

ASEAN's Political and Security Relations with Japan

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A combination of developments is making the current moment particularly propitious for the enhancement of political and security cooperation between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Japan—as well as between ASEAN and China and, to a lesser degree, ASEAN and South Korea. If carefully exploited and managed well, the potential for furthering peace, prosperity, and well-being in East Asia will be significant.

The focus for cooperation within these relationships, however, will remain primarily in the economic area. This is perhaps just as well, because economic cooperation is both more easily attainable and provides more practical dividends for East Asian well-being than would security cooperation. And economic cooperation prepares the ground for political and security cooperation. It is also consistent with the aspirations of the East Asia Vision 2020, to which all the nations involved subscribe.

Factors Driving ASEAN-Japan Political and Security Cooperation

ASEAN Countries

The relations ASEAN countries have maintained with Japan have for some time been driven essentially by economic considerations, and this is unlikely to change in the future. Interest in Japanese investment (cumulative foreign direct investment amounting to US\$544 million in 1990–2001),

trade (US\$282 billion in 2002), and tourism (3.5 million visitors from Japan in 2001, making Japan the primary source of tourists) continues to make Japan a primary player for all ASEAN countries. For a number of ASEAN countries—in particular Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam—Japanese economic and technical assistance also make Japan essential to their efforts to stimulate economic development and achieve progress.

Political relations with Japan have been built upon this economic bedrock. In contrast to the immediate postwar decades when Japan was uniformly viewed with aversion and suspicion, Japan is today regarded positively as partner and friend, sympathetic to ASEAN's needs and inspirations. The New Miyazawa Initiative, the Obuchi ASEAN Initiative, and the Japan-launched Chiang Mai Initiative, which were created to help ASEAN economies recover from the financial crisis in 1997–1998, were gladly received. The Koizumi Doctrine of January 2002, calling for even stronger economic and security cooperation between Japan and ASEAN, has also been well-received in ASEAN countries.

Japan's approach to its engagement with Southeast Asian countries has been pragmatic, not too politically doctrinaire or intrusive, as is the practice of the United States and the European Union. This is viewed positively in most ASEAN countries.

Southeast Asia's memories of World War II and Japan's own pacifist constitution have thus far limited any security cooperation. Apprehensions regarding Japanese militarism, however, have all but disappeared as a result of confidence building and goodwill generated by decades of productive economic interaction and friendly relations.

The establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the initiation of ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan, and South Korea) have strengthened the voice of ASEAN in peace and security in the area. Issues in Northeast Asia have an impact on peace and security in Southeast Asia, and these processes, which include Japan, provide channels where they might cooperate on political and security issues.

Japan

For Japan there are several factors driving its desire to forge a political and security relationship with ASEAN countries. Economics is fundamental. Southeast Asia is a major market for Japanese products and investment,

and maintaining good political relations is a prerequisite for sustaining and expanding the market.

Southeast Asia's strategic location in international waterways—in particular the Malacca and the Lombok straits, where oil tankers and container ships go to and from Japan—make the region strategically vital. Political instability and unrest in the region, maritime crime, and threats to safe passage are thus prime concerns for Japan, as are the conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea adjacent to the sea lanes of communication.

In the current situation, Japanese political and security interest in the region has been strengthened by the combined impact of several factors: the rise of China; U.S. urgings that Japan play a larger security role in the region and elsewhere; lowered sensitivities among Japan's neighbors regarding its greater external defense profile; and Japan's own desire to become gradually a "normal" power.

The rise of China and the expected increase in Beijing's economic, political, and diplomatic clout has spurred Japan to protect its position in Southeast Asia and to compete for leadership of the wider East Asian region. As if in competition, China and Japan have each proposed a free trade agreement with ASEAN.

As regards security, Japan has been encouraged by the United States, on the basis of the 1996 U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security, to assume a greater share of the burden in the region and elsewhere. China and South Korea continue to be suspicious of any appearance of Japanese remilitarization, intermittently expressing their objections—as they do whenever Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro makes a visit to Yasukuni Shrine—but they have shown tolerance for a noncombatant role for Japanese defense forces abroad, especially when it is with United Nations approval.

Within Japan as well, there has been support for a noncombatant military role abroad. The government is emerging from its self-imposed self-defense posture and exploring a wider security profile by interpreting its pacifist constitution more liberally and arming itself with the necessary legal and political cover in the Diet.

ARF and ASEAN + 3 have a comparable value for Japan as they do for ASEAN. That is, these processes provide venues for the two to cooperate closely in the management of security issues. The threat of international terrorism, with its links to the Jemaah Islamiyah in the region, has brought security issues on a very concrete level to the fore.

Current Cooperation between ASEAN and Japan

Even as political relations between ASEAN countries and Japan are strong, bilateral security cooperation is limited. There are bilateral visits by defense ministers (however irregular), exchanges of defense officials at military academies, meetings between intelligence agencies, and military-to-military discussions, but there is hardly any bilateral security cooperation involving Japan and individual ASEAN countries or ASEAN generally.

Japan's contribution to strengthening security in the region should not be underestimated, however. Substantial official Japanese development and technical assistance, amounting to about US\$2.1 billion annually, has helped significantly to reinforce the economic and social foundations of long-term security in the region.

In addition, Japan has been active in addressing various regional security problems. It has expressed its interest in resolving peacefully the insurgency in Aceh, although its joint initiative with the United States, the European Union, and the World Bank failed to sustain a cease-fire between the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (the Free Aceh Movement) and Indonesian government forces. In the Philippines, Japan has in contrast taken a partisan role, providing an aid package to the Philippine government in its fight against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf group.

Japan has been a leading player in international efforts to contain piracy in Southeast Asian waters. In April 2000, it hosted a sixteen-nation conference, which included all ten ASEAN countries, that produced agreement on several anti-piracy measures: exchange of information among countries, assistance to vessels that are victims of piracy, and enhancement of technical and human capacity to address piracy. Tokyo's anti-piracy efforts continue.

Japan and ASEAN countries cooperate closely in a number of multilateral track one and track two security cooperation and dialogue processes. The more prominent include the ARF governmental process led by foreign ministries and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) process involving committees led by national institutes for defense and strategic research. In addition, since 1996, the Japanese Defense Agency has organized an annual Forum for Defense Authorities in the Asia-Pacific Region, and both Japan and the ASEAN countries attend the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in Singapore.

Cooperation in ARF has been strong, although limited thus far to the confidence-building phase. Areas of dialogue have included counter-terrorism, the principles of preventive diplomacy, transnational crime, and maritime security. In CSCAP, discussions have covered broadly similar areas as well as future cooperation with ARF.

Strategic Framework for ASEAN-Japan Political and Security Cooperation

The Strategic Environment

Strategic environments are notoriously difficult to predict. Many factors remain constant, but it only takes one event to alter the entire picture. Similarly, an unpredicted and unpredictable development can result in radical changes to the environment for cooperation. The end of the cold war and September 11, 2001, are but two obvious examples.

In East Asia and Asia Pacific, it is not difficult to imagine a multiplicity of changes to the strategic environment, for the situation is not stable: North Korea could collapse, though this is less likely now than a few years ago, when the economic situation was even more appalling. Pyongyang and Seoul could work out a political arrangement that ends hostilities. The United States could launch a strike upon suspected nuclear weapons sites in North Korea.

The relationship across the Taiwan Strait could deteriorate, bringing not only China and Taiwan to the brink of open war, but also drawing in the United States and possibly Japan and others.

China could implode, destabilizing the whole region with profound economic, political, and security consequences.

Another major financial crisis could sweep through the region, undermining economies with serious political and security repercussions.

While being aware of the possibility of these not altogether unlikely scenarios, it is necessary to make certain fundamental assumptions about the strategic environment if meaningful forward planning is to be done. Accordingly, it is assumed that the strategic environment governing future cooperation between ASEAN and Japan will be distinguished by the following factors in the foreseeable future:

—Ever-increasing interdependence among regional and global economies driven by trade, investment, and dispersion of production processes.

Mohamed Jawhar bin Hassan

- This will make both regionalism—in Southeast Asia as well as East Asia—and globalization a continuing relevant fact.
- Proliferating global, regional, and bilateral regimes for trade and investment within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asian Free Trade Area (AFTA), ASEAN Investment Area (AIA), bilateral trade agreements and other similar arrangements. This will make greater cooperation among nations imperative.
 - The need to strengthen regional cooperation for its own sake as well to be competitive with regional processes in Europe and America. Steps have been taken: The ASEAN community initiative of the 2003 Bali Concord II embraces an economic community, a security community, and a social and cultural community. An Asian free trade area encompassing the ASEAN + 3 and India is also in the making.
 - Sustained tension and instability between North Korea, on the one hand, and the United States, then Japan, and next South Korea, on the other. This will persist unless there is radical change within North Korea or in U.S. policy toward Pyongyang.
 - Continuing mutual suspicion of Japan by China and the two Koreas due to memories of Japan's subjugation and occupation.
 - Signs of growing competition and rivalry between Japan and China for regional influence and leadership. The competition is already lively in Southeast Asia, where postwar Japan controlled the economic and political turf until the 1990s, when China's economic power and political sophistication enabled it to make inroads into the region.
 - The enormous economic challenge posed by China to all states in the region. If the negative impact upon the smaller economies in the region is not managed carefully, anti-Chinese sentiment and tensions could fester.
 - Rising military expenditures and buildups in the region, by far by the United States, but also by China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. As costs increase, so will tensions. If there is conflict, it is likely to be between China and Taiwan.
 - Continuation of the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-South Korea military alliances despite opposition from the younger population in Japan and South Korea. The U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security of 1996 increased their geographical coverage in East Asia. Because of local opposition, however, U.S. troop deployment in Japan and South Korea could be reduced, supposing that technological capability to project force overseas from the United States is developed.

- “Containment,” or whatever term is used to describe U.S. policy toward China, through various means such as alliances, military linkages, and support for Taiwan. U.S. military presence in Central Asia following the campaign against Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, has increased the effective encirclement of China.
- The gathering transformation of Japan into a “normal” power with the capacity to become a leading regional military power.
- Divergent external security perceptions and orientations within ASEAN, despite progress toward the objective of building a security community by 2020. Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand will continue to be more pro-U.S. in strategic and military inclination, compared to the other ASEAN members. Suspicion of China will be strongest in Vietnam and the Philippines.
- Stable, peaceful relations among ASEAN countries despite occasional border tensions and incidents.
- Possible stresses to the body politic of some ASEAN countries as a result of political transformation in non-democratic countries and instability in some democracies.

Fundamental Guiding Principles for Future Political and Security Cooperation

The fundamental goal of ASEAN-Japan political and security cooperation should be the promotion of peace, security, and stability in the region and in the wider East Asia. Emphasis should be placed upon developing confidence and trust between nations and peoples; cooperative security; addressing conventional and nonconventional security challenges; promoting peaceful resolution of disputes; and conflict prevention.

Given this fundamental goal, on the one hand, and the sometimes deep-seated suspicions, tensions, conflicting interests, competition, and rivalries in Asia Pacific, on the other, it would be both prudent for cooperation between the ASEAN countries and Japan to be guided by the following five basic principles:

1. The spirit of equality and mutual respect.
2. The recognized principles of international law and conduct. The principle of noninterference in internal affairs shall be respected. States, however, shall be open to suggestions, comments, and criticisms of

- conduct that is clearly in gross violation of human rights and recognized norms of international behavior.
3. ASEAN-Japan cooperation should not be directed against the national security of any third party, or threaten or harm its legitimate security interest.
 4. ASEAN-Japan cooperation should be consistent with the imperatives of wider East Asian cooperation and community building, working toward realization of the East Asian vision of peace, prosperity, and progress.
 5. ASEAN-Japan cooperation in the context of East Asian community building should not undermine or be at the expense of ASEAN community building, but rather complement and reinforce it.

The Future of ASEAN-Japan Cooperation

Prospects for enhanced political and security cooperation between ASEAN and Japan are exceedingly strong due to various factors—the burgeoning economic ties, Japanese policy to play a more active political and security role in the region, and increasing capacity in ASEAN and its more developed members to engage with Japan and other Northeast Asian countries through such processes as ARF, ASEAN + 3, APEC, the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), CSCAP, and a budding network of East Asian think tanks and nongovernmental organizations.

However, the pace and extent of ASEAN-Japan cooperation in the context of East Asian community building will require strong political will and genuine commitment among all involved to move East Asian cooperation forward. Hesitancy on the part of some, based on fears of being ignored or made subservient in a cooperative relationship among the world's major economic powers, will have to be addressed.

It is suggested that the enhancement of future ASEAN-Japan political and security cooperation, conducted bilaterally between Japan and individual ASEAN countries or collectively with ASEAN as a group, focus on the following concerns:

1. Piracy—including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, severally as well as jointly.
2. Production and traffic in illegal drugs—including the Golden Triangle countries of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos—and their economic alternatives.
3. AIDS—prevention, treatment, and accessibility of medicines.

ASEAN's Political and Security Relations with Japan

4. Marine pollution—including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, countries on the Strait of Malacca.
5. Building intelligence capacity on terrorism and transnational crime.
6. Assistance for the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) in Malaysia, which provides training and capacity building for counterterrorism agencies.
7. Dialogue between the foreign policy community and security agencies (defense, police, intelligence, and marine security services).
8. Opportunities for training and educational exchanges.
Further recommendations are that:
9. ASEAN countries, collectively or individually, have the chance, furthermore, to contribute toward confidence building and dialogue in the region—particularly on the Korean issue and as regards strains between Japan and its Northeast Asian neighbors. ASEAN's absence of vested interest, its nonthreatening demeanor, and its credentials in peace-oriented processes equip it well for this role. Measures could include facilitating and providing the venue for open track two dialogue or closed-door meetings among officials.
10. Japan should continue to play a constructive mediating role in efforts to resolve conflicts such as in Indonesia and the Philippines.
11. Japan should reconsider its refusal to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, as China and India have done and Russia is discussing. Japan's decision not to do so could be construed by some as detracting from its avowed earnestness to be at the forefront of political and security cooperation with ASEAN.
12. Japan and ASEAN should enhance dialogue at official and track two levels on political and security issues, with a view to promoting more of a shared platform. Key issues include the Korean problem, the rise of China, China-Taiwan relations, the role of the United States in the region, military enhancement programs among regional states, weapons of mass destruction, nuclear disarmament, and terrorism.
13. In international institutions and processes and on issues that have a global context, ASEAN countries and Japan should explore common positions and cooperate in advancing their common interests. Key issues include the observance of international law and multilateral cooperation in international disputes; reform of the United Nations to make it more effective and reflective of geopolitical realities; nuclear disarmament; nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and arms control.