quiet.

During Howard's visit to Japan (his seventh such visit as Prime Minister) in 2007, Japan and Australia also agreed to start free-trade negotiations, Japan's first such negotiations with another OECD country. Yet, while the Joint Declaration has delivered ACSA and moved on to information sharing (something states are normally very hesitant to share), free-trade talks have made little progress and excite little enthusiasm in either business community. After decades of close and successful cooperation on regional architecture, both the Rudd and Hatoyama governments released competing visions of regional architecture, visions that had clearly not been aided by effective prior consultation with the other capital.<sup>6</sup>

**Focus on Japan**

While the quiet achievements of Australia-Japan security relations are particularly noteworthy for Australia in an historical context, it is changes within Japan in the last two decades that have allowed them to be realised. Remarkable shifts have occurred in Tokyo's foreign and security policy in the post-Cold War, post-9/11, environment, which arguably contribute towards a 'normalisation' of Japan's international status. Chief among these structural shifts have been the Peace-Keeping Operations Law (1992), which allows Japan to deploy military force overseas (in circumscribed conditions); The Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (2001) consolidating this principle, with some restrictions removed; the wartime preparedness legislation (2003); and most significantly, the creation of a Ministry of Defense (2007). These all amount to a 'salami-slicing' of the restrictions imposed on Japan's

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international participation by its controversial 'Peace Constitution' (especially Article IX, which prohibits the use of force overseas).

Japan is one of the three major strategic players in the Asia-Pacific region, alongside China and the United States. It has one of the largest military budgets in the world, with a high degree of technical capability and professional competence (its military budget for 2009 was US\$52.6bn/JPY 4.7tr).<sup>7</sup> The Japan Self-Defense Forces (JDSF) are gradually increasing their range, through mid-air refuelling capabilities, for example, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JDSF) However, the JDSF still lack all the assets needed to project military force overseas effectively, such as amphibious landing craft and aircraft carriers. Nevertheless, this new legislation means that JSDF is increasingly becoming viewed as a viable instrument of Japanese foreign policy.

These changes in Japanese foreign policy posture and improved allied relations speak to a more proactive role for Japan in the region and globally. The abandonment of passive strategies for Japan – the 'Yoshida doctrine' of economic-strategic separation; the 'reactive state' thesis of Professor Kent Calder; or the 'reluctant realism' of Michael Green, is now evident.<sup>8</sup> Now Japan could be better described as an 'active' or 'adaptive' state: an extension of what Michael Green dubbed 'reluctant Realism' on the part of Tokyo.<sup>9</sup>

The recently released report on Japan's future security strategy entitled *Japan's Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era: Toward a Peace-Creating Nation* by a panel of experts appointed by Prime Minister Hatoyama underpins how far this transition

has gone and how much further it has to go.<sup>10</sup> This report calls for an end to Japan's passive 'Basic Defense Force Concept' based on limited, static deterrence that has been Japanese doctrine since the early 1970s. It calls on Japan to revisit its long-standing ban on arms exports, its severe limitations on the Self Defense Forces' ability to support the United States in areas surrounding Japan including ballistic missile defense, and proposes that Japan shifts from a main islands focused static deterrence to dynamic deterrence with particular care for Japan's outlying islands such as Miyakojima and the Senkakus.

The tone and recommendations of this report reflect what might be dubbed an emerging 'grand strategy' for Tokyo. This strategy is a robust, but subtle and non-provocative, attempt on the part of Japan to shape the regional environment in a direction conducive to its core national interests. This aims to mitigate the negative effects of the shifting power balance in the region, evident in comparative American decline, and the rise of the People's Republic of China.

Tokyo has adopted a three-tiered approach to allied security cooperation and this new more active approach to security.<sup>11</sup> First remains the bilateral military alliance treaty with the United States, that still forms the 'bedrock' of Japanese defence policy. Indeed, many of the aforementioned developments in Japanese foreign policy have been driven by American appeals. Like successive Australian governments, Japanese ones have chosen to strengthen Japan's security presence primarily through its alliance relationship with the United States, not outside it.

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Second is the building of a network of strategic partnerships with key regional players such as Australia, India, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines. These expand Japan's allied portfolio and provide a limited 'hedge' against over-dependence on the US in all diplomatic questions while also strengthening relations with key regional allies and partners of the United States – a so-called 'networking of the "spokes"'. These relationships have grown in importance and have garnered increasing public awareness in Japan.

Indeed, the so-called 'strategic partnership' has established itself as a mechanism of choice for close diplomatic/security cooperation, without the need for a formal military defence alliance.<sup>12</sup> Given the term's provenance from the business world, strong elements of economic cooperation are usually present in these relationships, but they are distinguished from Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), by their additional security focus. Because of their low-cost, low-commitment status, combined with versatility and effectiveness, a dedicated study by Vidya Nadkarni demonstrates how such relationships are now the instruments of choice for seeking 'allies' among the states of the Asia-Pacific.<sup>13</sup>

Third is Japan's engagement with regional security institutions, formal and informal, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the global Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), the Shangri-la Dialogue and the recently formed ASEAN Defence Ministers +8 (ADMM+8) process.

### Partnership drivers

Let us now examine some of the drivers behind this growing partnership, and some of its modalities.

#### *Rising China*

The rise of China has served as something of a catalyst in Australia-Japan relations. While both countries have benefitted from China's remarkable rise economically, they hold reservations over some aspects of Chinese behaviour on the international stage, as well as its continued military build-up. Relatively speaking Australia conforms to Japan's characterisation of its relationship with China as '*Seirei keinetsu*' – cold politics, hot economics. That is, both countries take a dim view of the perceived political interference with the domestic rule of law, human rights, arbitrary application of international law/norms, use of economic levers to apply diplomatic pressure, and provision of full diplomatic cover to North Korea. Examples abound, such as the arrest of Australian and Japanese businessmen on charges of espionage by the PRC government, the continued imprisonment of a Nobel laureate in China, the handling of the recent *Senkaku/Diaoyutai* dispute and repeated probings emanating out of China of the two governments' cyber networks.

These factors have made Japan more disposed to cooperation with its chief ally the United States, and more amenable to stronger security ties with other countries in the region, and Australia in particular. Likewise, it has made countries with similar strategic concerns like Australia, India and South Korea more willing to work more closely with Japan, even at the risk of Beijing's ire. As a result of Beijing's

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blustering diplomatic stance on the issues above and its continued invocation of historical grievances to periodically fuel anti-Japanese nationalism, political and popular attitudes have hardened in Japan, aligning public opinion more closely with government assessments. While it is not accurate to speak of growing 'nationalism' in Japan, in the sense of 'militarism'/'re-militarisation', a more assertive stance has been adopted and perceptions of China are increasingly negative. Lowy Institute poll results from 2005 to 2010 suggest a similar if more modest trend in Australian public opinion as well.

***Declining USA/Japan***

Relations with the other major power in the region, the United States, are elemental to the context and operation of the Australia-Japan strategic partnership. The relative decline of Japan and the United States, particularly in the economic sphere, has provided the impetus for an intensification of their bilateral security cooperation. As noted above, Japan has sought to mitigate the relative decline of its power position by seeking new partners throughout the region, often among other existing US allies. Moreover, Washington has begun to look favorably upon this enterprise as it results in increased co-ordination between the 'spokes' of its own Asia-Pacific alliance network, thus reinforcing it.

The Australia-Japan strategic partnership is a case in point. In general terms, these three countries enjoy a remarkable confluence of interests and values. These include freedom of navigation, regional stability, and combating terrorism and other forms of transnational crime. They are all 'like-minded' countries sharing values of liberal democracy, free trade,

and respect for human rights. In the realm of hard security co-ordination, the two strategic partners and US allies are both prime customers and operators of American defence technology, including combat aircraft (Australia: F-18, Japan: F-15, both with orders for the JSF), and the Aegis TMD (theater missile defence) systems. This increased bilateralism is presided over by the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) with its Security and Defence Cooperation Forum (SDCF). Whatever is said officially about the TSD between the two countries and their joint alliance partner, the US, it is evident that each of these countries views the rise of China as a source of concern.

**Partnering activities**

The Australia-Japan strategic partnership received strong impetus from the efforts of its executive leadership, especially during the Howard-Koizumi period. Frequent meetings resulted in the 2007 Joint Security Declaration, the first of its kind for Japan, and this was quickly followed by an Action Plan for Implementation in 2008, outlining a range of 'functional areas' for cooperation. The Action Plan provides for the regularisation of annual meetings between Australian and Japanese Foreign and Defence Ministers (known as '2+2'). The most recent meeting of May 2010 produced the ACSA, and prior Memoranda of Understanding on Defence Cooperation and Counter-Terrorism supplement this, providing ample opportunity for military-to-military contacts, including the provision for joint military exercises. The next step will be enhanced information sharing.

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To date, the countries have continued to participate in multilateral military exercises such as KAKADU (2008), and the annual RIMPIC manoeuvres, as well as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). These activities continue to reinforce the benefits gained from joint deployment in Iraq in 2006, and their experience in East Timor (INTERFET) in 1999. Joint GDSF and ADF manoeuvres on Australian soil have yet to materialise however.

Both countries share a strong convergence of interest in 'non-traditional' security threats. Environmental security dangers, including natural disasters, figure highly in Australia-Japan cooperation, where both countries played major roles in the relief efforts for the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. Both are also strong responders to climate change through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and support for the Asia-Pacific Partnership (APP) on Clean Development and Climate.<sup>14</sup> Canberra and Tokyo are also committed to the goal of nuclear disarmament and jointly chair the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), which produced the report *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers*.<sup>15</sup>

**Testing times**

Changes of government often provide the best test of the strength of a bilateral relationship and its future prospects. The political changes in Australia and Japan over the last three years have provided a very good test of this

burgeoning security relationship, a test it has passed easily despite initial worries.

The 2007 change of government in Australia sparked concerns in Japan and among Japan watchers in Australia that the bilateral relationship may suffer under the Rudd government, particularly as many read only lukewarm support for the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation and the US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue on the Labor side of politics.<sup>16</sup> While clearly the Japan-Australia relationship has been buffeted by the Rudd government's decision to escalate the long-standing dispute over whaling in the southern ocean and the divergent paths on regional architecture, concerns over the security relationship have not been realised.<sup>17</sup>

Japan's first full change of government in over five decades in August 2010 posed a greater challenge for two reasons. First, the fact that it was such a momentous political change meant there was greater uncertainty inside and outside Japan over what the new social democratic Hatoyama government would do. Second, from its very beginning, the Hatoyama government expressed an interest in renegotiating the US-Japan alliance relationship and hence Japan's defence policy. Yet, while US-Japan security relations did enter their roughest period in decades under the Hatoyama government and these tensions were instrumental in Hatoyama's quick fall from grace in Japan, Australia-Japan security relations continued to strengthen, as shown by the signing of ACSA under Hatoyama. Government sources in Tokyo even suggested that the tribulations in the US-Japan alliance under Hatoyama spurred the negotiation of ACSA to allow the Hatoyama

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government to show progress on security and defence policies with another close US ally.

The political triangle of Prime Minister Howard-Prime Ministers Koizumi and Abe-President George W. Bush and their similar strategic visions was likely a necessary condition at the beginning of this decade for these quiet achievements. However, as shown by these testing times, its momentum now seems self-generating. There is clearly effective bipartisan support for the relationship in both Japan and Australia. Bureaucratically, the renewing action plans under the Joint Declaration are providing a clear direction for further cooperation and helping to maintain a strong inter-agency cohort in both Canberra and Tokyo working on and committed to the relationship. The political, policy and operational levels of the relationship now seem to be mutually supporting and all pointing in the direction of further bilateral defence cooperation and integration.

The early movements of Australia's and Japan's latest foreign ministers reflect this. Japan was the first Asian country to host a bilateral visit by Foreign Minister Rudd with Rudd pronouncing that 'Japan is Australia's closest partner in Asia'. In return, Foreign Minister Maehara made Australia his first bilateral visit during which Foreign Minister Rudd helped ease current Japanese strategic concerns by noting that 'Australia stands ready to be a long-term, secure, reliable supplier of rare earths to the Japanese economy'.<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, it seems that the partnership has notable support within the policy establishment in Japan, and attitudes among the Japanese public are very favorable to Australia. The

continuance of various Track 2 and Track 3 supporting Australia-Japan relations creates a domestic environment conducive and receptive to building closer ties. In a globalised environment where public awareness and participation in the shaping of foreign policy in democracies is on the increase, this is an important supplementary asset (known as 'inter-mestic politics').

**Outlook**

The quiet achievements look set to continue into the foreseeable future due to four inter-linked factors. First, in line with Japan's three-tiered approach, Japan and Australia now have multiple opportunities for closer operational cooperation for a very diverse range of contingencies. These range from the globally oriented PSI and anti-piracy efforts in and around the Gulf of Aden to the growing number of regional exercises, including new ones organised under the ASEAN Regional Forum. There is also great potential for the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) process to foster more three-way cooperation as symbolised by the trilateral naval exercises off Okinawa in June 2010. Finally, as set out in the Joint Declaration, Japan and Australia are committed to deepening bilateral security cooperation and exchange in line with their shared alliance and global interests.

Second, the mutual strategic concerns that have motivated these quiet achievements are intensifying, not moderating, particularly as East Asia's plentiful territorial disputes are being exacerbated by the growing military might of many of the claimants. This worrying juxtaposition has become increasingly evident

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during the gestation of this report. As shown by the growing participation of Australia and Japan in US-South Korea exercises, North Korea's nuclear-tipped belligerence is bringing the triangular relationships between Japan, the United States and South Korea, and Japan, the United States and Australia closer together. This triangular coalescence is likely to continue given the instability on the Korean peninsula, Australia's deep interests in the area and its treaty obligations as an allied power.

Third, partially as a response to its growing challenges to its regional primacy, US defence policy is increasingly reliant and demanding of support from its regional allies. This is clear in the most recent Ballistic Missile Defense Review and by the agreement by Japan, South Korea and Australia to purchase Aegis capabilities to enhance their ability to play a role in regional missile defence. The future development of 'regional ballistic missile defence architecture' and the associated research and development requirements will both provide more opportunities and require Japan, Australia, South Korea and the United States to work more closely together in a more interdependent manner.

Finally, both Australia and Japan are committed to increasing their force projection capabilities in similar manners. The muscular 2009 Defence White Paper calls for a doubling of Australia's undermanned submarine fleet from 6 to 12. Japan, despite holding to no real increases in defence spending, is planning to expand their submarine fleet from 16 to 22.

However, there are some areas for possible friction in Australian-Japanese relations outside of the security relationship that could affect it.

Governments are skilled at keeping issues separate from each other but are far from infallible. Popular perceptions cannot be ignored for their potential to do damage to the relationship. Witness how the issue of assaults on Indian students in Melbourne quickly became a serious diplomatic issue for Canberra at a time when the two capitals were negotiating the joint declaration on security cooperation.

If free-trade negotiations continue to show more tunnel than light, this could reduce overall momentum in the political relationship and the appetite for further advances in the security relationship. The fact that Howard and Abe so closely linked the trade talks with the Security Declaration simply adds to this possibility. One of the refreshing elements of Maehara's visit to Australia was that it was not dominated by the long-running and recently escalated dispute over whaling. Yet, the dispute itself is ongoing. The make-up of Australia's new minority government could aggravate it by giving the Greens a voice in power, while public opinion in Australia remains resolutely opposed to Japan's whaling practices. While at the same time Australians seldom grasp the symbolic significance of whaling for the Japanese as a diplomatic issue on which they can, and feel they must, assert themselves independently. Finally, while there is recognition of the increased importance of Australia within Japan's Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, it is not clear that this is replicated equally at the political level. Prime Minister Koizumi was the last Japanese Prime Minister to make a bilateral visit to Australia. He came in May 2002. Likewise, it remains to be seen if Prime Ministers Gillard and Kan can

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replicate the personal chemistry of the Howard-Koizumi and Howard-Abe relationships.

Even within the security relationship, some challenges to and limits of cooperation are looming. First, the information-sharing negotiations are bound to be much more difficult than those around ACSA due to the sensitivity of the issue and due to the fact that the relevant intelligence-sharing systems within the Japanese government are not fully networked or even consistent with each other. This is one of the sources of Japan's well-publicised and embarrassing intelligence leaks.<sup>19</sup> Yet, without a strong information-sharing agreement, the future of the security relationship will be limited.

Even if one can be agreed upon, Japan's own pacifist history and constitution will likely mean the relationship will never achieve the depth some hope. Japan has been attracted to the strategic partnership model since a more formal alliance relationship with Australia or others would be seen as provocative to others in the region and would run into difficulties in securing the necessary domestic support. Strategic partnerships are much more ambiguous than security treaties.

Second, if Japan and/or Australia do not follow through with their new defence plans and the resulting capabilities commitments then confidence in the partnership could be hurt as well as meaning both sides will have less with which to cooperate. There are already murmurings in Canberra that the ambitious capabilities commitments in the 2009 Defence White Paper will not be met, while Japan's crushing fiscal situation and the historic political weakness of the defence lobby cast

doubt on whether Japan will, for example, expand its submarine forces as suggested.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Japan's move to focus more intensely and directly on active defence of Japan and its surrounding areas could mean that Japan's recent focus on global aspects of security cooperation that has certainly aided the last decade of bilateral security cooperation could wane. For example, Japan is planning to reduce its minesweeping capabilities to help finance the planned increase in its submarine forces. Much of the political and bureaucratic momentum for this shift is growing concern in Japan over China and North Korea, concerns that Australia in the future may not share as intensely. Both Japan and Australia have to balance their growing economic interdependence with China and strategic concerns about China's growing might but these concerns are closer and weigh much heavier on Japan than on Australia. Cooperation in Iraq and in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is much easier than overt cooperation against a commonly identified major rival or foe.

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