Original Article

NATO and Japan: A strategic convergence? Post cold-war geopolitics: Russia, China, anti-piracy and anti-terrorism

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Abstract In this article, I argue that NATO and Japan, from a parallel anti-Soviet Cold War position through common links with the United States, have directly moved towards each other since the 1990s. Each of them has gone more global. NATO's 'out of area' operations have taken NATO eastwards from its previous focus on Europe and the Mediterranean, while Japan's gradual multilateral activism have taken it westwards from its previous focus on East Asia. This has created geopolitical overlap between these two actors, most notably in Afghanistan but also elsewhere in the Indian Ocean. Common advocacy of liberal democracy, and overt concerns over jihadist and piracy destabilisation have brought these two actors together. NATO's post-Cold War search for relevance meets Japan's wider external security sensitivity, especially with regard to China's rise. However, while NATO has adopted a flexible range of 'Partnership' frameworks, there have been long-running constitutional impediments to Japan deploying military forces outside its own immediate territory. It is precisely this impediment to further NATO-Japan interaction that the Japanese government has been removing during 2015.
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Introduction

Couched in high flowing rhetoric from North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) figures about 'Japan, the country in Asia with which NATO has the longest-standing relationship, a truly unique partner for the Alliance' (Erdmann, 2007). Japan stands as the longest-standing of NATO's officially designated 'Partners across the Globe'. Building on initial contacts in the early 1990s, interaction on common security interests has now become more regular and structured, with some tangible

cooperation ensuing. As China rises and Russia resurges, both NATO and Japan are looking at each other more than ever. At the start of 2015 Tsuneo Watanabe asked 'why is sharing fundamental values with NATO important for Japan's security policy?'; to which the answer for him was that 'in short, it lends legitimacy to Japan's efforts to play a larger role in regional and world security' (Watanabe, 2015, p. 1). An unnamed NATO official told him that this twofold coupling of *legitimacy and capability* was what NATO was looking for in its outreach to Asian partners like Japan (Watanabe, 2015, p. 1).

This study goes from past to present and future. Consequently, the first part looks at how the Japan-NATO relationship has developed, the second part looks at what their relationship has now developed into and the conclusion considers where the relationship is likely to go.

The Process

Cold war parallelism

During the Cold War there was little specific and tangible cooperation between Japan and NATO. Japan's security horizons were focussed on cross-Pacific bilateral linkage with the United States, while NATO formed its own collective bloc centred on the cross-Atlantic partnership between the United States and West European countries. Their common US linkages made them cousins rather than partners, related but at a distance. Geographically their zones of operation and focus were also different. In strategic, security and military terms, NATO was focussed on the North-Atlantic/Europe zone, as laid down in its own 1950 *North Atlantic Treaty* Articles 5 and 6, while Japan's horizons were in practice focussed on East Asia. Not only did they have similar challenge – the Soviet Union, but they had similar values, liberal democracy. But this represented parallelism of interests and values, they 'remained separate cogs of the containment mechanism set up with regard to the Soviet Union' (Venning, 2012), with little interaction in terms of institutional structures or operations. Japanese defence ministers visited NATO headquarters in 1979, 1981 and 1984 but that was *ad hoc*. NATO figures did not visit Japan, not through ill will but just because Japan was not on NATO's strategic radar. The United States and Japanese think tanks could agree on that there were 'common security interests' (Johnson, 1981) between NATO and Japan, but this had no official structuring or framework.

Post-cold war dialogue

As Tsuruoka (2013) notes, 'it was only after the end of the Cold War, with the disappearance of the common threat [namely the Soviet Union], that Japan and

NATO somewhat ironically began to make some attempt at developing their relations' (p. 1). A dialogue phase emerged in the 1990s. The biannual *Japan-NATO Security Conference* mechanism was convened in Belgium in July 1990, with Taro Nakayama, Foreign Minister of Japan formally received at NATO headquarters by its Secretary General Manfred Worner. Fukuda's (1995) sense of the 3rd *NATO-Japan Security Conference* held in October 1994 was that 'a close dialogue between us will serve our common interests'. The Deputy Secretary General Sergio Balanzino argued in March 1997, at the 4th *NATO-Japan Security Conference* in Tokyo that 'the relationship between NATO and Japan is a natural and logical one … in the aftermath of the Cold War. Although our focus of activity is in different parts of the world we have common interests' but it was primarily a discursive exercise of 'comparing notes with our friends in the Pacific' (Balanzio, 1997). Some *ad hoc* high level visits were initiated in the early 1990s. In such a vein, for the first time the chairman of the Joint Staff Council of Japan's Self-Defence Forces went to NATO headquarters in Brussels in 1991. On the political front, the NATO Secretary-General Manfred Worner visited Tokyo in September 1991 to address the Japan Institute for International Affairs, which was followed by a trip from Japan's Defence Minister to Brussels in 1992.

Japanese officials were cautious in 1992, 'these dialogues and contacts to date have not gone beyond a general exchange of views serving only to enhance mutual understanding' (Satoh, 1992). Satoh's (1992) sense was that 'the post-Cold War world will need international cooperation … and political dialogue between Japan and NATO must be a part of any such process'. A sense of the limited nature of NATO-Japan relations at the start of the 1990s was evident in Satoh's (1992) judgement that 'it is timely to deepen the political dialogue between Japan and NATO through more regular meetings, meetings which could possibly be at the level of foreign ministers'. A formal *High Level Consultation* mechanism was initiated on such lines in 1993, on an annual/bi-annual security conference basis. These particular Japan-NATO mechanisms set up in 1990 and 1993 preceded the wider *Partnership for Peace* (PfP) mechanisms that NATO announced in 1994 for a range of countries.

This sort of discursive interaction was maintained by the visit of NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana to Japan in October 1997. The focus of his talks was on action by NATO in Europe and on generalised discussion with Japan. He looked to the future for an extended relationship:

> We can improve and extend our contacts. Greater and more regular contacts between NATO Headquarters and senior members of the Japanese government in order to keep each other informed of developments of mutual concern … Exchanges of information on a regular basis would be very useful and in our mutual interest. My staff at NATO Headquarters stands ready to meet with your representatives in Brussels on this and other issues as often as necessary (Solana, 1997).

Specific existing mechanisms were praised 'our biennial NATO-Japan Security Conference, which provides yet another opportunity for us to carry on our discussions' (Solana, 1997). By 1999, at the 5th *NATO-Japan Security Conference*, held in Brussels, the new Secretary-General George Robertson showed a continuing sense of both countries operating in their own areas, 'the end of the Cold War has affected Europe and Asia in very different ways', with the mantra repeated that 'although our focus of activity is in different parts of the world, we have many points of common interest' expressed 'through a growing NATO-Japan dialogue' (Robertson, 1999). In retrospect, this 1990s decade still represented a phase of 'dialogue between officials, with little concrete cooperation' (Tsuruoka, 2011a, p. 62).

NATO-led bombing action in 1999 against Serbia in the Kosovo conflict showed the limits of NATO-Japanese interaction (Gilson, 2000). On the one hand, Japan's liaison with the organisation did enable the Japanese government to be informed in advance of NATO's general bombing plans, but on the other hand this was by a mere 20 min. On the one hand, Japan's official position was that it 'understood' the use of force by NATO, but on the other hand the government continued to call for a peaceful non-military resolution (*Japan Times*, 1999). A sign of practical demarcation was Robertson's acknowledgement and appreciation at the 5th *NATO-Japan Security Conference* that NATO military action (*Operation Allied Force*) in Kosovo in 1999 had been complemented by Japanese financial pledges at the end of 1999 of US$160 million to the ensuing peacebuilding reconstruction projects.

Post-9/11 'partnership'

The *9/11* Al Qaeda attacks on New York pulled NATO out of its previous focus on Europe and the Mediterranean (Robertson, 2002a). Consequently, the NATO Reykjavik Foreign Ministers Meeting in May 2002 identified international terrorism as a global issue rather than as a domestic or regional issue (Ruhle, 2003). The May meeting, and the following Prague Summit in November 2002, made a point of signalling NATO's readiness to look further afield for taking action and seeking like-minded states to cooperate with. On similar lines, Japan's *Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law* was passed in October 2001, which allowed the Japanese navy to give refuelling support for Western forces being deployed into Afghanistan, as well as carrying out interdiction patrol duties. This is why some commentators consider that 'the September 11, 2001 attack on the US was a catalyst for greater Japan-NATO cooperation' (Schriver and Ma, 2013, p. 5).

NATO's then Secretary-General, emphasised that the 2002 Summit decisions required that NATO 'be prepared to go out of area instead of out of business' (Robertson, 2003). The Riga Summit in 2006 further pushed a NATO role in Afghanistan and Darfur, its formal *Declaration* talking of 'expeditionary operations far from home territory' (NATO, 2006). NATO has not only moved from a North

Atlantic and European framework to a global framework, but it has also moved from a reactive to pre-emptive setting, and had set up reconstruction mandates for the future. NATO's 2010 *Strategic Concept* asserted that 'crises and conflicts beyond NATO's borders can pose a direct threat to the security of Alliance territory and populations', so that 'NATO will therefore engage, where possible and when necessary, to prevent crises, manage crises, stabilize post-conflict situations and support reconstruction' (NATO, 2010b). The inclusion of 'pre-emptive action' has become part of NATO's anticipatory interpretation of 'self-defence' (Yost, 2007).

There has also been a maritime shift by NATO, with its 'new operational horizons' (Ruiz, 2007) and interest in securing the wider 'global commons' (Smith-Windsor, 2009) culminating in NATO's *Alliance Maritime Strategy* released in 2011 (NATO, 2011). This maritime strategy has taken NATO out of its Atlantic-Mediterranean waters wider afield into the Indian Ocean (Bhadrakumar, 2008; Alderwick and Giegerich, 2010), where it is encountering similar outreach by Japan (Jain, 2003; Kotani, 2011).

As talk of a *Global NATO* emerged (Robertson, 2002b; Daalder and Goldgeier, 2006), which pointed to a NATO that was global in operation if not in formal membership, Japan became one of NATO's designated *Contact Countries* in 2004 at the Istanbul Summit. This was a category for non-member countries that NATO was ready to work with in a formal regularised way. The NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer's trip to Tokyo in April 2005 brought stronger practical rhetoric:

> Geography may once have separated us, but common values and interests now unite us more strongly than ever before. The fact that we are both prepared to protect and promote those values and interests makes us natural partners in upholding international stability. And that is why I see a great future for the NATO-Japan relationship (Scheffer, 2005).

In this post-Cold War, post-9/11, world, the Secretary-General told his Japanese audience that 'in tackling new threats, we are keen to work more closely together with countries that are even further a field, including very much your country, Japan' (Scheffer, 2005). Military cooperation beckoned, 'increasingly, our military forces may be called upon to work together to defend our common interests' (Scheffer, 2005). The Secretary-General thought that 'the fight against terrorism and WMD [weapons of mass destruction] proliferation' were 'important areas in which I believe we should work more closely together' (Scheffer, 2005). The Assistant Secretary-General, Martin Erdmann, was similarly ready in 2007 to call Japan a 'natural partner' for NATO, 'we have many common interests. Our challenge is to continue to turn these common interests into common action. And I am confident that, together, we will meet that challenge' (Erdmann, 2007).

One new NATO-Japan developments was military-to-military links, signalled as General Hajime Massaki, Chairman Joint Staff Council, visited NATO headquarters in May 2005. Japanese participation in the Senior Officers Course run at the NATO

Defence College in Rome also started in 2005. Such officers have tended to be posted to NATO countries as military attaches. Further military-to-military links were reflected in the Chairman of NATO's Military Committee visit to Japan in January 2008 at the invitation of the Japanese Defence Ministry.

On the political side, a quickening of tempo on the Japanese side was evident when Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Aso attended the North Atlantic Council meeting in Brussels in May 2006, the first Japanese foreign minister ever to do so. He pinpointed two new shifts in the post-Cold War setting; first that 'September 11th, 2001 [*9/11*], I believe was a dawn of a new era', and second that 'what is new in this region is the rise of China' (Aso, 2006a). Looking forward, his sense was of aspiration and of potential, 'down the road, it is my belief that we will eventually discover how we can cooperate not only in policy coordination but also in operational areas as Japan and NATO continue to deepen mutual understanding' (Aso, 2006a). The conceptual underpinning for Japanese policy was Aso's *Arc of Freedom and Prosperity* framework. He defined this area as bounded by NATO and Japan, an 'area, which forms the shape of an arc as it loosely traces the outer rim of the Eurasian continent' (Aso, 2007a). It was no coincidence that this arc surrounded the emerging Russia–China block in a geographical and geopolitical fashion. He also, in discussing the application of this arc, pointed out how 'East [Japan] heads West, and West [NATO] heads East', and 'with wings thus spread to fly, it is no longer a rarity to see Japan and NATO working side by side, undertaking efforts in places from the Indian Ocean to Afghanistan' (Aso, 2006b). This outreach to NATO was in part a way to strengthen links with the United States, 'making an approach to NATO is another way of strengthening Japan's relations with the United States', for although Japan has seen the United States only through the Pacific, the Japan–US alliance will be more durable if we embrace through the Atlantic via Europe' (Aso, 2007b, p. 19)

By this time, Aso had gone from being Foreign Minister in Junichiro Koizumi's administration to remaining as Foreign Minister in Shinzo Abe's first administration that ran from 2006 to 2007, and which saw a shift forward in NATO-Japanese relations (Ikegami, 2007). Abe's own address to the North Atlantic Council in January 2007 was the first by a Japanese Prime Minister. Abe's speech followed the internal NATO deliberations of the previous year, 'my congratulations are due for the success of the summit in Riga. I welcome the commitment of NATO leaders to enhance links with non-NATO democracies, such as Japan' (Abe, 2007). For his part, it was a question for Abe that 'Japan is eager to collaborate with NATO' (Abe, 2007). He not only stressed the participation in various NATO non-military operations in Afghanistan but also stressed Japan's own regional concerns. The explicit message for NATO from Abe (2007) was to make its position clear on North Korea, the implicit message was also to warn of China, 'we must understand, however, that there are some uncertainties surrounding China, such as its increasing defense expenditures and continued lack of transparency. We need to pay close attention to the future of this nation'. Following Abe's visit, a formal *Tailored*

Cooperation Package (TCP) was drawn up between NATO and Japan in March 2007, whose purpose was to arrange Japanese civilian aid in Afghanistan that would complement NATO's military effort. In turn, Abe's Defence Minister visited NATO headquarters in May 2007, with a reciprocal visit by 22 parliamentarians of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to Tokyo in June 2007. Japanese figures were clear that 'Japan's security policy is now pointing in a new direction as shown by the redefinition of the Self-Defense Forces' international activities as part of their primary missions' in which 'Japan is still deliberating ways to actually implement this international contribution, and Japan-NATO military cooperation is part of this deliberation' (Magosaki, 2007).

NATO officials recognised this increasing convergence. In the wake of Abe's visit the previous month, Martin Erdmann the NATO Assistant Secretary-General was ready in March 2007 to call Japan a *natural partner* for NATO, since 'we have many common interests. Our challenge is to continue to turn these common interests into common action. And I am confident that, together, we will meet that challenge' (2007). Scheffer's official trip to Japan in December 2007 brought his comments that 'NATO and Japan share an increasingly overlapping security agenda and are working ever more closely together to meet a range of common challenges' (Scheffer, 2007). This represented a move forward from the earlier limited emphasis on dialogue as a process. Japan's wider engagement was welcomed by the NATO Secretary-General, 'it is of key interest to all the NATO Allies that Japan is willing to make its contribution to security and stability, not just here in the Asia-Pacific region, but in the wider world as well' (Scheffer, 2007). Scheffer's trip also brought a *Joint Statement* with the Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, the first of its kind, in which both figures agreed that 'the long-standing Japan-NATO relations have entered a new phase' (Japan-NATO, 2007).

Nevertheless, the collapse of the Abe administration in September 2007, caused in part by his failure to extend the refuelling operations of the Japanese navy in the Indian Ocean (Tanter, 2007), resulted in a slowing down in this process of strengthening Japan-NATO links. Although the Japanese navy was sent back into the Indian Ocean in January 2008, its scope was narrower under the *Replenishment Support Special Measures Law* than had been the case under the 2001 *Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law* (Tanter, 2008). In power from 2009 to 2012, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) stressed non-military actions even more strongly and focussed more generally on East Asia (Hatoyama, 2009). One sign of that was the DPJ decision in January 2010 to terminate the refuelling operations in the Indian Ocean.

Nevertheless, some momentum had been established in NATO-Japan relations. Cooperation between Japan and NATO in Afghanistan that had been set up in the TCP agreement of March 2007 was maintained. Japan's deployment of warships on anti-piracy duties in the Gulf of Aden moved from parallel deployment in 2009 to some active cooperation with NATO forces in 2010. In April 2009, Japan signed up

to the NATO Trust Fund in Azerbaijan set up to clear mines, as well as agreeing to contribute to NATO's *Explosive Remnants of War and Medical Rehabilitation* PfP project in Georgia. A cyber-intelligence agreement was also signed in 2010, which was an interesting example of NATO's competency to sign external agreements. The Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto visited NATO Headquarters in May 2011 and met the Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. At the time, Gilles Vander Ghinst from the Partnership Section at NATO headquarters judged that 'Japan has become de facto partner, although we don't have any formal arrangement … we're adjusting the strategic concept to meet the reality' (Tokyo Foundation, 2011).

The re-election of Shinzo Abe in December 2012 brought renewed impetus to the NATO-Japan relationship (Penn, 2013). An unpublicised letter was delivered from Abe to Rasmussen in January 2013 by Katsuyuki Kawai. Its contents were not released, but were generally understood to have contained overt warnings about North Korea and China (Mei, 2013). In response, Rasmussen visited Japan in April 2013, his first as NATO Secretary, for talks with Abe and top Japanese officials on security issues of shared concern, as well as opportunities for deeper cooperation. Rasmussen's visit to Japan in 2013 saw him using the mantra of Japan and NATO being *natural partners*:

> Together we help to protect our mutual interests, and enhance peace and security in our own regions, and beyond. NATO and Japan share the same commitment to freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. And we share the commitment to protect those values (Rasmussen, 2013).

Acknowledgements were paid by him to Japan, 'let me take this opportunity to thank you for the considerable and consistent support that Japan has provided to NATO these past 20 years' (Rasmussen, 2013). This was exemplified by him in the shape of Japanese help in Balkans reconstruction, mine clearing operations in Azerbaijan and anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, 'but it is in Afghanistan where much of Japan's assistance and support has been focused' (Rasmussen, 2013). His trip concluded with a *Joint Political Declaration* (NATO-Japan, 2013a), the first such political document between NATO and Japan, and a 'milestone' in the view of some commentators (Hribernik, 2013, p. 1). The *Joint Political Declaration* immediately asserted how 'shared values and common security challenges' were the 'foundation' for the relationship (Japan-NATO, 2013a). They also decided to set up a *Japan-NATO Joint Study Group on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief.*

A significant development in May 2014 was Abe's visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels to hold discussions with the Rasmussen and again address the North Atlantic Council. Rasmussen's welcome to Abe was warm. This visit 'demonstrates the role you have played in the deepening of the NATO-Japan partnership', and 'is all the more timely given the background of your new National Security Strategy, which emphasizes your vision for Japan's proactive contribution' (Rasmussen,

2014), to security matters in the world. The language used by Abe had moved up a notch from 2007, 'indeed we are more than simply "natural partners" that share fundamental values. We are also "reliable partners" corroborated by concrete actions' (Abe, 2014). General cooperation in the area of maritime security was officially stressed, given his view that 'Japan and NATO share responsibility in promoting the rule of law on the world's seas' (Abe, 2014). Abe's visit saw a, in effect post-Afghanistan, wide-ranging *Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme between Japan and NATO* agreement, which listed (3.1.1–3.1.7) cyber defence, humanitarian assistance, counter-terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, maritime security (especially counter piracy), conflict management and defence science and technology as 'priority areas for cooperation' (Japan-NATO, 2014).

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida's trip to NATO headquarters in January 2015 was not only a chance to meet the new NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, it was also a chance to reaffirm the trend towards 'practical cooperation, such as anti-piracy activities, which are vital for the trade of Japan and NATO member countries', and to reaffirm that 'NATO was a "reliable natural partner" for Japan that shares fundamental values and that Japan would more proactively act for the peace and prosperity of the world together with NATO' (MOFA, 2015a). Elsewhere, in that vein, Japan's official Representative to NATO, Masafumi Ishii, argued in January 2015 that Japan and NATO shared a number of common security challenges and interests, explicitly in terms of counter-piracy, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, but also perhaps implicitly in terms of encouraging China to adopt more genuine multilateral cooperation (Ishii, 2015). This points to his earlier discussion on Japan-NATO relations where he noted 'China is a rising power … This is not just an Asian problem but also a European one' (Tokyo Foundation, 2011, p. 2). The visit to Tokyo in September 2015 by the NATO Deputy Secretary-General, Alexander Vershbow, provided further opportunities for security discussions. Alongside Vershbow were the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, General Mirco Zuliani who met with Admiral Kawano, Chief of Staff of the Japanese Joint Staff and Major General Onozuka, Director of Strategic Plans and Policy. Zuliani welcomed how 'we see more opportunities to increase military to military cooperation, including through participation in exercises' (NATO, 2015), a development eased through Japan's *Peace and Security Preservation Legislation* then going through Parliament.

The Current Situation

Afghanistan

NATO's time in Afghanistan, running the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) 48-nation military effort since August 2003 has brought with it extended cooperation with Japan. Indeed, Paul (2013) argues that it was 'Afghanistan, which

was the catalyst for NATO and Japan for cooperation' (p. 1), whereas Schriver and Ma (2013) considered it a 'milestone' (p. 5). Owing to the restrictions found in Clause 9 of the Japanese Constitution, this cooperation could not involve Japanese troops on the ground, despite Abe's initial inclination to offer such military assistance. However, Japan financially linked into NATO's various civilian-reconstruction Trust Fund Projects, which was thanked by NATO officials (Vershbow, 2012) as being an 'important contribution'. Japan also participated in various NATO-sponsored high level meetings on Afghanistan, held at Bucharest in April 2008, Lisbon in November 2010 and Chicago in May 2012. The significance was that Japan was the only non-troop contributing country so invited. However, although NATO will remain in Afghanistan in a training capacity, the end of military combat deployments in Afghanistan by 2015 effectively ends this particular episode of Japan-NATO coordinated action.

Piracy

Japan has operated since 2009 in the Gulf of Aden (Black, 2012; Prakash, 2013) Following rising incidents of piracy operating out from Somalia into the Gulf of Aden, and threatening trade to and from the Indian Ocean, NATO's *Operation Ocean Shield* has deployed naval forces there since 2008 (Muratore, 2010). A Japanese naval presence *Escort Division* was sent in 2009, with both NATO and Japan remaining involved. NATO and Japanese maritime cooperation has been further increased through Japan joining the *Combined Task Force 151* anti-piracy mechanism established in 2009. Although NATO and Japanese units generally operate separately, there has been some direct cooperation between Japanese and NATO units against pirate vessels (NATO, 2010a). Military-to-military links have also been pursued in the field of operation. In such a vein, NATO *Ocean Shield* Force Commander, Henning Amundsen, met with the Commander of the Japanese Escort Division 6, Captain Tsutomu Iwasawa, on board JS *Akebono* in the Gulf of Aden in August 2013. NATO comments were fulsome on the visit, 'the Japanese Escort Division provides an important and steady contribution to the international counter-piracy effort. It is important for NATO to maintain a close relationship' (NATO, 2013b). This was again typified in the onboard meeting of the commander of JS *Samidare* and the commander of NATO's counter piracy task force in December 2013. Ironically the international anti-piracy efforts have also brought some cooperation in these waters between NATO and Chinese naval units, and indeed between Japanese and Chinese naval units.

Abe's visit to NATO headquarters in May 2014 brought renewed emphasis on this arena. More specifically, he argued that post-Afghanistan NATO-Japan cooperation, 'strengthening our cooperation within anti-piracy efforts off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden will be the touchstone' (Abe, 2014). Tangible actions were

signalled by his declaration that 'today, Secretary General Rasmussen and I newly decided that Japan will engage in joint exercises with the countries participating in [NATO's] Operation Ocean Shield' (Abe, 2014). Such formal joint operations were conducted between NATO and Japanese units deployed in the Gulf of Aden in September 2014, complete with Japanese comments that NATO was a 'reliable natural partner' with whom 'Japan intends to continue advancing specific cases of cooperation with NATO in a broad range of fields' (Japan, 2014c).

Cyber-intelligence

As the face of warfare and of security has moved into new areas, so has Japan-NATO cooperation. With widespread concerns being raised over cyber espionage, an intelligence pact was signed in March 2010, in the shape of *Agreement between the Government of Japan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on the Security of Information and Material*. This has been seen as 'a foundation for deeper dialogue and practical cooperation between Japan and NATO' (Tsuruoka, 2011b, p. 34). Its preamble was classic; 'Japan and NATO share common values, as well as a mutual sense of responsibility towards global security challenges', and that they had 'agreed to consult on political and security-related issues of common interest and expand and intensify cooperation in these fields' (Japan-NATO, 2010). Though not overtly aimed at any other state, it is no coincidence that both NATO and Japanese defence establishments have been subject to cyber-espionage in recent years, with the finger pointed at China on various occasions.

Science and technology

As the world's third largest economy Japan's high-tech edge is clear cut. Application of this expertise into the defence field is an emerging area for NATO-Japan cooperation. In this vein, during June 2013, a delegation from NATO's *Emerging Security Challenges* Division met senior government representatives and experts in Tokyo to discuss practical cooperation on cyber defence, counter-terrorism and non-proliferation. Opportunities for collaborating on responses to such challenges through science and innovation were stressed in the visit. The focal point of the visit was a *Symposium & Information Day*, jointly hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and NATO's *Science for Peace and Security* Programme. Japan's participation in the *Conference of National Armaments Directors* is significant given this is the senior NATO committee responsible for promoting the cooperation between countries in the armaments field, and brings together the top national officials responsible for defence procurement in NATO member and partner countries like Japan to consider the political, economic and technical aspects of the development and procurement of equipment for NATO forces. In such a vein, in May

2015, Japanese naval officers travelled to a NATO meeting in The Hague to learn more about the 12-country NATO consortium programme to develop and share the costs of the advanced SeaSparrow missile, an advanced ship-borne weapon designed to destroy anti-ship sea-skimming missiles and attack aircraft.

Russia

NATO-Japanese positions on Russia have shown three different settings in which similar stances have been taken. In the first phase, the Cold War years from the 1950s to the 1980s, NATO and Japan were united in generally seeing the Soviet Union as a neighbouring threat in ideological and geopolitical terms. In the second phase, during the 1990s, Japan and NATO both saw Russia as a post-Soviet neighbour trying to democratise and capitalise. Consequently, a degree of common political outreach and economic support for Russian reforms were forthcoming from NATO and Japan. In the third phase, Putin's increasing assertiveness in the Caucasus and then in the Ukraine cooled NATO and Japanese perceptions of Russia. This was clear in the Joint Press Conference held by Rasmussen and Abe in 2014. Rasmussen pulled the implications westwards to NATO, 'today we are facing the gravest crisis to European security since the end of the Cold War. This crisis has serious implications for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole' (Rasmussen-Abe, 2014). Abe pulled it eastwards to Asia; 'we will not tolerate any change of status quo through intimidation or coercion of force … This is not only applicable to Europe or Ukraine. This is applicable to East Asia' (Rasmussen-Abe, 2014).

How far NATO and Japan will practically work together on either flank of Russia remains to be seen, but there is an obvious tacit geopolitical understanding to be made there between Japan and NATO. It was no coincidence that in October 2014, NATO Assistant Secretary-General Alexander Vershbow extolled the usefulness of NATO's partnership agreements in Asia with Mongolia, South Korea and Japan. He argued that such frameworks 'allow NATO allies and partners to come together, to come together and share views, identify areas of mutual interest, and cooperate on a practical level', before going on to note how with regard to Russia 'the picture today is very gloomy. With its reckless actions against Ukraine and its intimidation of many of its other neighbors, Russia has left the path of cooperation in favor of confrontation and aggression' (Vershbow, 2014).

China

Abe's warnings about Russian action were partly because of fears of China taking similar unilateral assertive action in East Asia. Japanese and NATO stances on China are not quite the same. A degree of distancing between their two positions on China is

apparent. Although 'Japan has lobbied NATO to increase its engagement in Asia to act as a counterweight to China's rise' (Fallon, 2013), NATO has been caution of extending further eastwards into the Asia-Pacific in such a fashion.

On the one hand, Abe's address to NATO in 2014 included his claim, and perhaps hope, that 'in particular, China's foreign policy approach and its military developments have become issues of concern for the international community' (Abe, 2014), including NATO (Asahi Shimbun, 2014). It was partly a matter of China's amount of spending, which was deliberately given comparisons with NATO levels

> Expenditures have now become roughly equivalent to the total amount of defense expenditures of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, which are leading member countries of NATO. What's more, its expansion of defense expenditures lacks transparency without clarification of the breakdown (Abe, 2014).

It was also partly a question of perceived offensive intentions. Such warnings to NATO are deliberate, in effect to get NATO more involved in Japan's own careful element of balancing towards China. Here 'Japan has long wanted NATO to play a larger role in the unfolding Asian security space, hoping the alliance might diplomatically "lean'' upon China from the west', much 'as Japan leaned on the Soviet Union from the east in the Cold War days' (Lyon, 2014).

On the other hand, NATO's position on China is a touch more delicate. To some extent Rasmussen on the surface side-stepped mounting Japanese concerns in his trip to Japan, 'on China, we do not consider China a actual direct threat to NATO Allies' (Rasmussen, 2013). However, this is not to say it could not be a threat to NATO partners like Japan, or that China might not become a threat in the future. Hence, his delicate caution that 'of course, we have taken note of the fact that the Chinese defence budget has increased substantially during recent years', and 'from an overall strategic perspective, of course, it may have a long-term impact on the global power balance that we are cutting defence budgets while China [is] … increasing their defence budget' (Rasmussen, 2013). Nevertheless, the emphasis was on engagement but actually with a note of uncertainty; 'we hope that China will use its increasing influence on the international scene in a peaceful way and in a constructive way to maintain international peace, security and stability', for which 'I would very much like to see a strengthened dialogue between NATO and China … a more structured dialogue. We have some dialogue. But it could be enhanced' (Rasmussen, 2013). If we push at such comments, *hopes* for China to act in a peaceful constructive way is tacit indication of concerns that it might not, and desire for strengthening dialogue is another tacit admission that it is rather weak now. Low level NATO-China dialogue has been initiated, but at level of establishing trust rather than any tangible cooperation (CMO, 2015). Meanwhile China's own arrival in the Mediterranean is becoming an uncomfortable development for NATO (Lin, 2014).

Future Cooperation

International politics of NATO-Japan cooperation collides with domestic politics of Japan. Generally, *collective self-defence* is an 'inherent right' under Article 51 of the UN Charter, and is the cornerstone of the NATO Alliance under Article 5 of the *North Atlantic Treaty*. However, this is hampered under the Japanese Constitution with its Clause 9.1 (the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes) and Clause 9.2 (to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential will never be maintained) restrictions. Back in 2006, Nishihara reckoned that such constitutional restrictions meant that Japan could not be a full global partner for NATO nor a new ally, though it could 'still be a useful partner' (Nishihara, 2006, p. 39). In a practical sense, this constitutional impediment blocked Abe's inclination in his first premiership of 2006–2007 towards deployment of Japanese troops in support of NATO's ISAF operation in Afghanistan, whereas neighbouring South Korea, a fellow *Contact Country* of NATO's, that did not have such constitutional restrictions, was able to deploy troops into Afghanistan under NATO's ISAF's framework.

Eight years on and it was precisely Abe's attempt to amend the Constitution, so as to remove that bar, that was a noticeable development in Japanese politics (Yoshida, 2014). An *Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security* that Abe had set up in May 2007, previously delivered an initial report in June 2008, which 'called for changes to be made to constitutional interpretation, so as to permit the exercise of the right of collective self-defence and participation in the collective security measures' (Japan, 2014a, pp. 1–2). An immediate upshot of Abe's return to office, Abe were the Cabinet Guidelines of July 2014 under which Japan's definition of permissible self-defence was widened in clause 3.3, 'the Government has reached a conclusion that not only when an armed attack against Japan occurs but also when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs' (Japan, 2014b). These developments were behind comments by Ishii (2014), Japan's official Representative in Brussels to NATO that 'by increasing its activities in the field of security … Japan has also entered a new page regarding its relations with NATO'. Having won re-election in December 2014, Abe passed a new Security Bill in September 2015 that would give legal effect to the Cabinet Guidelines, and enable greater military cooperation with foreign partners.

Consequently, the future is lining up whereby with both parties having pushed (NATO) or now pushing (Japan) past their constraints on the geographic (NATO) and military (Japan) scope of operations, NATO and Japan are set to move towards fuller partnership of action. Limits will remain in this process. Any formal NATO guarantee to Japan's security remains unlikely, given that under Article 5 of the *North Atlantic Treaty* such mutual action is designed for 'members' rather than 'partners'. Instead, military guarantees for Japan remain served through the existing

bilateral US–Japan alliance, which continues to strengthen in the face of China. NATO outreach to Japan does not step on US toes, since the United States is a lead member of NATO, and since the US strategy of increasing Japan's contributions to global security is served by NATO's growing links with Japan. Here, NATO cooperation with Japan is envisaged in conventional, especially maritime and technological terms, rather than any Japanese nuclear capability, which remains unlikely to be implemented in the near future because of constraints of domestic Japanese politics.

However, such conventional cooperation addresses the capabilities as well as the legitimacy angle that was mentioned at the start of this article, and at the start of 2015, by Tsuneo Watanabe. Strategic convergence has been overlaid with increasing operational cooperation between these partners from afar. In such a vein, Japan's participation in NATO's Crisis Management Exercise in March 2015, the 19th of its kind, was the first one that Japan participated in. It was described as focussing on 'maritime security' through 'a table top exercise which is aimed at enhancing capabilities for response from NATO and cooperation with partners' (MOFA, 2015b). A formal delegation from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly visited Japan a week later. Their comments that 'Japan and the Euro-Atlantic region are far from each other geographically, but in terms of values, we are incredibly close' (NPA, 2015) was warm, but perhaps lost sight of current cooperation in cyber-intelligence, and in overlapping geographical areas like the Indian Ocean.

Nevertheless, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation's record that 'discussions centred on the impact of assertive Chinese and Russian policies' (NPA, 2015) provided a significant undertone for current post-Cold War strategic convergence between NATO and Japan. Certainly, the decision by China to send warships to participate in Russia's *Joint Sea 2015* exercise being held in the Black Sea in May 2015 was something that NATO was not particularly happy with and which Japan could argue that reflected its earlier warnings to NATO on the direction of Chinese policy. Conversely, Russian announcements in October 2015 that it was increasing its military presence on the disputed South Kurils/Northern Territories islands was something that Japan was not particularly happy about, and which Japan could argue showed same sort of Russian shadow that had worried NATO in the Ukraine.

About the Author

David Scott taught for 15 years at Brunel University, where his interests and teaching focussed on various aspects of Asia-Pacific international relations, the impact of China and India in the international system. A study on NATO-India relations appeared in *International Politics* in 2012. A prolific author, various studies have also appeared on Japan–US relations, on EU–China relations, on the South Korea–India strategic partnership, on India's role in the Indian Ocean, the Asia-Pacific and

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