The Japanese Security Environment and Its Relationship with NATO

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Introduction

The Northeast Asia region is never a pleasant paradise. It is a region where neighbouring countries threaten with nuclear weapons and remnants of the power structure from the US-Soviet Cold War era are still present.

At the same time, Northeast Asian countries are currently situated in an uncertain and unstable environment that is witnessing new security-related tensions. Japan has also been exposed to quite a rare and complex strategic environment and must realise that it is in a tactical and uncertain situation. Under such circumstances, a certain resolution is demanded from Japan as it is in the middle of a historical turning point.

In addition, we cannot discuss the 21st century in the Asia-Pacific region without making any projections concerning the future of China. A security theory of the Asia-Pacific region that does not take into consideration the Chinese military strategy would have no real meaning. It is also necessary to take into account that Japan is caught in the middle of the strategic competition between the United States and China in the Asia-Pacific region. Now that China is actually strengthening its military power and starting to close the military as well as economic gap vis-à-vis the United States, there is a growing political competition between them. Within this context, Japan needs to be prepared to take a leadership role in securing peace and stability in the region, and to address the current strategic situation. Japan, however, has not made the necessary adjustments to this security environment yet, while China at the same time has and will continue to strengthen its influence and power in the region.

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Security in Japan's Neighbourhood

The security issues and instability in the Asia-Pacific region, including around Japan, have become more serious and complex. This is mainly because of the modernisation and strengthening of military power by neighbouring countries and the activation of more military activities.

According to the new Defence White Paper released by the Japanese Ministry of Defence in August 2017[1], Japan is facing a new phase in its threat perception due to the recent developments in both China and North Korea. The threat level of North Korea, resulting from its nuclear weapon and missile programme, was raised in 2016. The operationalisation of long-range missiles, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), which were launched in July 2017, has also highlighted concerns over North Korea's massively increasing development of nuclear weapons. The country's progress in terms of vessels, ballistic missiles and general operating capacity has raised the threat to a new level. In conjunction with the repeated provocative behaviour of North Korea, the lack of stability, predictability and trust in the region has become an imminent threat to the international community, including Japan. In light of North Korea's ignorance of international norms, not fully functioning UN sanctions and currently missing non-military intervention mechanisms, any further expansion of North Korea's nuclear and missile capability can have a great impact on the global security order.

In addition, the region has also seen the expansion of China's military force and the possibility of more maritime operations in the South China Sea as well as the East China Sea. The limited transparency of the Chinese activities in the East and South China Sea, attempting to change the status quo in the maritime security of the region by creating precedents, leads to uncertainty and has increased the potential for misunderstanding in the regional security order. These activities have raised concerns not only for Japan but also for the international community. In particular, the territorial issue of the Northern Territories and Takeshima continues to be of high relevance to Japan.

The United States has a long tradition of military partnerships in Asia and established alliances with a series of countries to enhance military cooperation. This approach has not been changed by the complex factors and territorial disputes with the region. One of the earliest and most advanced arrangements of the US in this region has been the Pacific Security Treaty (ANZUS), which in addition to the United States, involves Australia and New Zealand. The US also has close security ties to Japan and South Korea. Through its freedom-of-navigation manoeuvres, the United States has more recently also been active in issues such as the territorial disputes between China and the Philippines and China and Vietnam. The military

[1] http://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/wp/wp2017/pdf/index.html.

presence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region has been expanding over the past years and more than 60% of the US Navy will be stationed in the region by 2020. Currently, the US military is based in Korea, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Guam.[2] This has, however, also added another level of complexity to the region since some countries believe that conflict resolution should be shaped strictly according to the national interests of the large countries in the region and no outside major power should be involved.

The regional security order may even evolve further. The region has seen a growth in Russia's involvement with its deployment of military personnel and facilities to the Northern Territories (Etorofu Island and Kunashiri Island). Russia has also announced the deployment of anti-ship missiles. The unresolved question of Taiwan may also further complicate the situation given the election of the Beijing-critical Tsai Ing-wen in 2016 and the subsequent phone call between her and US President-elect Donald Trump.

At the same time, security threats located outside of the Northeast Asian region continue to have implications on countries like Japan. If unaddressed, these risks can contribute to the instability of the entire international community. Such threats include international terrorism, dramatic shifts in the global power balance, unilateral actions by states to change the current status quo and cyber-attacks. In recent years, cyber-attacks have become more sophisticated. In many of the cases, government agencies have been suspected of involvement and this has led to discussions about the risks in the stable use of cyber space. As military forces' reliance on information and communication networks grows, cyber-attacks are positioned as an asymmetric strategy and many foreign militaries are increasing their capability to attack in cyber space.

Japan's Role as One of NATO's "Partners Across the Globe"

In recent years, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has developed relations with a range of countries beyond the Euro-Atlantic area, while maintaining its focus on activities in the European region and challenges affecting countries of the Alliance. Referred to as "Partners Across the Globe,"[3] these countries and NATO share similar strategic concerns and key alliance values. Although this arrangement is not part of the formal partnership structure, countries can work with NATO on issues of mutual interests and benefits. Under this framework, NATO has established cooperation with the following seven Asian countries: Afghanistan,

[2] http://index.heritage.org/military/2017/assessments/operating-environment/asia/.

[3] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/51288.htm.

Australia, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, and South Korea. The adoption of a more efficient and flexible Partnership Policy in April 2011 paved the way for the enhancement of practical cooperation and political dialogue with these "Partners Across the Globe". The idea to enhance security through dialogue and cooperation is part of the partnership policy, which is rapidly advancing in recent years with those countries burdened by unstable factors and uncertain challenges.[4]

NATO has recognised that Asian countries play an important role in global security. Asian and NATO countries realised that they will both be affected by instabilities in areas such as Afghanistan or piracy off the East coast of Africa. Furthermore, both sides acknowledge that instability in the respective other region has a direct impact on the security in their own region. This is mainly also due to the economic factors. With globalisation, modern security has become complex and closely related to political, military, and economic factors. In particular, economic challenges can lead to critical security issues due to the existing interdependencies. Currently, the Asian region includes the country with the world's second-largest gross domestic product (GDP), China, and the third-largest, Japan, and considering the presence of the United States in the Pacific area, the world's three largest economies are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region. Just as the turmoil in the American economic market following the "Lehman Brothers bankruptcy" in 2008 affected the world, a crisis of the Asian economies might directly impact the economies of NATO member states. In addition, it is not only the Asia-Pacific region but also NATO member states that are faced with the potential threat of continuous missile and nuclear weapon launches by North Korea. Although unrealistic, North Korea's claims to seek military parity with the United States[5] and any involvement of the US in a conflict with North Korea might potentially also impact NATO due to the collective defence mechanism.

In the meantime, the cooperation has improved. All four Pacific partners – namely, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea – have taken part in NATO operations to fight piracy off the coast of Somalia. Over the years, all four have signed formal partnership agreements with NATO, deepened their political dialogue and extended their practical cooperation to new areas like disaster relief and cyber defence. While Australia and New Zealand have deployed many troops under the NATO banner in Afghanistan, Japan and South Korea have made big contributions to the reconstruction and development efforts there.[6]

Japan is NATO's longest-standing global partner and the importance of the Japan-NATO relationship can be seen from several milestones. During his visit in

[4] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm.

[5] http://www.atimes.com/article/north-korea-says-seeking-military-equilibrium-us/.

[6] https://www.uskoreainstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/USKI-CFTNI_Report_NEA-AFG_032911.pdf.

Europe in 2007, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the first Japanese prime minister to visit the North Atlantic Council[7]. Prime Minister Abe highlighted in his speech:

> Japan and NATO are partners. We have in common such fundamental values as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is only natural that we cooperate in protecting and promoting those values. My government is committed to reinforcing the stability and prosperity of the world based on the fundamental values I have just mentioned. For its part, NATO is widening the circle of freedom through an expansion of membership and partnerships.
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> Japan and NATO share a common sense of responsibility towards global challenges. We now need to work together more than ever in sharing our capabilities, as we work to consolidate peace in the face of conflict.
>
> Over the past decade, Japan has undertaken peace cooperation activities in diverse places including Cambodia, Mozambique, East Timor, the Indian Ocean and Iraq. We have also conducted disaster relief efforts in Pakistan, working side by side with NATO forces.
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> Since becoming Prime Minister, I have made clear to the Japanese people that my government will develop and carry out a proactive foreign policy, and that Japan should play a meaningful role on the global stage. In this approach, Japan is eager to collaborate with NATO, building on a common sense of trust.

The second milestone took place in April 2013, when NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Prime Minister Abe signed the "Japan and North Atlantic Treaty", a joint political declaration.[8] In May 2014, the Prime Minister once again visited NATO headquarters. The Individual Partnership and Cooperation programme between Japan and NATO (IPCP) was signed in Brussels on 6 May 2014 by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the Secretary General to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.[9] In this programme, some priority areas for cooperation were clarified: cooperation and sharing lessons learned on cyber defence; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; counterterrorism and disarmament, particularly in relation to small arms and light weapons; arms control; non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery; maritime security, especially counter-piracy; comprehensive approach to conflict management; defence science and technology; and public diplomacy initiatives.

[7] http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/pmv0701/nato.html.

[8] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_109508.htm.

[9] http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000037774.pdf.

In July 2017, two additional high-level meetings took place when Prime Minister Abe held bilateral talks with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg in July and Stoltenberg returned the visit to Japan in October.

Future Areas of Cooperation

One of the aims of Japan in engaging in a political dialogue with NATO is to share Japan's perspective about the security environment in East Asia with NATO. It will be useful for Japan if NATO shares the same perspective as Japan on the security situation and especially on countries that are disrupting the stability of the Asia-Pacific region through unilateral interpretation of international law. Furthermore, Japan believes that the global security environment should be based on cooperation with the international community. In the current strategic environment, no nation can maintain its own peace and security alone. Japan, including its Self-Defence Forces, has contributed significantly to efforts aiming to maintain and restore international peace and security, such as UN peacekeeping operations. These efforts are made based on the belief that Japan, as a "Proactive Contributor to Peace", needs to contribute more actively to the peace and stability of the region and the international community, while coordinating with other countries. If Japan intends to cooperate further with NATO, it needs to be familiar with the circumstances of NATO's structure and have a clear overview of how both can evolve together in order to achieve a mutually beneficial partnership.

NATO's range of activities used to be limited to the North Atlantic region (Euro-Atlantic area), but this has changed with the end of the Cold War and especially the war in Afghanistan. Instead, NATO has continued to respond to new challenges. The new strategic concept[10] is significantly affected by the lessons learned from the NATO operations in Afghanistan. Therefore, the Alliance has expanded its cooperation with partners to include "stabilisation" and "reconstruction tasks" in order to strengthen various areas of crisis management and to get partner countries involved in making decisions. The new strategic concept highlights the significance of specific security challenges (proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, unrest in neighbouring countries, etc.). In contrast to the old concept, there is a new emphasis on dealing with non-traditional threats (cyber-attacks, terrorism, energy supply). Thus, NATO's new strategic concept embodies a collective defence that is based on the purpose, nature, and fundamental security tasks of the Alliance. In addition to the concept of conventional security, the framework of the partnership has been strengthened for the promotion of cooperation, and the relationship between Japan and NATO has been actively promoted as part of this. Exchange and dialogue

[10] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm.

between the two on issues relating to international politics and security, especially in the context of the Asia-Pacific region, are of common benefit to both Japan and NATO.

Stability and peace in the Asia-Pacific region are of common interest to Japan and NATO. For example, France's defence minister was wary of the North Korean development of a ballistic missile that could reach Europe earlier than expected. In a speech to the military, she said, "There is no denying the scenario of escalating into a massive conflict. Europe risks being within range of (North Korean President) Kim Jong Un's missiles sooner than expected".[11]

Japan and NATO are looking to expand cooperation in the field of marine security as well as cyber defence. There is significant potential for the Asia-Pacific region to work with NATO on this since there is an expert institute, NATO CCDCOE (NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence)[12], dedicated to cyber issues. Furthermore, the Strategic Communication Center (Stratcom)[13], which was founded in Riga in Latvia, works on hybrid warfare issues and on achieving the Alliance's political and military objectives. For the Asia-Pacific region, countries can share the historical background of hybrid warfare in their community. Reliable free-speech space on the internet, fake news patterns and diffusion mechanisms, liability of media platforms like Facebook, measures against fake news, etc. are urgent matters that need to be addressed on a global scale. The potential for cooperation on this issue is large. Cybercrime has been a source of funding for North Korea's missile development.[14] In this regard, information sharing and working jointly to address this challenge by NATO member states and countries in the Asia-Pacific region are essential. In addition, it is necessary to work closely together to deal with information exploitation by national actors, including Russia's attempt to meddle in the US presidential election.[15]

Limitations of the "Partners Across the Globe"

On the other hand, many ask what the significance of NATO's cooperation with Japan is. NATO exists to ensure the collective defence of territory and to ensure the safety of the people of its member states. Despite the above-mentioned efforts,

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[11] https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-09-05/europe-could-soon-be-within-range-of-north-korean-missiles-france.

[12] https://ccdcoe.org.

[13] http://www.stratcomcoe.org.

[14] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-cybercrime/north-korea-hacking-increasingly-focused-on-making-money-more-than-espionage-south-korea-study-idUSKBN1AD0BO.

[15] https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/russias-election-meddling-backfired--big-time/2017/08/17/e7ee4b74-837f-11e7-ab27-1a21a8e006ab_story.html?utm_term=.76735404a672.

NATO's role in Asia will remain limited. Neither does NATO strive nor do the circumstances allow for NATO to become an active security player in Asia. For instance, when NATO Secretary General Rasmussen visited Japan in 2013, NATO's intention was not to show its presence in the Asia-Pacific but to work with Asian countries in finding common solutions to global security challenges.[16] Yet, there are certain aspects limiting even this potential. The economic downturn in 2008 had a significant impact on the Alliance's European countries, forcing countries to cut military spending. Although absolute military budgets have increased since and each country signed an agreement to allocate 2% of its GDP to defence spending,[17] only a few countries achieved this target in 2015. Despite a nominal increase in the military spending, the GDP share continued to drop in most of the countries due to the economic recovery. Furthermore, 20% of defence costs should have been earmarked for the acquisition of new equipment, but only six countries have achieved this goal. Although the bottom of the economic slump has passed, NATO and its members lack the financial resources to commit directly to the outside, such as the Asia-Pacific region, which is geographically far away from Europe. Secondly, NATO is concerned about creating new tensions by being directly involved in Asia and prefers to avoid this. Then-NATO Secretary General Rasmussen clarified that NATO is not targeting China. China is a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations and will necessarily be involved in terms of a coordinated security aspect, since it is an important actor as a political, economic, and security-related country. In fact, NATO has made attempts to strengthen relations with China at the political level, such as the high-level dialogue with China and the mutual visits of dignitaries. Chinese vessels have also been involved in a NATO-led anti-piracy operation (Operation Ocean Shield). NATO and China have worked together at the military level through joint exercises. Lastly, NATO faces a number of challenges in its immediate neighbourhood which require its full attention, including Russia's policies in Ukraine, the response to terrorism in Iraq and Syria as well as the recent developments in Afghanistan.

Implications for the Future

Given the current tensions and challenges, cooperation with partners is essential for maintaining and stabilising the global security environment. By fostering exchange with partners, countries in the Asia-Pacific and beyond can strengthen mutual trust and cooperation.

[16] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_99634.htm.

[17] https://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/02/daily-chart-11.

This is even more the case since President Donald Trump fulfilled one of his campaign pledges by signing an executive order to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).[18] This twelve-nation trade deal was a linchpin of former President Barack Obama's Asia policy. TPP was of great significance for the United States, Japan, and the other countries, not only in terms of trade and investment, but also in terms of geopolitical benefits, which were believed to be tremendously large. Its success was also supposed to make the presence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region even stronger. In NATO, Europe and America have a mechanism to address security challenges together. A similar mechanism is crucial in the Asia-Pacific region. It should not specialise solely in security like NATO though, but could also be a place where economic issues and a wide range of cooperation are discussed.

In the meantime, NATO and Asian countries should continue their cooperation. NATO has been promoting a clearer partnership policy under the new strategic concept. The Pacific "Partners Across the Globe" share certain values with NATO and are willing to work with the Alliance. They also face similar security challenges like terrorism, piracy, non-traditional threats, and cyber defence. All these require partnerships and common solutions. The importance of relationships with NATO could thus potentially increase and partnership policies might progress. However, Japan and NATO are still only at the starting line in terms of cooperation and it is imperative to examine the framework for more practical cooperation in the future.

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[18] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/01/23/president-trump-signs-order-to-withdraw-from-transpacific-partnership/?utm_term=.edefa43eb9c2.