

JAPAN'S NEW NATIONAL SECURITY NETWORKS

Purnendra JAIN

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Executive Summary

1. In recent years Japan has expanded its national security networks beyond its long-standing ally, the United States, to formally engage two new partners.
2. In October 2008, Japan signed a security cooperation declaration with India, which some construe as ‘anti-China’, while both Japanese and Indian leaders deny it.
3. In March 2007, Tokyo signed a security cooperation declaration with Australia raising similar concerns.
4. These are the only formal security cooperation frameworks Japan has established outside its security treaty and alliance relationship with the US, the lynchpin of Japan’s national security since the end of World War II. Both declarations concern mainly non-conventional security issues, yet they signal a landmark development in Japan’s security thinking.
5. This new development signals Tokyo’s new approach to ensuring Japan’s comprehensive security through establishing two new military-capable networks in addition to that of the US as its long-standing security provider.
6. Beijing undoubtedly looks with suspicion at Japan’s moves to establish new security networks, which Beijing regards as a cloak for Japan to hide behind in its ‘failed’ attempt to institute a quadrilateral security arrangement comprising the US, Japan, India and Australia.
7. It seems highly improbable that either Australia or India will seek to contain China through their security frameworks with Japan, as both nations have reasons, though vastly different, to work with China rather than against it.
8. The new development, however, clearly indicates that Tokyo does not intend to be a bystander watching from the sidelines as a new strategic environment

and consequent security threats unfold. Tokyo is now a pro-active strategic player in the region and the two declarations are both pragmatic and symbolic means to that end.

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Tokyo Expands its Security Networks

- 1.1 During the October 2008 visit to Japan by India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Japan and India signed a bilateral security cooperation declaration. This was only the second of such declaration for Japan outside its security relationship with the United States, the lynchpin of Japan's post-war security arrangements.¹ The first declaration was signed with Australia in March 2007.
- 1.2 That Japan signed the two declarations – indeed, it actively pursued both – within a timeframe of less than two years signals clearly Japan's newly proactive stance towards national security. Japan has made these strategic moves while the rise of two new Asian giants, China and India, is reorienting the Asia Pacific strategic landscape with different power relationships and national capacities. Japan could and did remain somewhat disengaged from this landscape for the past half century through its security treaty with the US, which draws Japan under the umbrella of US nuclear protection.
- 1.3 Signing the security cooperation declaration with Australia was by no means an extraordinary development. Both nations have been US allies since the end of World War II and the three nations have in place a formal trilateral security dialogue process, with the first foreign ministerial meeting held in early 2006. Moreover, during the past few years Japan and Australia have conducted a range of security cooperation activities including intelligence collaboration,

* Purnendra Jain is Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Adelaide's Centre for Asian Studies. He is also a research associate of the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore. He would like to thank Prof John Wong for his helpful comments.

¹ For text of the agreement with India, see http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/pmv0810/joint_d.html ; for text of agreement with Australia, see <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/australia/joint0703.html>

maritime cooperation, joint exercises, counter-terrorism activities and peacekeeping in Cambodia, East Timor and more recently participation in the Iraq war. The security cooperation declaration basically formalises the cooperative activities that the two nations have been carrying out for some time.²

- 1.4 A security cooperation declaration with India, on the other hand, surprised many. Japan and India had limited mutual engagement even in trade and commerce during the Cold War period, when politics kept these nations on opposite sides of the strategic divide. While Japan was allied with the US, India pursued strategic autonomy. Post Cold War, when removal of the old divides cleared the way for closer, more diverse bilateral relations, New Delhi drew Tokyo's condemnation after India's nuclear testing in May 1998. Only in the past few years has Japan-India contact at defence and security level begun to emerge, that too on a low-key basis.
- 1.5 Although India sees strategic advantage in forging closer ties with Japan, it will not play the China card explicitly in its relations with Japan. Moreover, if India feels frustrated over the slow pace of Japan's development of commercial ties with India,³ New Delhi may become lukewarm in political and security areas with Japan.
- 1.6 Australia under Rudd will pursue the trilateral security dialogue but may underplay the bilateral declaration. Australia is now heavily dependent on China commercially and is not directly affected by China's rise strategically and militarily, as are Japan and India.

² See Desmond Ball, 'Whither the Japan-Australia Security Relationship?', September 2006, <http://nautilus.rmit.edu.au/forum-reports/0632a-ball.html>

³ See Purnendra Jain, 'The China Factor in Japan's Rising Interest in India', EAI Background Brief No. 326, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, 29 March 2007.

Background to Security Cooperation Declarations

- 2.1 For some time Japan has been pushing the idea of a quadrilateral security arrangement involving the US, Australia, India and Japan. Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo favoured the move. Present prime minister and former foreign minister Aso Taro favours an expanded form, with the group establishing an 'arc of freedom and prosperity'.⁴
- 2.2 Realisation of the quadrilateral framework seemed increasingly difficult for Japan in the face of China's opposition and subsequent lack of interest among other partners. Japan has therefore pursued bilateral security frameworks with 'like-minded' nations in the Asia Pacific. Both Australia and India were willing to sign such a declaration.
- 2.3 With the conservative government of John Howard in office in Canberra, it was easier for Japan to push the security cooperation agenda. Current Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, in opposition when the declaration was signed, opposed the move then and was not keen to pursue its agendas. Subsequently though in a two-plus-two meeting between the foreign and defence ministers of the two nations in December 2008, Japan and Australia agreed to share confidential security information and expand joint military exercises.
- 2.4 India, on the other hand, has long been a suitor of Japan irrespective of the political colour of the Prime Minister. When the opportunity to link formally with Japan in security and defence matters arose, New Delhi grabbed it with alacrity. Japan was motivated in this direction because it regards India as a possible balancer to China while the two mainland nations become Asia's new giants. With Japan experiencing fraught strategic relations with China, Tokyo sees India as worth hedging its strategic bet, especially when the US has moved toward closer, more comprehensive engagement with India in recent years.

⁴ Aso Taro, *Jiyu to hanei no ko* (The arc of freedom and prosperity), Tokyo: Gentosha, 2008.

Content of the Declarations

- 3.1 The new declarations contain some common elements, such as committing their signatories to democratic values, human rights and the rule of law. The text of the security declaration with Australia appears to have served as a basis for the Japan–India cooperation declaration. However, the post-war foreign policy paths of Australia and India have followed different trajectories and so have Japan’s relations with India and Australia. Thus the two documents are marked by both subtle and clear differences.
- 3.2 The declaration with Australia was signed in the context of the two nations’ alliance with the US and the existence of the trilateral strategic dialogue. It virtually codifies and publicly acknowledges the kinds of arrangement already in place between Japan and Australia. It also affirms the ‘common strategic interests and security benefits’ already emanating from their alliance relationship with the US and commits both nations to ‘strengthen trilateral cooperation’.
- 3.3 By comparison, the Japan–India declaration is broad and general. It makes no mention of a third country as does the declaration with Australia, which mentions cooperation between the two nations towards peaceful resolution of issues concerning North Korea.
- 3.4 Furthermore, the Japan–Australia declaration commits both nations to ‘working together, and with others, to respond to new security challenges and threats, as they arise’. No such ‘challenges and threats’ (code for the rise of China) are mentioned in the declaration with India, reflecting India’s insistence on its strategic autonomy.
- 3.5 The declaration with India specifies some cooperation areas such as sea lines of communication and space technology, reflecting Japan’s recognition of

India's strengths in these fields. Here, too, China seems to be increasingly concerned about stronger Japan–India ties.⁵

- 3.6 While the declarations apply to areas that are mostly *benign* and non-threatening (fight against terrorism and transnational crimes, pursuit of disarmament and non-proliferation, and peacekeeping), there is nothing in the declaration or beyond to prevent Japan and its new security partners from using the new declarations as a basis for further and deeper cooperation in defence matters, if such cooperation is desired by both parties respectively.

Geo-Strategic and Political Environment

- 4.1 Tokyo is clearly cognisant of the changing geo-strategic environment and the challenges that emanate from it, especially the growing economic muscle, political influence, and military and soft power of China. Japan rose quickly in the post-war period to become the world's number two economy and Asia's leading economic power, a position it still retains despite the national economic downturn from the early 1990s. Now, however, an unprecedented strategic landscape is taking shape, with both Japan and China becoming powerful simultaneously. With this, the emergence of India as another Asian giant makes the geo-strategic situation in Asia even more complex for Japan.
- 4.2 Post 9/11, altered security concerns such as growing international terrorism, piracy and unsafe sea lines of communication have forced Japan to rethink its security options. In Japan's new strategic calculations, both Australia and India are valuable security partners for the nation.
- 4.3 One more important consideration is crucial to Tokyo's strategic assessment: the implications for all members of the region, including Japan, of what

⁵ Peter J Brown, 'China fears India-Japan space alliance', *Asia Times Online*, 12 November 2008

appears to be the decline in US capacity for influence in the Asia-Pacific.⁶ Japan continues to depend largely on the US as its chief security underwriter. But Japan is now mindful that the nature and the priority of its national needs may diverge from those identified by the US governments – another reason to develop new security networks since it cannot depend exclusively on the US for all of its security needs. The US has encouraged Japan to build new networks to unburden some of its responsibility, to help in maintaining US dominance in the Asia Pacific.

China's Concerns

- 5.1 Despite China's booming economic relationship with Japan (China is now Japan's largest trading partner and Japan has invested heavily in China) and its fast growing trade with India, politico-security concerns with both nations remain paramount for China.
- 5.2 With Japan, issues relate to its colonial past, the content of history textbooks, territorial disputes, and growing conservatism in Japan as expressed through a proposal to revise the constitution to remove its pacifist orientation and through prime ministerial visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine honouring war criminals among Japan's war dead.
- 5.3 With India, border disputes since the 1962 Sino-India war have remained unresolved. Both nations remain mutually suspicious of each other's strategic designs in the region and beyond.
- 5.4 China's relationship with Australia is less troublesome politically. Even so, Canberra's statement on the Taiwan issue in the past and its alliance with the US puts it outside the strategic comfort zone for Beijing, even with Australia's current, Chinese-speaking prime minister.

⁶ See, for example, Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2008; Kishore Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, New York: Public Affairs, 2008.

- 5.5 China was unimpressed when Japan, the US and Australia formed the trilateral security dialogue which it dubbed 'Little NATO'. But it reacted more sharply when a proposal to establish a quadrilateral security arrangement that included India was put forward.
- 5.6 On Japan's two bilateral security cooperation declarations, China has been less critical and few official statements were made public, apart from commentaries by state-controlled media outlets and think tanks and analysts.⁷ On the Japan-India security declaration, Radio China International through its World News programme made comments that were later uploaded on the website of China International Institute of Strategic Studies, both state-sponsored agencies.⁸ Titled 'Japan and India forge military alliance to attack China both from front and rear', the programme noted Japan's rising interest in India from economic relations to the security partnership, especially since Aso became prime minister in September 2008.

Responses in Australia and India

- 6.1 Australian analysts and commentators responded to the declaration with mixed feelings. Many commentaries were critical, although some welcomed it as a means to strengthen Japan-Australia relations and to greater peace and security in the Asia Pacific.⁹
- 6.2 Responses from India were generally positive and some even commented that there was no need for India to be apologetic about this declaration. Prime

⁷ See comments by Zheng Yongnian, 'Japan-Australia pact amounts to East Asian NATO aimed at China', http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cpi/updates/yongnian_zheng_zhaobao_column/27_03_2007.php

⁸ Information in this section is drawn from D. S. Rajan, 'Beijing Suspicious on Japan-India Security Declaration Targeting China', 3 November 2008. <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers30/paper2912.html>

⁹ Critics and sceptics include Brendon Taylor 'The Australia- Japan Security Agreement: Between a Rock and a Hard Place' 19 March 2007, <http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/pac0713.pdf>; William Tow, 'The Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation and Asia-Pacific Strategies Geometrics', Austral Forum 07-16A, 6 September 2007; while those who commented positively included the Lowy Institute's researchers such as Malcolm Cook, 'Howard Brings Home the Goods from Japan Trip', *The Australian Financial Review*, 16 March 2007; Paul Dibb, 'Security Deal a Significant Step for Two Aspiring Nations', *The Australian Financial Review*, 16 March 2007

Minister Manmohan Singh's publicised statement made it clear that the declaration was not against any country and least of all against China, although critics dismissed the statement as unnecessary.¹⁰

- 6.3 It is crucial to note that there was overwhelming support for the security cooperation declaration in India, even though Japan and India do not have strong commercial ties or a history of close political relations. On the other hand, Japan has been Australia's largest trading partner for decades and today remains Australia's largest export market. Further, as noted earlier both nations are key allies of the US in the Pacific. Yet this bilateral security agreement drew mixed responses.
- 6.4 The federal government under Kevin Rudd, elected to power in November 2007, is unlikely to be as enthusiastic as his predecessor John Howard was about the bilateral security ties, while a change of government in New Delhi is unlikely to affect the emerging security ties with Tokyo. In other words, Japan–India security ties are likely to be enduring and are not hostage to political change like Japan–Australia ties.

¹⁰ See articles by D.S. Rajan, Subhash Kapila and Sourabh Gupta available on South Asian Analysis website (www.southasiananalysis.org); Inder Malhotra, 'India, Japan get close, China feels the heat', *The Asian Age*, 6 November 2008; Brahma Chellaney, 'Towards Asian Power Equilibrium', *The Hindu*, 1 November 2008.