

Following up with Actions instead of Words: German-Japanese Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Public Symposium “Security Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific” as part of the German-Japanese 1.5 Track Security Dialogue

Event Report by Arndt Meissner

In times of global interdependence, the Indo-Pacific region and Europe have grown closer and closer together despite any physical distance. As a consequence, not only did the German government with its 2020 Policy Guidelines pivot to the Indo-Pacific, also the European Union is working on a strategy for the most dynamic region worldwide. In the last decade, the rapidly evolving security environment in the Indo-Pacific saw among others an increase in cybercrime, territorial conflicts not only in the South China Sea and nuclear tests and demonstrations. Although geographically separated, as like-minded democracies Japan and Germany aim on fostering an active dialogue on foreign and security policy particularly during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung together with the Japanese-German Center Berlin, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Federal Foreign Office and the Japanese Institute for International Affairs held the seventh annual 1.5 track dialogue with a public symposium on "Security Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific" on June 23rd 2021.

Dr. Klaus VIETZE, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Japan, emphasized the new phase and intensity of geopolitical confrontation in the Indo-Pacific region. Following his opening remarks, he mentioned that the German view often neglects that its partner Japan is indeed situated on the front line and both North Korea and the People’s Republic of China are only a few steps away. He highlighted that the German government has received great support in the region for its first ever Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific. Not only North Korea's efforts to circumvent sanctions and China's strong militarization now require even closer cooperation on security issues in the region. Dr. VIETZE described the symbolism of sending the German frigate “Bayern” to the Indo-Pacific in August this year as important and necessary. While balancing interests has become more difficult in recent years for both Germany and Japan, China's increasingly aggressive use of power and economic policy, human rights and geostrategic issues in the region require joint and coordination with value partners. It is time to reduce weak points, both in military terms and in terms of supply chains. Both

Germany and Japan want to use the successive G7 presidencies in 2022 and 2023 to set coordinated topics. Security can only be achieved with partners, as Dr. VIETZE put it.

In his welcoming statement, His Excellency YANAGI Hidenao, Ambassador of Japan to Germany, expressed his delight with the positive development of German-Japanese relations in the past year, particularly in the security and defense domain, and highly valued Germany's 2020 Policy Guidelines to the Indo-Pacific. Not only have the two countries been cooperating in multilateral fora in a spirit of trust during the past year, the common goal of a global rule-based order has moreover led both countries to strengthen their concrete security cooperation. The Ambassador expressed particular confidence for the G7 presidencies of the two countries. Above all, in the areas of disarmament, maritime security and free trade, cooperation could be expanded and the current instability in the Indo-Pacific could be reduced. The deployment of the frigate, which Japan warmly welcomes, shows that Germany is backing its words, he added. He concluded his remarks with his delight about the latest meeting by Chancellor MERKEL and Prime Minister SUGA on the sideline of the G7 leaders' meeting.

Opportunities and Challenges of German-Japanese Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond

In his incoming statement, Henning SIMON, Head of Division East Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Pacific States at the German Federal Foreign Office, stressed the importance of the current decisions and cooperation in the design of the future world order. The Asia-Pacific region includes 20 out of 33 global megacities and the world's largest economies. From a German point of view, however, he mentioned the previous lack of a strategic and coordinated approach with the region. With its "Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific" the Federal Government has thus created a conceptual framework intended to contribute to a diversification and strengthening of relations with partners in the region and to actively support the rules-based world order. The new EU guideline, to be published in September, also sets active priorities with six core topics: multilateralism; climate change; human rights and the rule of law; peace, security and stability; free trade and connectivity. Japan is currently on the geostrategic front line, just as Germany was during the Cold War. For this very reason, the German Federal Foreign Office is striving for strong bilateral and multilateral cooperation and has laid important foundations for future closer cooperation with the recent 2+2 meeting and the German-Japanese Agreement on the Security of Information, said Mr. SIMON.

NOGUCHI Yasushi, Director General for International Affairs at the Ministry of Defense of Japan, stressed the importance of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision and elaborated

on the security dynamics as perceived by Japan. Thereafter, North Korea and its nuclear weapons program currently pose a major threat to Japanese security. Whether it is a pandemic or last year's typhoon, the military marches and new nuclear tests in March this year suggest that North Korea continues to expand its nuclear weapons program. In the South China Sea, China is trying to change the status quo by force, and in the East China Sea, the situation around the Senkaku Islands continues to escalate. Japan is also paying particular attention to the Taiwan conflict, where it is advocating a peaceful solution. The maritime border dispute between China and the Philippines in 2016 showed that China ignores court rulings by international conventions. Japan's global value partners must therefore support it in its efforts to maintain the rules-based international order.

Japan's focus in security policy is based on three pillars: (i) its own defense architecture, (ii) its alliance relationship with the United States, and (iii) worldwide defense cooperation to maintain the rule of law, freedom of sea lines of communication, economic well-being, and security and stability. Mr. NOGUCHI particularly highlighted the role of the Quadrilateral Security Cooperation (Quad) and the successful leaders' summit earlier this year. There, not only security issues in the narrow spectrum were discussed; the value partners also addressed topics such as the vaccination campaign against COVID-19, climate change and technological advancements. ASEAN states thereby play a key role in the region, especially for the topics of disaster management, human capacity building, arms cooperation as well as security architecture. Japan is pleased that Germany, a value partner, is increasing its commitment in the region and is actively raising its valuable voice, expressing his expectations towards a Japan-Germany joint exercise and Germany's engagement in illicit ship to ship transfer by North Korea. Together with France and the United Kingdom, highly active in the region, Germany and the EU are close and good cooperation partners, according to Mr. NOGUCHI.

Dr. Sarah KIRCHBERGER, Head of Department of Strategic Development in Asia-Pacific at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University, highlighted the maritime domain. The issues mentioned by the previous speakers are for a large part expressed in ship incidents and submarine encounters forced by the Chinese side. While the EU states have different competencies and capacities in the maritime domain, their deployment is an important element of a defense strategy. France, for example, has a great depth of knowledge in the region, as it is constantly on the spot due to its overseas territories and crosses the South China Sea twice a year. Germany with its deployment of the frigate "Bayern" is now striving for a presence in the region for the first time in 20 years. Despite the previously mentioned symbolic character, Germany should not be underestimated, however, as it possesses great expertise in certain niches such as submarine command and control in

shallow and difficult waters. Next to the maritime dimension, further developments such as the recently concluded Agreement on the Security of Information strengthen cooperation in sensitive areas and facilitate an exchange of information without delay. One challenge for the German engagement in the Indo-Pacific region is still the small maritime capacity having to also fulfill duties in the close waters. Dr. KIRCHBERGER clearly concluded that both countries do share similar views so they should use the great potential and momentum for cooperation.

Prof. Dr. IWAMA Yōko, Professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, laid the focus on multilateral cooperation and expressed her satisfaction from the Japanese point of view that multilateral institutions have been increasingly addressing the security dimension in addition to the economic dimension in the region. This tendency shows that multilateral institutions and frameworks like NATO or the Quad, more specifically the common value partners and the common understanding of the democratic countries, could and should prevent a second Cold War. Diplomatic confrontation and diplomatic dialogue, Prof. Dr. IWAMA highlighted, is the way for value partners to coordinate among themselves and to act united. Due to their global interdependence, Germany and Japan find themselves in a similar situation. In order to stabilize not only itself but also the region, Japan must meet with its like-minded partners and develop joint strategies and scenarios. As Prof. Dr. IWAMA stated, a forum between global democracies could contribute to resolve conflicts without military intervention. Germany still has a lot of experience and knowledge from the Cold War period and Japan is looking forward to learn from it and to exchange ideas with Germany.

In the following panel discussion, Mr. SIMON added that multilateral cooperation particularly needs substance and a clear focus on core topics within existing fora and institutions. Regarding the nexus between economic and security policy, Mr. NOGUCHI pointed out that especially with regard to China, economic and security policy goes hand in hand. Japan aims to produce strategically important elements domestically or guarantee stable supply chains in order to maintain strategic autonomy. Regarding the conflict around the Senkaku islands, Mr. NOGUCHI added, as far as the sovereignty of a state is concerned, one should not give way one step. Dr. KIRCHBERGER emphasized China's increasing self-confidence and first tendencies of a trustful cooperation with Russia e.g. in submarine development. She moreover highlighted the clear focus of the United States on the Indo-Pacific and added that NATO in its current organizational and capacity strength is not prepared for active involvement in both its traditional and new regions of engagement. Prof. Dr. IWAMA responded that this is also a call for Japan for strong capabilities to be built and organized at this time.

With both Germany and Japan facing elections in 2021, Mr. SIMON assured the endurance of Germany's Indo-Pacific policy and denied a risk for volatility in light of the German federal elections. Given the instable security dynamics in the region and China as a competitor, partner and systemic rival, the situation in the Indo-Pacific is constantly assessed and will continue to be in the spotlight. However, Prof. Dr. IWAMA and Mr. SIMON jointly stated that the issue of security policy will likely play a subordinate role in the upcoming elections both in Japan as well as in Germany. According to Prof. Dr. IWAMA, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Olympic Games are currently the dominant issues ahead of the Japanese elections.

At the end of the discussion, Mr. NOGUCHI stressed the positive signal of the German frigate and appreciated its support in monitoring the UN resolution against North Korea. Dr. KIRCHBERGER pointed out that the German view on the Indo-Pacific is often less alert, whereas the Japanese are aware of the immediate developments and threats. She concluded the discussion by emphasizing that China has changed in the past years, but the new policy has not yet reached German politics. We must no longer look the other way, but must follow up with actions instead of words.