

NATO-Japan Relation: A Geopolitical Study

Md. Harun or-Rashid*

Abstract

International Coalition and cooperation have often been shaped through catalytic events that lead countries to retrace the meaning of their own security. Japan's relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been no exception to that notion, as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the tragic September 11 attack on the United States, and destructive natural disasters across the world stretched narrow definitions of security. Moreover, non-traditional challenges, such as terrorism and piracy, have been amplified by the increasingly globalised nature of the international economy and media as well as the upward webs of political and security alliances. The converging path of Japan and NATO's security interests has cemented the way for increasing political engagement as well as humanitarian and post-conflict cooperation. While recent developments are positive for the U.S. - Japan alliance and NATO, there is indisputably potential for considering a more ambitious, more formal and more active program for Japan's involvement with NATO. The aim of this article is to explore Japan's security policy and its linkage with NATO. The first part of this article deals with the dynamics of Japan NATO relations. While the second one examines the historical background of Japan NATO Relation. The third part examined why Japan seeks a close relation with NATO. The fourth deals with why NATO wants Japan as a Global partner. The fifth focuses on potential challenges in Japan NATO relations. Finally I tried to draw an attention of the readers with the overall Japan NATO future political engagements.

Keywords: Security linkage, Political Engagement, Global Partners.

Introduction:

Over recent years, NATO has developed relations with a range of countries beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. Referred to as “*partners across the globe*”, they share similar strategic concerns and key Alliance values. Japan is the most important NATO's longest-standing global partner. In the past, the NATO-Japan relationship was limited to infrequent and loosely focused dialogue, with little concrete cooperation. This changed substantially when NATO became engaged in international security beyond its traditional geographical area and

* Independent Researcher, E-mail: harun328du@gmail.com.

became involved in countries like Afghanistan. It was a catalyst for NATO and Japan for cooperation. For Japan, there are at least two merits in enhancing cooperation with NATO. **Firstly**, NATO's comprehensive strategy fits Japan, which has refrained from making active military contributions under the pacifist Constitution, better than cooperation under the Japan-US alliance alone. Caught in a dilemma of "*security*" and "*reconstruction*", Japan has often been unable to come up with effective measures for international peace building. Partnership with NATO may open up opportunities for Japan to play a more effective role. Financial assistance and the dispatch of civilians to the NATO/ISAF-assisted Provincial Reconstruction Teams are already such examples.

Secondly, *cooperation* with NATO members, with which Japan shares such fundamental values as democracy, rule of law and human rights will provide Japan with a valuable opportunity to learn about a multilateral security framework. Japan has little experience in institutionalized multilateral security cooperation other than with the United Nations. At a time when there is a greater need for cross-border cooperation to meet global challenges, enhancing cooperation with a coalition of democracies will offer Japan fruitful experience and lessons as it promotes multilateral cooperation in diverse Asia. Therefore, NATO's transformation from a military alliance to a hybrid crisis management organization provides Japan with an opportunity to expand cooperation with European partners with whom Japan shares the fundamental values of freedom and democracy. And in this term paper, I would discuss the dynamics of Japan-NATO relations.

Japan's Security Policy and its linkage with NATO:

Japan is *becoming* the longest-standing of NATO's partners across the globe. Building on initial contacts in the early 1990s, dialogue on common security interests has become more regular and structured. Practical cooperation has been developed in a wide range of areas, including peace-support and crisis-management activities, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, cyber defense, defense against terrorism, non-proliferation, as well as participation in military activities. From 1990's top NATO and Japanese leader have visited each other and exchanged their views regularly. The Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen visited Japan in April 2013 for talks with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and top officials in his government on security issues of shared concern as well as opportunities for deeper cooperation in a joint political declaration signed. The joint political declaration demonstrates how far the relationship between NATO and Japan has been taken in recent years. It sets out shared strategic interests in promoting global peace, stability and prosperity through pursuing a rules-based international order. Japan is one of a range of countries beyond the Euro-Atlantic area, which share similar strategic concerns and key Alliance values and with which NATO is developing relations. NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept paved the way for a more flexible partnership policy offering all partners the same basis of cooperation and dialogue. Choosing from the wide range of cooperation activities available in the Partnership Cooperation Menu, Japan concluded an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program with NATO on 6 May 2014 - a program that is tailored to its interests and formalizes its relations with the Alliance.

Displaying the deepening of relations between NATO and Japan in recent years, Japanese officials have participated in a number of informal exchanges of views with Allies on security issues of mutual interest, such as North Korea, assistance to Afghanistan, cooperation with Central Asia, missile defense and counter-piracy.

Japan- NATO Security Cooperation in Today:

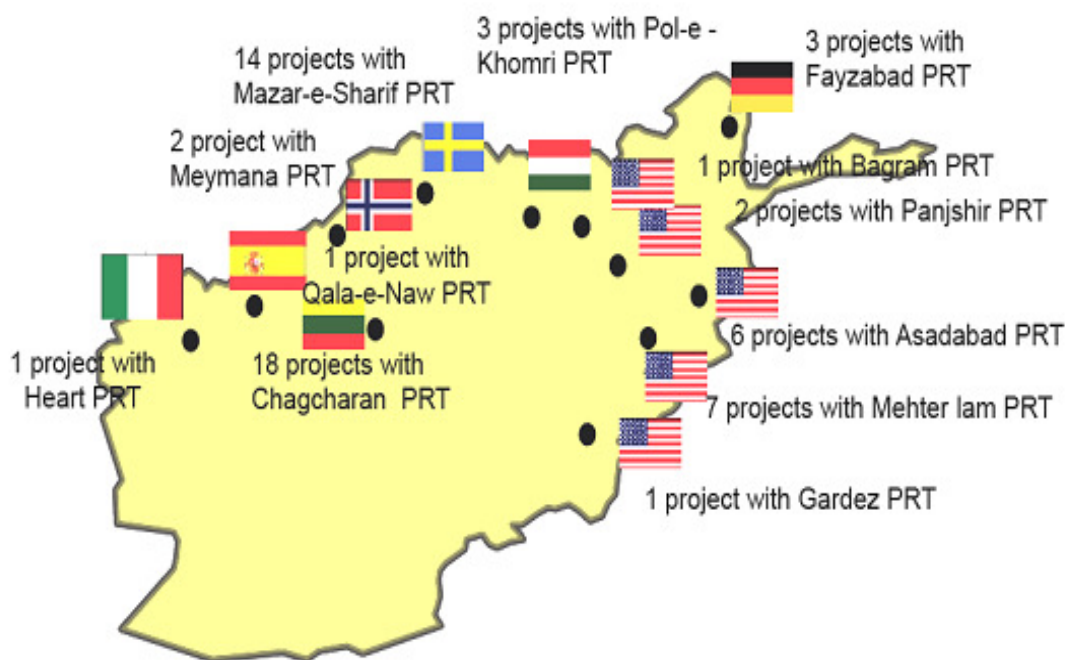
Today, Japan and NATO cooperation spans across numerous initiatives and exchanges. Currently, Japan - NATO programs include the ongoing high-level dialogue, which meets alternatively in Japan or at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Japan has also broadened its support for NATO programs, including contributing to a second NATO/PfP Trust Fund project. In April 2009, Japan formally signed an agreement to contribute to unexploded ordinance clearing operations in Azerbaijan.

In spite of the positive trajectory of cooperation, forces in Japan's domestic politics have injected uncertainties over the future of Japan – NATO relations. The historic victory of the Democratic Party of Japan in the 2009 elections ushered in a new policy agenda that emphasized domestic concerns and a return to a more literal interpretation of Japan's pacifist constitution. Upholding their campaign pledge, the DPJ terminated MSDF's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean in January 2010. Yet, the DPJ did not abolish support for NATO's ISAF mission altogether. Instead, the DPJ chose to continue their contributions in the form of civilian aid. At the end of 2009, the government of Japan pledged \$5 billion in aid to fund reintegration programs for former Taliban fighters, human needs projects such as education, as well as agriculture and infrastructure development over the next five years.¹ The government has also established a new division in the prime minister's office to oversee the aid plan. Despite changes in the leadership in the DPJ, Japan's commitment to Afghanistan has remained steadfast.

Today, Japan maintains a significant presence in Afghanistan, with over 130 civilians working in the embassy and for non-government and private organizations. Japan has also enhanced its coordinated efforts with NATO, conducting 59 grassroots projects in cooperation with 12 PRTs in the areas of education, vocational training, medicine and healthcare. There is four MOFA staff working in the town of Chaghcharan in Central Afghanistan under a Lithuanian-led PRT, alongside Croatian, Danish, U.S., Ukrainian, and Icelandic troops. Most recently, Japan agreed to enter into an information security pact with NATO, a significant move that promises to enhance future cooperation in Afghanistan. The pact will facilitate information-sharing to ensure the safety of the increasing contingent of Japanese aid workers on the ground.

¹ Roland Buerk, "*Japan to Boost Aid to Afghanistan*," BBC News, 10 November 2009.

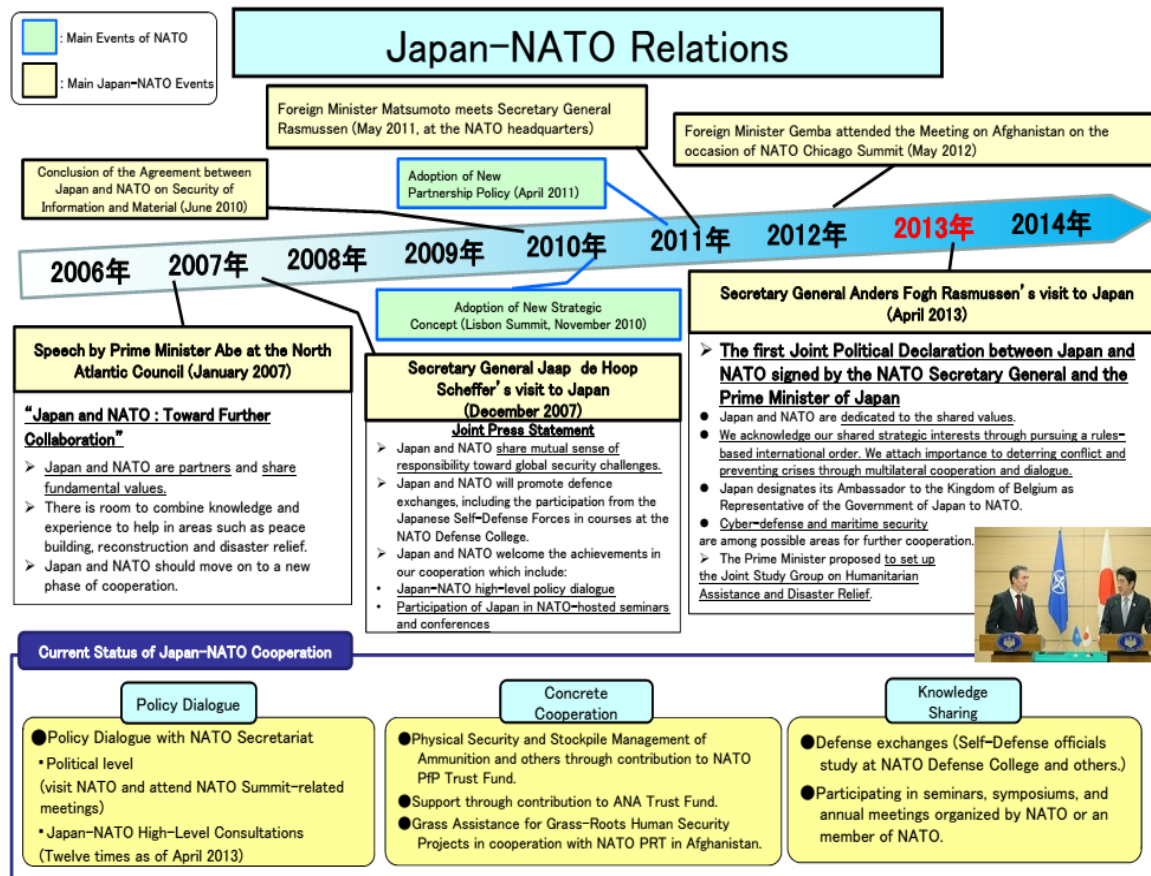
Figure: Japan's cooperation with NATO PRTs in Afghanistan



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.

Officially, the DPJ has said little about what its vision is for Japan - NATO cooperation going forward. Its party manifesto, released in 2009, stated that the DPJ sought to continue “a proactive role in UN peacekeeping operations...and...take the lead...to remove the threat of terrorism,”² but action may speak louder than words in reflecting the calculations of the DPJ leadership. While it ended non-combat naval support in the Indian Ocean, the MSDF has assisted in anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia, as part of a multinational effort that includes NATO vessels. Since 2009, Japan has deployed two destroyers and two P-3C patrol aircraft to the area. The government of Japan also signed a Status of Forces Agreement with Djibouti to establish a base for SDF operations at the distant location. These developments are likely a sign that the DPJ government remains open to security commitments abroad as new challenges arise. The fact that Tokyo continues to operate in areas of current NATO activity signals a continuation of common strategic interests between Japan and NATO.

² Democratic Party of Japan, “The Democratic Party of Japan’s Platform for Government: Putting People’s Lives First,” 18 August 2009, pg.18.



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan

Why Does Japan seek a close relation with NATO?

Japan's desire to seek close relations with Japan can be expressed by the following arguments. They are-

a) NATO as a political partner:

From a Japanese perspective, NATO can be seen, first, as a political partner, meaning a partner with which to have political dialogue. While visiting NATO and addressing the North Atlantic Council (NAC), both Foreign Minister Taro Aso (May 2006) and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (January 2007) spent a great deal of time talking about the security environment in Asia, including the abduction and other issues of North Korea as well as China's military buildup.³ Abe directly requested the understanding and support of NATO members concerning Japan's stance on the North Korean abduction and other issues. This illustrates the fact that, for Japan, dialogue with NATO is a new venue to acquire

³ Michito Tsuruoka, "NATO and Japan: A View from Tokyo," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 156, No. 6, December 2011.

understanding and support from Europe for its position on problems related to politics and security in Asia. NATO is a forum suitable for Japan to discuss Asian security and other security-related issues mainly. Japan is not alone in seeing NATO as a political partner. NATO is often described as the strongest and the most successful military alliance in history and encompassing all major powers from North America and Europe. Thus, NATO inevitably carries a unique weight in international security and world politics.

b) NATO as an operational partner

NATO today can be characterized as an “*alliance in action*”. In addition to large-scale operations in Kosovo (KFOR) and Afghanistan (ISAF), NATO is currently conducting an antiterrorism operation in the Mediterranean (OAE), antipiracy measures off the coast of Somalia, and a training mission in Iraq (NTM-I). Furthermore, from March to October 2011, NATO conducted an operation over Libya. Many non-NATO countries, as well as NATO Allies, are contributing troops to those operations and missions. From NATO’s point of view, cooperation with new partners is in essence an “*import of support*” and NATO naturally welcomes countries with the will and capabilities to contribute to the operations that it leads.

From a Japanese point of view, the importance of this cooperation with NATO comes from the fact that it enables Japan to expand the geographical reach of its development assistance beyond those areas where an Embassy or the Japanese aid agency (JICA) are already present. Moreover, Japan and NATO concluded a security agreement in June 2010, which allows Japan and NATO to share classified information with each other. This is expected to be a foundation for deeper dialogue and practical cooperation between Japan and NATO.

c) NATO as another venue of cooperation with the United States

The comparative advantage that cooperation with NATO offers Japan is the fact that the US, Japan’s only formal ally, is part of NATO. For all NATO Allies excluding the US, what NATO means is essentially an alliance with the US. The NATO membership was synonymous with receiving a commitment from the US for collective defense, exemplified by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. In Japan, as can be seen by the fact that the European Affairs Bureau (European Policy Division in it) covers NATO in the Foreign Ministry, there is a tendency to treat NATO in the context of Europe. When it comes to sending the SDF abroad, for better or for worse, considerations to relations with the US occupies a major place in terms of domestic politics. As long as what can be called the “*US factor*” plays a major role in Japan’s policy-making in security and defense, the fact that Japan – NATO cooperation can take place in the context of Japan – US cooperation and vice versa will increase potential for Japan – NATO cooperation, especially in terms of operational cooperation involving the SDF.

Why does NATO want Japan as a global partner?

NATO's demand of Japan as global partner can be analyzed from various point of views. Firstly, Japan can offer NATO both policy coordination and operational cooperation. Given its current constitutional constraints, Japan can intensify its strategic dialogue and coordinate its policy with NATO without becoming a formal member. Such a relationship would be similar to that between Tokyo and Canberra, that is, although Japan and Australia are not formally allied, they do share a strategic outlook. Likewise, Japan and NATO could coordinate their policies on many security-related issues, including maintaining peace after conflict, solving transnational crime, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, fighting terrorism, providing natural disaster relief, offering energy security, and dealing with environmental degradation.⁴ They even could begin to share intelligence. Foreign minister Aso spoke of Japan's interest in "*establishing regular contact with the North Atlantic Council*". He also added "*during the course of discussions, Japan will consider the most appropriate modality of cooperation within NATO within its constitutional framework.*"⁵

The next and a higher level of operational cooperation might be the provision of logistical support by Japan for NATO troops. Until summer 2006, SDF and NATO member state troops worked side by side in Iraq, as well as in Northern Pakistan to help refugees from the 2005 earthquake, although they did not cooperate in logistical support. Japan and NATO, thus, could establish a mechanism for future operational cooperation, so that the SDF and NATO troops could provide logistical support to each other, with the United States as the contact country.

A third and further level of operational cooperation might be Japan's participation in NATO military exercises. In the biannual multinational naval exercise (Rim of the Pacific or Rim Pac exercise); held by the U.S. Navy in the Pacific theatre, Japan's Maritime Self- Defense Force is currently restricted to participating only in bilateral exercises with the United States. So that it might eventually participate with the United States in a NATO multinational naval exercise, Japan and NATO should study more closely the interoperability between their respective weapons systems.

History of Japan - NATO Relations

The measured path of Japan and NATO cooperation has been paved by converging interests that were unlikely envisioned by the creators of Japan's 1947 Constitution and the founders of NATO in 1949. At the end of World War II, Japan and Allied occupiers were focused on the domestic agenda, namely post-war reconstruction under a new political era. Japan's

⁴ Balbina Y. Hwang, "*Japan's New Security Outlook: Implications for the United States,*" Policy Research and Analysis, Heritage Foundation, July 7, 2005, available at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/bg1865.cfm>, visited on 5th May, 2014.

⁵ Foreign Minister Aso, "*Japan and NATO in a New Security Environment,*" available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0605.html>, visited on 4th May, 2014.

transition into a liberal democracy was decreed by the Potsdam Declaration and subsequently enshrined in the Japanese Constitution. Despite unconditional surrender, concerns of resurgent militarism led drafters to include a pacifist clause in the founding legal document. This became known as Article 9, which renounced war and the use of force in resolving international conflicts and prohibited possession of forces with “war potential.”

Despite Japan’s transition, its Western counterparts did not automatically embrace it as a fellow liberal democratic institution. At the time, Europe’s eastern horizon extended only as far as to Russia and, despite Japan’s historically tenuous relationship with Russia, cooperation did not come naturally. Instead, European states sought to counter Soviet expansion by formally entering into a military alliance based upon the North Atlantic Treaty. The 12 signatory nations founded a collective defense organization with the implicit goal: “*keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down*”. The text of the North Atlantic Treaty reflected these limited geographical interests and membership was not considered beyond Europe and North America. As a product of the security threats faced by Europe at the time, NATO was not created with the necessary latitude for addressing a future of globalized strategic challenges or global cooperation. Even though the Korean War was a catalyst for NATO’s transformation into a formidable collective defense coalition, Asia failed to become a sphere of concern for the organization.

As NATO’s strategic outlook remained constant throughout the Cold War, Japan’s rise as an economic power led to a revived interest in international affairs. In the 1970s, facing a newly open China and fluctuations in its relationship with the Soviet Union, Japan sought to leverage its economic power into a more strategically advantageous position. Looking to broaden engagement with the transatlantic community, Japanese defense ministers made formal visits to Brussels in 1979, 1981, and 1984. However, they found little support in Belgium as NATO leaders – aside from the U.S. – were preoccupied with securing Europe and countering Soviet influence across the world and thus were generally reluctant to heavily engage in East Asia.

a) NATO’s Expanded Outlook:

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO began to re-examine its role in the international community. In doing so, it embraced unlikely new partners, such as former Soviet republics through the Partnership for Peace program. There were significant motivations for these partnerships beyond justifying the organization’s existence – an emerging boom in information technology, greatly improved transportation, and rapidly integrating world markets meant that NATO’s interests were becoming increasingly tied to previously distant areas of the globe. With some of the fastest growing economies in the world and rising political forces, East Asia seemed a glaring hole in NATO involvement, and a growing security concern. As a result, NATO began to explore opportunities it had previously overlooked with Japan and other Asian nations.

b) Modern Phase of Japan-NATO Relations:

The 1990s saw a new phase in Japan - NATO engagement. The inaugural Japan – NATO Security Conference was convened in Belgium in July 1990 and in 1991, NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner visited Tokyo, marking the first visit of a NATO Secretary General to Japan.

These breakthroughs were part of a general trend toward broadening ties between Japan and Europe. Japanese leaders looked to expand their cooperation with Europe by signing a joint declaration with the European Community (EC) in 1991, commencing a partnership with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 1992, and becoming an observer in the Council of Europe in 1996. Japanese leaders also began to redefine the nation's capacity to not only engage in self defense but also to participate in promoting international peace and security. This move was also endorsed by the Diet which has passed over 20 pieces of significant security-related legislation since 1992. Notably, it provided revolutionary legal mandates for Japanese forces to engage in United Nations peacekeeping and disaster relief operations overseas, enhanced cooperation between Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and U.S. forces, a greater role in regional security and expansion of geostrategic interests.

These amendments allowed Japan to actively support NATO operations in the Balkans. Since the 1990s, Japan has provided education and medical assistance in the Western Balkans, with projects ranging from supplying safe water to assisting the social integration of returned soldiers. It has also provided democratization assistance for elections as well as infrastructure and reconstruction projects.

In spite of expanding engagements, the primary barriers to a formal security alliance between Japan and NATO remained. Japan's constitutional restraints precluded the possibilities of full membership in a collective defense organization, while NATO's focus on expanding European membership made it impractical to stretch and deepen collective defense obligations across continental distances.

NATO resolved this dilemma by designating a category of "*Contact Countries*" to reflect the desire for increasing cooperation while circumventing the challenges of formal membership. The term was first introduced in 2004 and the grouping includes Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The new category provided avenues for joint protection of shipping lanes and assistance on peacekeeping and counter-terrorism missions without formal membership.

For Japan, it opened up greater potential for cooperation with the trans-Atlantic community; and for NATO, it allowed a window into Asia. This form of engagement brought mutual benefits and laid the groundwork for future cooperation.

The September 11, 2001 attack on the U.S. was a catalyst for greater Japan - NATO cooperation. The relationship was aided by an increasing awareness of the need for global cooperation against emerging transnational threats such as terrorism as well as proliferation and piracy. This rediscovery, based upon mutual interests, led to significant contributions to the subsequent NATO operation in Afghanistan. The NATO-led International Security

Assistance Force (ISAF) has been tasked with improving the security situation as well as overseeing development projects in Afghanistan since 2001. In many ways, ISAF was a milestone for both NATO and Japan. For NATO, it was the first time that the collective defense article of the Treaty has been invoked. For Japan, its extensive commitment and active participation in supporting operations signaled a new phase of engagement in the international security environment. Over an eight year period, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) refueling mission in the Indian Ocean supplied over half a million kiloliters of fuel to warships from 12 countries, primarily to U.S. vessels.⁶

In addition to Afghanistan, Japan has also worked alongside NATO member countries in a variety of operations across the world since 2001, reflecting the globalized nature of converging security concerns. In the Middle East, Japanese troops have been serving alongside Canada and Poland in a UN peacekeeping operation in the Golan Heights since 1996. Members of the SDF have also participated in humanitarian and reconstruction projects alongside Dutch and British troops in Iraq. In Asia, SDF personnel were involved in election monitoring in East Timor in 2002. During this time, there was a significant international force present in the country including the United Kingdom, U.S., Canada, Spain, Norway, and Portugal. In South Asia, the SDF participated in rescue operations, working alongside NATO Response Force troops, in Pakistan in the aftermath of the devastating 2005 earthquake. Most recently, the SDF carried out disaster relief operations under the auspices of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, which has included a number of NATO member countries.

As NATO increasingly participates in out of area operations and Japan views security through a widening geographic lens, they are frequently crossing paths in non-NATO operations across the world (see Table 1).

⁶ "Japan Ends MSDF Refueling Mission," *Asahi Shimbun*, 16 January 2010. Accessed on May 20, 2014.

Table 1: Japan's participation in non-NATO operations that involved NATO members since 1991

Country/Operation	Japan's Responsibilities	Year Deployed	NATO Members Involved During Operation
Cambodia (UN Mission)	Election Observing	1991	Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Poland, United Kingdom, United States
Mozambique (UN Mission)	Staff Assistance and Election Monitoring	1993	Canada, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, United States
Golan Heights (UN Mission)	Staff/Transportation Support	1996	Canada, Croatia, Poland
Turkey (Non-UN Mission)	Earthquake Relief	1999	All NATO nations
East Timor (U.N. Mission)	Infrastructure/Reconstruction	2001	Canada, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Slovakia, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States
Iraq (Non-UN Mission)	Humanitarian Reconstruction Assistance	2004	Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom
Countries Affected By Indian Ocean Tsunami (Non-UN Mission)	Tsunami Relief and Aid	2005	United States, Italy, France, Greece, Denmark, Turkey, United Kingdom
Pakistan (Non-UN Mission)	Earthquake Relief	2005	NATO Response Force which included 17 NATO countries
Indonesia (Non-UN Mission)	Earthquake Relief	2006	United States
Nepal (UN Mission)	Observing Ongoing Peace Process	2007	Canada, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Turkey, United Kingdom
Sudan (UN Mission)	Logistics/Information	2008	Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Turkey, United Kingdom
Somalia (UN Mission)	Counter-piracy Operations	2009	Germany, Greece, Italy, Turkey, United States, United Kingdom, Portugal, Denmark, Canada
Haiti (Non-UN Mission)	Engineering/Logistics	2010	Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Germany, United States
Vietnam/Cambodia (Non-UN Mission)	Medical/Disaster Relief Planning	2010	United States

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan

In 2007, NATO stepped up its security network in Asia by establishing individual “Tailored Cooperation Packages” (TCP) with the Contact Countries. Under the TCP framework, NATO offers capacity and skills building opportunities to further interoperability and help integrate partner nations into NATO-led operations. Japan's TCP provides the framework for practical cooperation and facilitates coordination and planning on an annual basis. In addition to supporting ISAF operations in Afghanistan, recent collaboration between Japan and NATO has focused on civil emergency planning, terrorism, non-proliferation, and crisis management.

How Japan's Interests in NATO Have Changed

a) *An Expanding Outlook:*

For many years after World War II, Japan was reluctant to approach NATO and, for that matter, to discuss security issues with Western leaders other than those of the United States. Being sensitive to international fears that Japan might revive its militaristic past once it acquired sufficient economic power, it moved carefully. Thus, after 1975, when members of the Group of Seven (G7), including Japan, began to meet annually, Japanese leaders were reluctant to discuss security.

After the mid-1980s, however, this attitude slowly began to change. As Western Europe and Japan became more economically interdependent through trade and investments, they also cooperated more often on political matters.⁷ At the same time, Japan began to sense a need to play a larger political and security role commensurate with its economic power, and the United States encouraged, often pressured, Tokyo into assuming more responsibility as its ally. The Gulf War of 1990 to 1991 became a watershed for Japan. Japan sent no troops and was not able to participate in the international peace support operation because its constitution is interpreted as meaning that the only legitimate mission for Japanese forces is the defense of its own country. Therefore, to compensate, Japan donated as much as 13 billion U.S. dollars to U.S.-led Operation Desert Storm, but received little recognition for instead.

This prompted Japan to promulgate its International Peace Cooperation Law in 1992, to provide the basis for sending its troops overseas to take part in peacekeeping operations (PKO). In this way, sharing responsibilities with other like-minded countries has set a new tone for its relations with NATO.

b) *Ambivalence towards NATO:*

During the Cold War, security specialists and relevant government officials in Japan had a high regard for NATO as a powerful alliance whose members were experienced in diplomacy and had a military strategy that stood firm in the face of the military threat posed by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, NATO's maintenance of a balance of power along the East-West German border, its nuclear deterrence capabilities and the attraction of freedom in the West, helped turn back the Communists. NATO's leadership was also admired for holding together a large and diverse membership, despite numerous internal differences.

During the Cold War, Japan considered Western Europe as a strategic competitor. Situated at each end of the Eurasian continent, Western Europe and Japan, in a sense, competed with each other for U.S. protection. That is, if NATO united solidly against the Soviet bloc, Moscow might decide to shift its weapons to its Far East region, where they would pose a threat to Japan's security. Accordingly, in 1983, when the Group of Seven (G7) summit was held at Williamsburg, Virginia, in the United States, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone opposed the European position to let the Soviets deploy their SS-20 missiles east of the Ural Mountains, stating that "*the security of our countries is indivisible and must be approached on a global basis.*"⁸

Likewise, when Western Europe moved toward rapprochement with Russia in the early post-Cold War period, Japan became concerned, as several sources of regional tension remained in East Asia, such as strained relations between China and Taiwan and North Korea's suspected nuclear development. Until about the mid-1990s, Tokyo feared that with the establishment of NATO's Partnership of Peace (PP) and better relations between Russia and

⁷ Yukio Satoh, "*Japan and NATO: Agenda for Political Dialogue,*" NATO Review 40, June 1992, pp. 18-22.

⁸ Yukio Satoh, "*Japan and NATO: Agenda for Political Dialogue,*" NATO Review 40, June 1992, pp. 18-22.

NATO, Russia might shift its military personnel and arms to its Far East, thereby creating new tensions with Japan. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has continued to handle its relations with Russia with care while at the same time expanding its membership to include Central and Eastern European countries. Moreover, as Japanese-Russian relations have improved, the Japanese-European competition for U.S. protection has waned. Today, therefore, the Japanese have come to regard NATO as a vital partner in promoting international peace support operations.

Potential Challenges in Japan- NATO Relations

NATO's efforts to involve Japan as "*global partners*" have ignited serious concerns. The first set of common challenges relates to the changing nature of the security environment itself. These challenges are essentially the by-product of economic modernization, technological advance, and the related phenomena of globalization. They tend to be 'collective action' challenges that by definition require the active participation of multiple countries for effective problem solving. They also tend to be challenges that belie traditional geographic considerations. This category of security challenges relate to issues such as counter-terrorism, cyber security, antipiracy, energy security, human trafficking, natural security, humanitarian relief, and peacekeeping.

They also include challenges that are the by-product of climate change such as forced migration and even food and water security. As these examples illustrate, non-traditional security matters have consequential impacts on Japan, NATO, and the United States. As countries that largely share values, but also as countries with modern economies and global interests, Japan and NATO members share an interest in the development of cooperative approaches to emerging security challenges. It is even conceivable that the exploration of cooperative approaches could lead to shared acquisition strategies and common considerations regarding force structure to appropriately meet 21st century security challenges.

The *second concern* relates to the displeasure of China and Russia with Pacific Rim countries that cooperate with NATO, something that might lead to their forming a counter alliance to NATO activities in the Pacific. Indeed, Beijing and Moscow must be apprehensive about NATO's reaching out to Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries for new members, to Afghanistan and Iraq for regional stability, to the Pacific Rim democracies for new partners. China, in particular, may see itself being sandwiched in by Europe and the Pacific, a feeling that may be at the root of its close cooperation with Russia and Central Asia to form the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).⁹

Organized in 2001, the SCO has grown quickly. In 2005 China and Russia held joint landing exercises near Qingdao facing the Yellow Sea and in September 2005 Uzbekistan demanded that the United States close its bases, promptly turning to Moscow for its security needs.¹⁰

⁹ Purnendra Jain and John Bruni, "Japan, Australia, and the United States: Little NATO or Shadow Alliance," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, no. 2, 2004, pp. 265-85.

¹⁰ Patrick Goodenough, "*NATO Eyes Partnerships in the East*," available at <http://www.crosswalk.com/news/1393863.html>, visited on 5th May, 2014.

NATO should, therefore, avoid forcing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization into becoming a counterweight.

In addition to sharing common challenges in the areas of non-traditional security as well as traditional security, Japan, and NATO also share the same set of challenges related to new security domains, notably space and the Arctic. Japan and NATO member countries are not only democracies with modern economies, they are also leaders of advanced technologies commonly responsible for producing cutting-edge technology with military and security applications. As observed in a previous report by the Project 2049 Institute, the opening salvos of future warfare may not be bombs exploding on the ground, but rather flashing laser lights in the silence of outer space.¹¹

A Scenario for the Future Japan-NATO relations:

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made clear his interest in reviewing article nine of the constitution and reinterpreting Japan's "*right of individual self-defense*". Revision of the constitution requires the support of a two-thirds majority in both houses of the National Diet and the subsequent support of a simple majority in a national referendum. This will take time so the government should move quickly to reinterpret article nine so as to allow Japan to exercise its inherent right to collective self-defense. This in turn will expand Japan's role in its alliance with the United States and enhance its level of cooperation with NATO. In the near future, then, Japan will not become a global partner for NATO, but will remain a useful and active partner. Then later, if Japan is able to establish a constitutional framework that is compatible with article five of the North Atlantic Treaty, it will have more policy options regarding its participation in a global NATO.

Conclusion:

The Japan - NATO relationship holds greater priority that has been realized to date. Enhanced cooperation can be achieved in a manner that ensures both mutual responsibility and mutual benefit. But enhanced cooperation will not necessarily emerge through a laissez-faire approach. There are indeed opportunities to strengthen Japan - NATO ties. Political leaders in Tokyo, Brussels, and Washington can choose to take the initiative to seek enhanced ties, and to guide the progress of the developing relations with a thoughtful strategic vision. Obstacles to closer Japan - NATO ties should be negotiated mutually. Japan and NATO could each balk at the various challenges ranging from Japan's constitutional limitations to NATO's ambivalence toward more out of area operations. The obstacles can be navigated, and a pragmatic approach to enhanced cooperation remains within reach. Therefore, it has become obvious that Japan and NATO should take proper initiatives to seek the path toward a stronger, closer Japan - NATO relationship.

¹¹ Ian Easton, "*The Great Game in Space: China's Evolving ASAT Weapons Programs and Their Implications for Future U.S. Strategy*," Project 2049 Institute, June 2009

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