
ASEAN-Japan Defense Cooperation: Overcoming History and Charting New Possibilities

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THE STORY OF JAPAN in the second half of the 20th century is often told and seen in the context of its economic recovery and subsequent rise to be one of the leading global economies. Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda's income doubling plan in the 1960s not only pulled Japan from the doldrums of the post-war economic quagmire, it also galvanized the nation and set in motion a process that would catapult Japan into the economic stratosphere. By the 1980s, the island nation stood proudly as the world grappled with the possibility of "Japan as number one." Japan's rise was indeed the main story of the late 20th century, although fears of Japan overtaking the United States as the world's leading economy were put to rest when the Japanese economic juggernaut decelerated in the late 1980s. But what is often missing in this narrative is the success of diplomacy in rebuilding bridges and relations with Southeast Asia in the postwar period.

Putting trade, investment, and official development assistance (ODA) to effective use, Japan was diligent in cultivating friends and partners in the region. Japan was one of the earliest countries to recognize ASEAN, and it became a dialogue partner in 1973. However, it was not all smooth sailing. Japan's economic success was interpreted as a form of neomercantilism at best or neoimperialism at worst. These frustrations were manifested in demonstrations and riots in the Southeast Asian countries visited by Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka in 1974. In marked contrast to the Tanaka visit, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's tour of Asia in January 2013 was warmly embraced and he received an enthusiastic welcome in Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. Japan's engagement with ASEAN is multifaceted and comprehensive, but it has consciously refrained from any significant defense

cooperation and linkages with the region to date. This restraint was in keeping with the first tenet of the Fukuda Doctrine, which states that “Japan rejects the role of military power.”

This chapter argues that Japan should rethink its preference for a limited role in the defense domain and work toward enhancing its cooperation with ASEAN. It posits that Japan should undertake an incremental approach to engage ASEAN and focus on “soft security” areas of cooperation, such as in the defense industry, maritime security (search and rescue operations, anti-piracy, and coast guard), humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and nonproliferation. It also argues that Japan should go beyond the “old model” of extending aid and assistance and graduate to active participation in defense cooperation by endeavoring to institutionalize its cooperation with ASEAN.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

Japan’s military misadventures during the 1930s and 1940s left an indelible mark on its national psyche and political culture. To avert a relapse into militarism, Japan inaugurated a constitution that forsakes the use of force in the settlement of disputes and instituted legal and political constraints on the defense establishment. Article 9—from which the nomenclature “peace constitution” derives—remains the bedrock and reference point guiding Japanese defense and security policy. Article 9 reads as follows:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, 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.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

The Japan Self-Defense Force (SDF) was formed in 1954 and had to contend with several unsuccessful legal actions challenging its legitimacy. The aversion to all things military was strong in Japan, to the extent that it was only in 2007 that the Japan Defense Agency was upgraded to full ministerial status. While the SDF has gained acceptance, its mission is limited to a defensive role. Discussions are ongoing in 2013 to allow the SDF to carry out limited collective defense actions when the SDF is operating in close proximity with the US Navy. Except when authorized by the Diet, the SDF is confined to an area of operation in the “surrounding

areas” of Japan. To reinforce the defensive nature of the SDF, the government adopted executive orders to ban arms exports, limited the defense budget to 1 percent of GDP, promulgated the three non-nuclear principles, and banned offensive weapons. These measures were aimed at keeping the SDF within a defensive mold and minimized its power projection capabilities. The limitations on territorial defense also meant that the SDF had few opportunities to collaborate with its ASEAN counterparts. The annual Cobra Gold exercises were Japan’s primary means to interact and collaborate with Southeast Asian militaries. Since Malaysia joined the Cobra Gold exercises in 2011, Japan now has the opportunity to pursue defense diplomacy with four ASEAN militaries, the other three being Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand.

Japan is ever mindful and cautious not to enlarge its military footprint in the region. The Fukuda pledge that Japan will not be a military power was crafted to allay regional fears of a re-armed and militaristic Japan. By keeping the SDF at home, Japan seeks not only to bury the hatchet but also to avoid stoking fears of a revival of militarism. The now famous comment by former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew that sending Japanese troops overseas is akin to giving “liquor to an alcoholic” suggests that Tokyo’s cautiousness is not unfounded.

Japan has to carry the burden of its war legacy and account for its past aggressive policies. However, it should not allow its future with ASEAN to be boxed in by history. For a great many Southeast Asians, Japan’s wartime behavior is not a prime factor in their perceptions of Japan. In a six-nation survey conducted in 2008 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), 68.1 percent of the respondents acknowledged Japan’s aggressive actions in the 1940s, but stated that it is “not an issue now” (see table 1). It is notable that there has been a marked positive shift toward a more conciliatory stance among the six countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines,

Table 1. Perception in selected ASEAN countries of Japan’s actions during World War II

	Cannot forget the bad things Japan did	Japan did some bad things, but they are not an issue now	I have never considered it an issue	Don't know
Singapore	23.15	69.28	4.54	3.03
Malaysia	26.74	64.94	5.06	3.25
Thailand	13.84	68.27	13.36	4.53
Indonesia	18.14	69.56	5.36	6.93
Philippines	27.26	59.07	13.52	0.15
Vietnam	11.94	77.54	9.01	1.51
Total	20.2	68.1	8.54	3.20

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan (2008).

Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) toward Japan. For example, the percentage of Singaporean respondents who do not consider Japan's wartime conduct to be an issue improved from 47 percent in 1997 to 69.28 percent in 2008. Correspondingly, the percentage of respondents who continue to regard this issue as significant dropped in all of the ASEAN states covered in the survey. In fact, the survey, which was carried out at three separate times (1997, 2002, and 2008), showed a clear pattern that suggests World War II is becoming increasingly less salient. The percentage of Southeast Asians who harbor strong feelings and memories of Japan's past transgressions fell from the period when the survey was first conducted in 1997 to the latest survey in 2008. In Singapore, the response dropped from 41 percent in 1997 to 23 percent in 2008, while in Thailand the response dropped from 24 percent to 14 percent.¹

These surveys reflect the fact that the strength of ASEAN's relations with Japan has improved markedly since the 1970s. As on-going efforts such as the Japan–East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths program serve to strengthen people-to-people ties between Japan and ASEAN, this important bilateral relationship is increasingly founded on instrumental and functional imperatives, and less on emotive historical memories.

As significant as the fading of wartime memories is, it does not pave the way for Japan to expand its defense cooperation with the region. In the 2008 MOFA survey, respondents from the six ASEAN states listed economic and technical cooperation, trade promotion and private investment, peacekeeping, cultural exchanges, and anti-terrorism actions as the top five priority areas where Japan can contribute to ASEAN.

When asked to choose two areas in which they would like Japan to contribute in the ASEAN region, the area of cooperation that was the least preferred by those ASEAN residents surveyed was "increased military presence to maintain peace and security in the region." On average, only 6.1 percent of the survey participants responded favorably to the idea of Japan undertaking an increased military role in the region, and the general tone of support for such a role has been slipping since the survey was first conducted in 1997 (see table 2). There has been a significant shift of opinion in Malaysia, with the 20 percent favorable response in 1997 dropping to 2.13 percent in 2008. In Vietnam, the favorable impression also dropped by half, from 13 percent in 2002 to 6.41 percent in 2008. On the other hand, support in Indonesia and Singapore seems to be gaining momentum, albeit in small increments.

Taken together, the results of the survey paint contrasting pictures of ASEAN's views on Japan. On the one hand, it is clear that war memories do not resonate strongly. In general, Japan enjoys a high degree of trust in

Table 2: Receptivity to an increased Japanese military presence in Southeast Asia to maintain peace and security in the region (%)

	1997	2002	2008
Singapore	6	5	7.13
Malaysia	20	5	2.13
Thailand	9	3	2.3
Indonesia	4	8	10.34
Philippines	8	8	8.14
Vietnam	-	13	6.41
Average	9.4	7	6.1

Source: "Opinion Poll on Japan in Six ASEAN Countries," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan (2008).

ASEAN countries, with 44.3 percent of the respondents considering Japan to be a "trustworthy friend." On the other hand, a larger plurality of 48.5 percent views Japan as "trustworthy but with reservations." Part of ASEAN's hesitance is manifested in its aversion to an increased Japanese military presence in the region. This seeming contradiction could be reconciled if the rationale for a limited Japanese military footprint could be detached from the events of the 1940s. Keeping in mind that in the post-Cold War era ASEAN has not encountered any existential military threats, it then becomes immediately evident why ASEAN states acquired the proclivity to downplay any demonstrations of military power.

The barriers to Japan contributing meaningfully toward regional security are two-pronged. First, it has to win over a skeptical ASEAN and gain the region's support for the SDF's missions in Southeast Asia. Second, it has to navigate the perilous minefield of Japanese public opinion. The passage of the International Peace Cooperation Law (1992) and the Anti-Piracy Measures Law (2009), for example, suggests that defense cooperation is possible when there is broad national support. The strong criticism of Japanese inaction on liberating Kuwait in the wake of the Iraqi invasion was a game changer in opening the door for Japan to deploy military assets in support of international peace and security. The differentiation between the use of force for national aggrandizement and political-strategic gains on the one hand, and for the common good on the other, must be made clear. The latter is uncontroversial and would be supported by ASEAN, while the former is unlikely to receive much support in Japan or elsewhere. Notwithstanding Lee Kuan Yew's cautious reminder, ASEAN does not see Japan as a threat. One would be hard-pressed to locate any substantive elements of anti-Japanese sentiment in ASEAN. In fact, the case could be made that regional frustrations with Japan are likely to rise if it is perceived

to be hiding behind its constitutional veil and not playing a more active and constructive role in regional security.

It is understandable that ASEAN's older generation would continue to harbor a sense of suspicion toward Japan, but it would be a mistake to keep living in this time warp and not recognize the generational shift occurring throughout ASEAN. Japan should not be judged by its past behavior but by its contemporary policies and actions. Japan's war legacy is no longer the immovable stumbling block that it once was for Japan to undertake and initiate defense cooperation with ASEAN. However, this does not suggest that Japan has unlimited freedom to explore openings for defense cooperation. ASEAN's support will be contingent on the scope and modality of the proposed cooperation.

CONDITIONS FOR ASEAN-JAPAN DEFENSE COOPERATION

Japan's engagement with ASEAN in the defense sector must be managed delicately given the sensitivities on matters that pertain to territorial defense and sovereignty. Cooperation should be conceptualized and implemented in a manner that is amenable to ASEAN's interests and concerns. Fundamental to those concerns is the imperative to keep ASEAN at arm's length from major power rivalries. Japan should avoid the US strategic mistake of "pivoting" for the primary reason of increasing its influence and visibility in the region. Not without reason, the US pivot strategy is perceived in some quarters as an extension of the budding Sino-US competition for influence and primacy. Japan would do well to stay clear of actions that may be perceived as contributing to the "containment" of China. ASEAN does not want to be caught in the dilemma of having to choose sides, nor does it want to be caught in the crossfire of any major power rivalry in the region.

Related to ASEAN's aversion to power politics, Japan should steer clear of actions that may strengthen the US-led hub-and-spoke alliance system. Although Japan is a critical component of that security system, it should not seek nor contribute to the further consolidation and expansion of the system in Southeast Asia. This position is in keeping with the provisions of the Japanese constitution that—in spirit—forbid its participation in military alliances. Cooperation should not be a means to strengthen existing US-led bilateral alliances—formal or otherwise. On the contrary, Japan should focus on *soft*—as opposed to *hard*—security forms of defense cooperation.

Defense cooperation that includes “offensive”-oriented missions and war games should not be part of Japan’s engagement with ASEAN. War games are often a form of posturing and communicate an aggressive message to the intended party. Such actions drive suspicion and negative perceptions, and would not be a sustainable or useful foundation for ASEAN-Japan defense cooperation.

Concomitantly, Japan should step out of the American shadow in fostering defense cooperation with ASEAN. In addition to the imperative of keeping ASEAN above the fray of major power rivalry, Japan should engage ASEAN directly and not as an adjunct of the United States. ASEAN-Japan cooperation ought to be premised and conducted on the basis of the two sides’ mutually agreed upon interests, and not those of a third party. This is an opportunity for Japan to demonstrate and exercise its leadership in an area of cooperation that has not traditionally been a Japanese strong point. Besides, detaching the ASEAN-Japan defense cooperation framework from the US-Japan security alliance may garner better support from ASEAN for the simple reason that it does not bring the “US baggage” to the region.

Extreme care must be taken to ensure that the East China Sea issue is not linked to the South China Sea dispute. The dynamics that inform the East China Sea and the South China Sea are different, and it is thus best to avoid the temptation to establish a common platform—for which there is none—between the two issues. It would not be in Japan or ASEAN’s interest to collaborate on these two issues, as it may cause irreparable damage to both sides’ relations with China.

MODALITIES FOR COOPERATION

Comprehensive security is a conceptual tool that has guided the Japanese and ASEAN security policies. The broadening of security issues to include “nontraditional” threats and concerns has allowed for a multidimensional approach to peace and stability. Nevertheless, for the purpose of advancing ASEAN-Japan defense cooperation, common security may be a more useful analytical framework. Common security places a premium on the identification and targeting of threats that are pervasive and common to all. A threat that impinges on the security of one state will also imperil the interests of others. This guides us to focus on achieving a “security for” doctrine as opposed to the realist tradition of “security against.” Common security provides the theoretical and functional foundation to organize Japan’s defense cooperation and engagement with ASEAN. It addresses most—if not all—of the concerns raised in the aforementioned section.

Common security is nonconfrontational. It is inclusive and even opens the possibility of enlarging the web of cooperation to include third parties. Fundamentally, it highlights security threats and issues that are common to ASEAN and Japan, without privileging one party over another. This chapter applies the common security concept as it discusses the four areas of co-operation identified above: defense industry, maritime security (search and rescue operations, anti-piracy, and coast guard), humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and nonproliferation.

Defense Industry

Over the past two decades, ASEAN states have embarked on boosting their militaries to reflect the realities of the post–Cold War needs. For the most part, this was part of a transition to establish a credible conventional military capability. To optimize resources and to foster intraregional co-operation, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) in May 2011 established the ASEAN Defence Industry Collaboration (ADIC). In light of the Japanese cabinet decision in December 2011 to lift the arm exports and joint development ban that was initially introduced in 1967, Japan and ASEAN could explore a strategic partnership for collaboration within the ADIC framework.

The ADIC has not yet been able to optimize its synergies, primarily because ASEAN lacks sufficient depth, expertise, and experience in arms manufacturing and development. In contrast, the Japanese defense industry is mature and well developed, and it has the strong potential to serve as the anchor to kick-start the ADIC. The relaxation of arms exports and joint development provides Japan with an opportunity to break into the Asian arms market, which has heretofore been dominated by Western suppliers (see table 3). Japan should not squander this opportunity to promote regional defense industry cooperation by solely focusing on the pursuit of its own economic gains. It may be profitable to vie for a share of the Asian arms market, but to do so would be shortsighted.

Rather than focusing on profits, Japan should endeavor to support the ADIC by promoting joint production. For ASEAN, the obvious gain would be to acquire technological expertise and learn from Japanese defense contractors. For Japan, working with ASEAN would be the primary—and most important—payoff from the collaborative effort. Joint production and embedding Japan within the ASEAN defense industry would provide Japan the opportunity to work with ASEAN armed forces at the operational level and would serve to strengthen institutional ties between Japan and ASEAN.

Table 3: Suppliers of major conventional weapons to selected ASEAN states, 2007–2011

Recipient	Share of Global Arms Transfers (%)	Change in deliveries, 2002–06 to 2007–11 (%)	Main suppliers, 2007–2011 (share of recipient's transfers, %)		
			1st	2nd	3rd
Brunei	0.2	10,333	Germany (82%)	France (6%)	Denmark (4%)
					Netherlands (4%)
Indonesia	1.3	144	Netherlands (35%)	Russia (26%)	South Korea (22%)
Malaysia	2.4	281	Russia (42%)	Germany (21%)	France (12%)
Philippines	0.1	20	USA (90%)	Italy (4%)	UK (3%)
Singapore	4.0	293	USA (62%)	France (39%)	Germany (8%)
Vietnam	1.1	80	Russia (97%)	Ukraine (1%)	Romania (<0.5%)

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 281.

Maritime Security

Maritime security is a major point of convergence for Japan and ASEAN. The protection of the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) is vital to Japan's wellbeing given its heavy dependence on energy supplies and trade. Likewise, all but one ASEAN state have extensive maritime borders and thus a clear interest in maritime security. Cooperation in the maritime domain should begin with and focus on "soft security" issues and should avoid taking on "hard" issues such as overlapping maritime claims and territorial issues. Three issues that would be appropriate for cooperation are (a) search and rescue (SAR) operations, (b) anti-piracy measures, and (c) capacity-building for coastal operations.

SAR OPERATIONS: The waterways between the Indian and Pacific Oceans are some of the world's most vital and busiest. The possibility of a collision or incident at sea cannot be discounted and merits consideration and planning for regional cooperation. An agreed upon set of protocols to facilitate regional assistance would be useful and productive. The armed forces, and particularly the navies, are often the first responders to such contingencies. Indeed the navy is positioned to play an instrumental role in SAR operations. SAR is an untapped opportunity for defense cooperation that

has not received as much attention to date as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.

Search and rescue operations are complex, dangerous, and difficult. Few ASEAN states possess comprehensive capabilities to conduct SAR operations, especially involving naval assets. What happens when a distress signal comes from the navy, in particular from a stricken submarine? It is often overlooked that increasingly more ASEAN states have acquired sub-surface capabilities, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam (see table 4). Currently, five ASEAN states operate a total of 29 submarines. This number is expected to increase in the coming years to more than 40. Vietnam has the largest “in development” submarine program, with planned delivery of six Kilo-class submarines. Given the increasing number of submarines roaming the seas in the region, there is an urgent need for contingency planning for SAR operations in the event a submarine encounters difficulties or is damaged in the high seas.

Submarine SAR operations are highly technical and sophisticated and not many countries that operate submarines have such capabilities. Japan, which operates the largest submarine fleet in East Asia and has the most experience in sub-surface operations, could take the lead in establishing an ASEAN-Japan framework for sub-surface SAR operations. Of the five ASEAN states with sub-surface military capability, only Singapore has an operational deep submergence rescue vehicle (DSRV), *MV Swift Rescue*. Japan operates two DSRVs—*Chiyoda* and *Chihaya*—and could use its expertise and share its capabilities to form an ASEAN-Japan standby sub-surface SAR platform. In support of this objective, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force should conduct regular joint exercises and training with ASEAN navies to integrate the *Chiyoda* and *Chihaya* into the region’s contingency planning and response.

ANTI-PIRACY: Japan has made immense contributions to curtailing the problem of piracy in the Malacca Strait. It initiated and funded the Singapore-based Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) Information Sharing Centre to provide timely information on threats and to support capacity-building efforts to stamp out piracy. Beyond ReCAAP, there does not

Table 4: The strength of ASEAN and Japan’s submarine forces

Country	Currently in service	In development
Indonesia	2	3
Japan	18	2
Malaysia	2	0
Singapore	6	1
Vietnam	1	6
Total	29	12

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2013* (London: Routledge, 2013).

appear to be any support for “external” direct involvement in patrolling the Malacca Strait. The success of the littoral states—Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore—in containing piracy and armed robbery attacks in the strait negates the need for external assistance.

While threats in the Malacca Strait appear to be contained and well managed under the existing framework of the three littoral states, Japan and ASEAN shipping interests face a long-standing and sustained threat in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. At present, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore deploy naval assets in support of anti-piracy efforts off the coast of Somalia. While Singapore is a party to the multinational efforts of the Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151), Japan and Malaysia have opted for an independent mode of operations. Combining the Japanese and Malaysian resources will optimize their limited resources while providing the additional gain of enhancing interoperability and familiarization between the two navies. If this comes to fruition, the cooperation would be the first “live” out-of-area defense cooperation between Japan and an ASEAN country. Building on this, Japan should explore opportunities to partner with ASEAN contributing states to patrol the waters in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Fostering such habits of cooperation and partnership will only serve to strengthen the ASEAN-Japan relationship.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR COASTAL OPERATIONS: The protection of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) is a top priority for littoral states, and the coast guard is the frontline agency to safeguard and enforce rights within the EEZs. Japan has taken the lead in engaging regional coast guards with the establishment of the Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting in 2004. In addition, it has contributed material and capacity-building resources to ASEAN member states. Japan played an important role in the establishment of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and most recently extended soft loans to the Philippine government to purchase 10 patrol boats. Japan’s continuing support for efforts to boost the capacity and strength of the ASEAN coast guards is a positive contribution toward regional peace and security. Besides monitoring and deterring the potential intrusion of illegal fishing, coast guard patrols help to check smuggling and sea-borne transnational crime and human trafficking.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

Cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is widely supported in the region. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian

Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) serves as a focal and coordinating point for regional cooperation. Japan contributed to the establishment of the AHA Centre, especially in providing computing and technical support. While the AHA Centre is focused on addressing Southeast Asian needs, the framework of cooperation could potentially be extended to facilitate ASEAN-Japan mutual support in the event of contingencies. The ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus Eight (ADMM+8) coordinates humanitarian assistance and disaster relief exercises among ASEAN and the “plus eight” countries. An institutionalized framework that integrates elements of Japan’s SDF and emergency response agencies within the AHA structure would solidify Japan’s continuing support for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the region. This proposal highlights the need to think beyond providing material and financial support and stresses the symbiotic benefits of having Japanese personnel working alongside their Asian neighbors. Putting “soft boots” on the ground in support of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief would not be controversial and is unlikely to invite any political backlash. On the contrary, putting a “face” on Japanese assistance strengthens Japanese diplomacy in the region.

Nonproliferation

Japan has long been at the vanguard of nonproliferation efforts and could contribute toward the implementation and consolidation of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ). Signed in 1995 but only coming into full effect in 2001, when the last ASEAN member state (the Philippines) ratified the treaty, SEANWFZ sought to establish a region that would be rid of nuclear weapons. The ASEAN states pledge not to possess, develop, or “have control over” nuclear weapons, which is akin to Japan’s Three Non-Nuclear Principles. While the focus is on securing the ascension of the five nuclear weapon states—China, France, Russia, England, and the United States—ASEAN must be mindful that at least one of its members will soon be acquiring a nuclear reactor for the generation of energy. Besides persuading the five nuclear weapon states to sign onto SEANWFZ, Japan could assist and collaborate with ASEAN to set up mechanisms to manage and provide oversight capabilities to guard against possible proliferation.



Japan is a relative newcomer in the field of defense cooperation. Internal considerations as well as external factors combined to delay Japan’s active

participation in this field. Changes in Japan and in ASEAN now provide an opportunity for the former to strategize its engagement with the latter. The manner of engagement is as important as the substance. Japan's past success with quiet diplomacy sits well with the ASEAN diplomatic culture. Similarly, it is important for Japan to proceed incrementally and at a pace comfortable for ASEAN if it wants to find willing partners in the region. It is with these considerations in mind that this chapter has proposed the four main areas outlined above as having the greatest potential for Japan's nascent defense cooperation with ASEAN.

At the same time, the US-Japan security alliance remains the most important pillar of regional security. The US Forces Japan provide an element of security and a sense of assurance to the region that there exists a balancing force to guard against the emergence of aggrandizement tendencies. Therefore, Japan's continued willingness to host the US Forces contributes directly to regional stability. The provision of this public good by the United States and Japan allows the regional states to focus more of their attention on "soft" security concerns. This provides a window of opportunity for Japan to forge collaborative defense efforts with ASEAN.

Defense cooperation between ASEAN and Japan may not be as controversial as one may think. War memories and historical legacy are not sufficiently salient issues to jeopardize Japan's partnership and cooperation on issues such as anti-piracy and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The onus, however, is on Japan to muster the conviction and political will to engage ASEAN in a whole spectrum of partnerships, including defense. In planning these overtures, Japan should go beyond the "old ways" of being the financier. Japan and ASEAN should aim for "higher quality partnerships" that would have Japanese and ASEAN personnel working side by side and for Japan to take an active and visible role. There is no substitute for a physical presence. Japan should be more ambitious in institutionalizing its defense cooperation with ASEAN and not limit itself to ad hoc activities. The establishment of an SAR cooperation framework is one such opportunity for Japan to integrate itself into the region's defense structure.

Raising Japan's regional profile, while secondary to the objective of strengthening regional peace and security, would no doubt be a pleasant and welcome spillover effect. The bottom line remains that defense cooperation is only possible with the support of the ASEAN and Japanese domestic stakeholders and constituents. It is thus fitting that as ASEAN and Japan celebrate the 40th anniversary of their bilateral relations this year, both parties move toward broadening their partnership to include defense cooperation.

NOTES

1. Survey data for 1997 and 2002, as well as 2008 data, can be found in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Opinion Poll on Japan in Six ASEAN Countries: Databook” (2008), <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/survey/databooko803.pdf>.