The Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation and Asia-Pacific Strategic Geometries

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Introduction

William Tow, of the Australian National University argues that the March 2007 Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation was symbolic of one of two possibilities that Australia foreign policy must chose between: “a strategy of regional engagement designed to pursue community-building and avoid security dilemmas, or one that designates China as a rising strategic challenge that ultimately cannot be accommodated and thus must be contained with like-minded allies.” Despite the fears that the Joint Declaration represents a step in the militarization of the foreign policies of both countries, Tow concludes that the Joint Declaration “will not constitute an enduring or even very important component of the Asia-Pacific region’s future security architecture. I am not convinced that this agreement or the concurrent strategic geometries borne from hedging, balancing and bandwagoning now under way in the region will result in complete instability or lead to inevitable conflict.”

Essay: The Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security

Cooperation and Asia-Pacific Strategic Geometries.

Australia is at a historical crossroads: it must choose between a strategy of regional engagement designed to pursue community-building and avoid security dilemmas, or one that designates China as a rising strategic challenge that ultimately cannot be accommodated and thus must be contained with like-minded allies. The current APEC meeting in Sydney is perhaps symbolic of the first approach; the March 2007 Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation[1] (or JADSC) is symbolic of the second policy course. The JADSC is the first postwar security agreement involving specific defence collaboration that Japan has reached with another country apart from the United States. Some policy-makers and observers (including Australia's Foreign Minister) have projected a third model for JADSC collaboration: as a 'functionalist' exercise to better coordinate Australian-Japanese collaboration over an array of broader security issues, largely independent of geopolitical calculations, but in coordination with the United States, one that can provide better results in such transnational security areas as counter-terrorism, disaster relief, peacekeeping and WMD non-proliferation. I will focus on the JADSC taking into account these contending models, but also incorporating the broader context of regional structural change.

There are at least four key points that we may wish to apply to any discussion of the JADSC:

1. Who really initiated this bilateral agreement and why?
2. What is the broader significance of the JADSC in the larger evolving framework of Asia-Pacific regional security?
3. What are the JADSC's potential strategic advantages and drawbacks, both for its two signatories and for overall regional stability?
4. What are the JADSC's future prospects?

My basic argument is that the JADSC will not constitute an enduring or even very important component of the Asia-Pacific region's future security architecture. This is due to the fluidity of domestic political trends in the two signatories' domestic political arenas (as well as in that of the United States); the substantial momentum in China's regional growth and influence not generating the type of competitive counterstrategies from the existing U.S. alliance system as conventional realist or neo-realist thinking would predict; and because of American preoccupations with other issues that are pre-eminent in other parts of the world outside the Asia-Pacific region.

Formulation/Initiation

The Howard government has pushed for closer bilateral strategic cooperation with Japan for a number of years, largely through the low-key Trilateral Security Dialogue (later, the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue) ongoing since 2001. The catalyst for intensified bilateral ties, however, was the intensification of power by the right wing of Japan's domestic politics culminating with the election of Shinzo Abe in September 2006. Abe came to office with a vision of forging a 'broader alliance of democracies' that would include stronger links between Australia, India, Japan and the United States. This vision dovetailed with a growing Australian concern that due to China's rapid economic and military growth, Japan feels increasingly isolated – and increasingly defensive – rather than more secure. The JADSC, from the perspective of at least some Australian policy-planners, is partially a move to counterbalance the type of Japanese insecurity that could lead to Japan's increasingly powerful conservative political factions to embark on rash and destabilizing foreign

policy agendas in Northeast Asia and beyond – encouraging Japan's 'normalisation' to unfold in ways that would preclude more extremist Japanese foreign policies from prevailing as a result of its domestic politics. Critics of this approach would label it as being 'too cute by half' and argue that such 'conditioning tactics' could hardly impact upon a country that so steadfastly rejects Australian rationales for changing its whaling hunt policies or that continues a tendency to deny much of its modern wartime history!

In summary, a convergence of Australian and Japanese strategic interests at the functional level could lead one to understand why an intensification of security cooperation between the two countries is occurring over and above their respective, long-standing security relationships with the United States. This includes intelligence cooperation (particularly in the counter-terrorism arena but also in satellite surveillance involving Landsdale in the Perth International Telecommunications Centre supporting Japanese intelligence satellites and joint maritime surveillance), missile defence research, disaster relief, peacekeeping (humanitarian reconstruction activities at Samawah in southern Iraq during 2005-2006), and greater force interoperability for future regional contingencies. But critics note that all of this is occurring in any case. A formal declaration of security cooperation – while not an actual security treaty – posits a sufficiently provocative image to China and other regional neighbors as to negate whatever long-term diplomatic and geopolitical benefits might be gained from initiating it. They suspect that it is no more than an American-prompted initiative that gained momentum following Vice President Cheney's visits to Australia and Japan in February 2007.

Lastly, it should be noted that Japanese domestic politics is in the process of shifting in ways that could well affect the spirit if not the letter of the JADSC: opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa of the Democratic Party of Japan, architect of the Upper House electoral victory over Abe in July 2007, has now vowed to block passage of an extension of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law that ends on 1 November or a new such law (which the Upper House can do). This would force Tokyo to recall its ships from the Indian Ocean where it has been busy refueling coalition ships operating off Afghanistan – a conflict which both the Australian government and the opposition Labor Party support. Ozawa is also questioning the constitutionality of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law.[2] Japan is already more sceptical than Australia on the sale of uranium to India as valid under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and Ozawa's presence will not soften that scepticism. As Abe's popularity level dips to around 22 % (even George Bush looks good as a domestic politician by comparison), and with a highly possible change of Australian government by the end of this year to a party that has been far more sceptical about the JADSC's diplomatic utility than the incumbents, the political constellation that brought Australia and Japan together to sign this memorandum may well be changing substantially.

Broader Regional Significance

There are two major factors relating to the Security Declaration's broader regional significance: (1) China's response to the JADSC as a perceived component of a larger, U.S.-led 'soft containment' strategy directed against itself and; (2) its role as an important component of a realist structural design contending with more regionally indigenous, multilateral models for achieving Asia-Pacific stability (although stability is not necessarily synonymous with an Asia-Pacific 'security community').

China initially reacted fairly mildly to the 13 March 2007 Howard-Abe signing of the JADSC in Tokyo, with a Chinese foreign minister spokesperson that day commenting only that it 'is our hope that relevant countries can take into account the concern and interests of other countries in the region when they strengthen bilateral security cooperation, and do more to promote mutual trust

among the countries as well as peace and stability in the region.' [3] More recently, however, Chinese analysts have demonstrated greater concern that the Australia-Japan component of alliance intensification is part of a major U.S. containment initiative directed toward the PRC. A month after the signing of the Declaration, *China Daily* (6 April 2007) cited Hou Minyue, a professor of Australian Studies Centre at Shanghai-based East China Normal University insisting that the 'pact is a step forward toward the emergence of a US-led NATO-like organization in Asia, which will clearly grow to be the biggest potential threat to China's regional security environment.'

In early August, analysis cross-comparing contending security architectures for Asia appearing in the official Communist Party-run *Global Times* (*Huanqiu Shibao)* noted that Chinese diplomats handed notes to their Australian, American, Indian and Japanese counterparts demanding an explanation for why they would be meeting on the side of the ARF ministerial talks in Manila to talk about more intensive quadrilateral security cooperation. [4] The article specifically noted that *the* depth and breadth of the military and security cooperation between Australia and Japan has been raised to an unprecedented level and claimed that the latest Australian Defence Update went to unusual lengths to justify Australian defence cooperation with Japan in response to China's military modernization. Interestingly, the article concluded that China could best defuse such concerns by projecting a 'rest assured' diplomacy designed to achieve greater transparency and to set these countries' mind at rest that China's intentions are defensive and benign rather than offensive and nefarious. The article's underlying message was clear: Japan was extending provocative and needlessly destabilizing diplomacy to create a regional security dilemma that is very much avoidable, and that Australia would do better not to swallow the bait. Further Chinese criticism has been launched at the Australian and Japanese prime ministers and at President Bush for their planning a trilateral security dialogue meeting at the APEC conference on 8 September.

How have other regional capitals responded to the JADSC and to the larger framework of alliance reconfiguration now being launched in the name of 'Asian democratic values'? At first glance, one might conclude that a process of multilateral alliance intensification is taking place along predictable and potentially destabilizing lines: witness the pending *Malabar 07* naval exercises between Australian, Indian, Japanese, Singaporean and U.S. naval elements (including two U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carriers) that began on September 4 in the Bay of Bengal, coinciding with the APEC deliberations in Sydney from which India is still excluded. This exercise, perhaps not totally coincidentally, less than two weeks after the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's *Peace Mission 07* exercises, which involved 6,500 troops from Russia, China and four Central Asian countries converging on the Siberian city of Chelyabinsk in a show of force where U.S. military observers were invited. The exercise was conducted at the same time Japanese Prime Minister Abe was visiting India. As *Newsweek International* speculated in early September,

> 'the Malabar and Peace Mission exercises point to a potentially dangerous reality taking shape: the emergence of two competing security camps in Asia. On the one hand stands the United States, still the area's dominant military power; traditional allies such as Japan and Australia; and a few new friends, such as Mongolia and, potentially, India. On the other stands China, which is using its rapid economic growth and accelerating defence spending, as well as close ties to Russia, Pakistan, the Central Asian states, Burma, and Cambodia, to raise its own profile and to develop a sphere of influence. As the competition accelerates, more and more states are finding themselves forced to choose sides.'[5]

Appearances, however, can be deceiving. Several factors mitigate worst-case conclusions that the Asia-Pacific is reconstituting into Cold War-like security blocs. These include: (1) latent but still very

real strategic competition between Russia and China, who are both vying for greater access to Western economic markets to fuel the basic fundamentals for their economic modernization programs; (2) India's heritage of non-alignment is still alive and well, as evidenced by recent tensions to reach closure with the U.S. over the two countries' nuclear energy deal, and by its fervent desire to get a larger share of the China market; (3) the nearly united Asia-Pacific perception that international terrorism in Thailand, the Philippines and Central Asia constitutes part of a larger global threat which will require more integrated cooperation to defeat; and (4) a general impression that as a result of American preoccupation with that threat, Washington's heart is just not in engaging in any viable form of hegemonic cooperation with China any more than China, whose growth is largely entwined with the health of the American economy, is keen to supplant U.S. power even in the broader Asia-Pacific anytime soon. The irony here is that China's own evolution toward greater democratic practices is as probable – if not more so – than any real prospect of a virtual alliance made up of self-declared democratic societies turning concrete anytime soon. The Australia-Japan security declaration – and its limitations – should be read in this context. One American analyst has recently and aptly characterized the overall geopolitical process: 'everyone is hedging in every direction'. [6]

Potential Strategic Advantages and Drawbacks

As intimated above there are some obvious advantages that Australia and Japan can pursue with more coherent directions based on a growing convergence of strategic interest apart from 'the China factor' or from a possible future expansion of nascent trilateral or quadrilateral security groupings. Japanese troops exercising and training in Australia for an expanded role in international peacekeeping efforts will build upon past, arguably positive, nation-building collaboration and interaction in Cambodia, East Timor and Iraq – particularly in future contingencies that might occur in the so-called 'arc of instability' spanning from Australia's northern approaches to the easternmost reaches of Melanesia or other fragile South Pacific microstates. Maritime security collaboration with ASEAN for selected operations against piracy or involving responses to natural disasters could be tightened. In this context, the disaster relief mission and 'core group' of donor states established in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and involving close coordination of Indian, Japanese, Australian and American military contingents in rescue operations serves as a useful precedent. Closer operational coordination on such multinational initiatives as the Proliferation Security Initiative could also be facilitated and, following on from this, more systematic coordination of intelligence exchanges might be achieved over the longer-term.

Finally, while incurring European members' resistance to date, it is possible that Japan, Australia and New Zealand could eventually coordinate their policies more closely on global security issues in ways that may involve a joint consultative or deliberative role within NATO. Washington has signalled its support for such an arrangement eventually materialising. All of these areas of Australian-Japanese security collaboration could be rationalized outside the orbit of geopolitical response vis-à-vis China.

That said, critics of the JASDF are justified in warning about the potential downsides of more intimate Australia-Japan defence ties. The basic concerns relate to converting the postwar network of U.S. security alliances to an anti-China US-dominated multilateral alliance system which will not enjoy the support of such traditional U.S. security partners as South Korea, Thailand or even the Philippines. Any opportunity to build a more benign, less threat-centric Asia-Pacific security order, it is argued, will have been squandered by the de facto crystallization of a new system of regional security blocs predicated on 'China versus the democracies'. Bloc politics and the militarization of Australian and Japanese foreign policies that it would underpin, moreover, are incompatible with the

major trading trend dominating Australia's economy – the booming expansion of Sino-Australian economic ties. For the first time in its history, Australia is confronting a situation where its major economic partner is not the same as its major security ally, creating a difficult and possibly intractable element of schizophrenia and division of Australian national interests. Japan likewise risks alienating a China whose economy increasingly dominates Japanese trading interests (last year, for example, China surpassed the United States as a factor within Japan's total trade volume).

The Future

Despite such concerns, I am not convinced that this agreement or the concurrent strategic geometries borne from hedging, balancing and bandwagoning now under way in the region will result in complete instability or lead to inevitable conflict. It may well be that more nuanced and sophisticated Australian foreign policies, less driven by domestic political imperatives in election years, would have embraced most of the substance provided by the JADSC without requiring the potentially dangerous symbolism of a pro forma accord to muddy the diplomatic waters. But the JADSC did emerge and the key question now is how best to finesse its implications and instrumentalities. In this light, I think three factors surface as key determinants for its future significance:

First, the outcomes of pending domestic elections are becoming a major consideration in assessing the *continuity* and *durability* of the JADSC. A Labor Government in Australia and a Democratic administration in the United States could lead to a greater interest in multilateral security politics in both countries, more engagement with China, and less affinity with a sullen and conservative Japanese political elite determined to check growing Chinese power. Kevin Rudd has already indicated that he will not follow up the JADSC with a more formal Australia-Japan defence alliance, and that the United Nations will be assigned greater priority, possibly rendering his posture on Australia's traditional regional security ties less important. This orientation toward revitalizing international institutions and building more conduits of interdependence is also reflected in Hillary Clinton's speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York during late October 2006 where she disdained the brand of realism that has fueled the Bush administration's approach to Asian security geometries.[7]

Second, China is projecting an increasingly sophisticated array of counter-strategies to neutralize the effects of JADSC-type arrangements as the future model for Asian security. It is calibrating selective involvement in institutional initiatives – such as the East Asian Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum – in ways designed to gradually marginalize the U.S. brand of bilateral or multilateral security politics. It is simultaneously, however, shaping its own set of bilateral and multilateral politico-security relationships – with Thailand, Burma, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization – and probing for additional opportunities for strategic interaction previously not open to it (weapons sales to contemporary Indonesia come to mind) as part of a broader pan-Asian strategy to influence, if not to decide, the direction of most key security trends there. Greater linkages in maritime Southeast Asia will lead to a greater Chinese capacity to safeguard key energy supplies; intensified pressure on Australia and Japan will make their future support for American intervention on behalf of Taiwan that much more difficult; cultivating arms sales ties with Russia has allowed them to modernize hard power assets in ways totally unanticipated just a few years ago and to throw the gauntlet of asymmetrical warfare down on the American military establishment itself. Perhaps most centrally, China's economic rise is a unique strategic asset in its own right which has been applied judiciously during such episodes as the Asian Financial Crisis to encourage its regional neighbours to bandwagon with it, rather than with the region's other great economy, Japan.

Finally, the United States' preoccupation with international terrorism and with the Middle East and Central Asia as the major regions that generate appears fated to endure for years, if not decades to come. As I have just written in the journal *Current History*, this type of policy quagmire can only lead to the continued deterioration of American influence in Asia and provide little sustainable fuel for the Americans to shape a truly competitive infrastructure to China. [8] By default, future American administrations will need to consider cooperative multilateral instrumentalities more centrally as they struggle to come to terms with their Asian destiny. In such an environment, the JADSC may well become just a fleeting memory sooner rather than later.

Biography

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Footnotes

[1] Australia - Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, 13 March 2007.

[2] The End of Alliance "Business as Usual"? Ozawa's Rejection of Japan's Indian Ocean Deployment, Richard Tanter, Japan Focus, 899, August 12, 2007.

[3] Foreign Ministry Spokesman Qin Gang's Regular Press Conference on March 13, 2007.

[4] "Japan's 'Four-State Alliance' Concept Suffers Setback", *Huanqiu Shibao* [Global Times] 6 August 2007.

[5] Asia's Dangerous Divide; Beijing and Washington are building new alliances throughout the continent, Christian Caryl, Newsweek International, September 10, 2007.

[6] See also Robert Sutter,'U.S. Power and Influence in Asia', in Stanley R. Sloan, Robert Sutter and Casimer Yost, *The Use of U.S. Power* (Washington, D.C.: The Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Gerogetown University, 2004), p. 85.

[7] Challenges Facing the United States in the Global Security Environment, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Council on Foreign Relations, October 31, 2006.

[8] William T. Tow, America's Asia-Pacific Strategy Is Out of Kilter, Current History, September 2007.

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