

## **Navigating by Sun and Compass**

### **Policy Brief One: Learning from the History of Japan-NATO Relations**

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Although Japan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have enjoyed formal relations for nearly thirty years, the relationship has followed an uneven growth trajectory. After establishment in the early 1990s, the relationship plateaued through the early 2000s before ramping up precipitously to direct practical cooperation in 2007. The growth of Japan-NATO relations has accelerated under the tenure of Japan's current Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, with Japan and NATO conducting their first joint military exercises and signing an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme in 2014. These developments, along with security reforms passed in 2015, appear to provide Japan and NATO with the platform necessary to move their relationship to a new phase; whether they will do so remains to be seen. As Japan navigates changing regional and global power dynamics, its growing alignments with non-U.S. partners have taken on increasing significance. Just where NATO fits into this schema is unclear, however. While relations have continued to progress in the late 2010s, with Japan establishing a formal mission to NATO in 2018, policy-makers and scholars have expressed doubts about how much further the relationship can deepen, given priorities, resources, and practical realities on both sides, including Japan's constitutional restrictions on the use of force.

This policy brief is the first in a series of three seeking to explore the future trajectory of Japan-NATO relations. The first brief focuses on the history of the Japan-NATO relationship in order to provide context for its current state. The second brief examines how Japan's security reforms create space for greater Japan-NATO operational cooperation in the military sphere, an area that has yet to be explored by either side. The third brief identifies possible models for the future of the relationship. The historical perspective in this first brief provides information on the factors that shaped the growth of the relationship and might impact its further development. A deeper dive into the history of the relationship and the broader conditions under which it evolved also provides clues to whether its meteoric rise over the past decade has been accompanied by the kinds of conceptual changes that would connect Japan and NATO more deeply than simple procedural arrangements. The policy brief concludes that such conceptual changes have indeed taken place, providing an important internal rationale for the relationship. At the same time, it notes that the high rate of engagement seen in the relationship during the past decade has resulted in part from temporal factors that will not endure into the future, creating the potential for a decrease in the level of activity between Japan and NATO in the coming years. Conversely, it finds that the influence of third parties on the relationship, which has been relatively significant, is likely to continue, if not increase, in the future.

### *Initial Phase and Establishment of Formal Relations*

Japan is NATO's longest-standing out-of-theater partner, with informal contacts, consisting of engagement by Japanese ministers and parliamentarians, dating back to 1979.<sup>1</sup> Although formal relations between Japan and NATO began in the early 1990s, Japan reportedly made an initial, unsuccessful attempt to establish more formal relations in the early 1980s, through an effort led by Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe (father to the current Prime Minister) on behalf of the administration of Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone.<sup>2</sup> Abe traveled to major European capitals in 1983 to promote a Japan-NATO consultation mechanism, the apparent intent of which was to provide a vehicle for Japanese inputs into security discussions in Western Europe that stood to impact Japan's interests.<sup>3</sup> The threat of possible Soviet nuclear missile reductions in Europe leading to the displacement of such weapons to Asia was a major concern of Japanese policymakers at the time, as was the potential economic impact of tightening sanctions on the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> Japan's effort to give itself a channel to NATO on such issues was reportedly scuttled by France, on the basis of NATO's geographical limitation to Europe and North America, and almost another decade would pass before the beginning of more formal Japan-NATO relations in 1990.<sup>5</sup> These took the form of biennial security conferences bringing together senior officials and security experts from Japan and NATO countries.<sup>6</sup> In 1991, Secretary General Manfred Wörner became the first NATO head to visit Japan.<sup>7</sup> Regular High-Level Consultations between Japanese and NATO officials were established in 1993 and continue to the present day.<sup>8</sup>

That Japan and NATO developed formal relations only in the waning days of the Cold War is no coincidence. France's 1983 focus on NATO's European identity reflected the Alliance's formal mission of defending Western Europe's territorial integrity from Soviet aggression. The end of the Cold War both freed and forced the Alliance to begin contemplating a role for itself outside of this traditional sphere, opening the door for relations with new partners such as Japan. On Japan's end, the opportunity was not wasted. Yukio Satoh, then Director General for North American Affairs at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, articulated Japan's views on the benefits of cooperation with NATO in a 1992 article in the *NATO Review*.<sup>9</sup> The common security interests he identified included containing the fallout from the collapse of the former Soviet Union, facilitating Russia's internal reforms (along with an appeal for European support for Japan regarding islands occupied by the Soviet Union after World War II), maintaining U.S. engagement in international affairs, and addressing trans-national issues such as the environment and refugees.<sup>10</sup> Highlighting the comparative advantages of Japan and NATO, (the former in funding for reconstruction and development, the latter in the maintenance of security in critical regions) he advocated for the incorporation by each side of the views and interests of the other into its area of expertise. These same common security interests remained at the forefront in 1995, as stated by then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Hiroshi Fukuda in a second Japanese article for the *NATO Review*.<sup>11</sup>

Japan's continued desire for vehicles to inform and influence European views is clear in Satoh and Fukuda's writing. Although this effort went beyond NATO, seeing Japan establish relationships with other European bodies during the 1990s, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe, NATO had value as a platform for security discussions, not only with Europe, but also between the United States, Japan, and Europe.<sup>12</sup> The importance of "trialogue" between the United States, Japan, and Europe through NATO was emphasized in the 1992 Tokyo Declaration on the U.S.-Japan Global Partnership made under President George H.W. Bush and Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, underscoring U.S. support for relations between Japan and NATO.<sup>13</sup> Japan-NATO engagement during the 1990s and early 2000s also took place against the backdrop of broader Japanese efforts to collaborate with international partners on the management of threats to international peace and security. This trend, coming on the heels of heated domestic and international debate about an appropriate Japanese response to the Gulf War, saw Japan's passage of the landmark *International Peace Cooperation Act*, as well as its significant humanitarian and reconstruction support to the Balkans.<sup>14</sup>

Japan's participation, alongside NATO, in international efforts to stabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina was highlighted by Secretary-General Javier Solana during his visit to Tokyo in 1997, the first by a NATO Secretary General since 1991.<sup>15</sup> Japanese and NATO officials discussed Bosnia and Herzegovina in various meetings during the mid and late 1990s and both Japan and NATO participated in the multilateral Peace Implementation Council for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but their efforts were parallel rather than collaborative. As characterized by Solana, Japan, "[i]n providing assistance in the rebuilding of [Bosnia and Herzegovina]..." was "involved in European security, and working to the same ends as NATO."<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the absence of collaboration between Japan and NATO on the Balkans, a clear recognition of Japan's important status as one of the largest and most active donors to the region was evidenced by NATO's advance briefing of Japan on its bombing campaign of Serbia over Kosovo.<sup>17</sup> The fact that NATO's actions on Kosovo made Japanese officials deeply uncomfortable, owing to the lack of United Nations Security Council backing for NATO's use of force, was important enough for Secretary General George Robertson to devote the majority of his opening address at the 1999 Japan-NATO security conference to justifying NATO's approach on Kosovo.<sup>18</sup> Despite these open communication channels and mutual recognition, the Japan-NATO relationship during the 1990s and early 2000s remained limited in substance and function, largely contained to what Japan-NATO scholar Michito Tsuruoka has called "the world of diplomatic niceties."<sup>19</sup>

### *Direct Cooperation*

The relationship took on greater significance after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and the resulting U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, into which both Japan and NATO were drawn. At first, Japan and NATO's engagement on Afghanistan was incidental, although, as in the Balkans, their participation in complementary

multilateral initiatives established familiarity and made them relevant quantities for one another. These initiatives included the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which came under NATO leadership in 2003; Japan's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean in support of U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom (separate from, but related to, ISAF), from 2001 to 2010; Japan's leadership, in coordination with the United Nations, of international community efforts for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of Afghan ex-combatants from 2002 to 2006; and the 2002 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, hosted by Japan, which generated \$4.5 billion for Afghan reconstruction and development from 61 countries, including key NATO Allies. Direct practical cooperation took off in 2007 with a Japanese initiative to provide funding for local development projects in association with ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), temporary basing units in far-flung areas of Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup>

The initiative, launched amid speculation about a possible SDF deployment to Afghanistan and, according to Tsuruoka, partly as a substitute, eventually included the deployment of Japanese civil servants to one of the PRTs.<sup>21</sup> Both sides benefitted; funding projects identified through the PRTs enabled Japan to target its development assistance into parts of the country it would not have been able to reach on its own, while providing NATO with a source of funding to address the needs of local communities, a component of ISAF's "hearts and minds" efforts.<sup>22</sup> Japan also provided direct financial support for NATO-led efforts by contributing to the NATO Afghan National Army Trust Fund (ANATF), along with funding it provided for the policing complement to the ANATF, the United Nations Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA).<sup>23</sup> Although Japan's LOTFA contributions far outstripped its ANATF contributions, which were restricted to limited-availability, non-lethal projects, such as literacy training, Japan's LOTFA funding benefitted the ANATF in an indirect way.<sup>24</sup> Because international fundraising efforts targeted the Afghan security forces as a whole (police and military), encompassing both LOTFA and ANATF, Japan's LOTFA contributions freed other donors to focus funds on the ANATF that they might otherwise have split between ANATF and LOTFA requirements.<sup>25</sup>

As the site of NATO's largest and first outside-of-theatre mission, Afghanistan commanded significant attention from the leaders of NATO and key NATO Allies, whose efforts extended beyond the execution of the military mission to broader economic and political management of and advocacy for Afghanistan. Japan, restricted from participating in ISAF militarily, but willing and practiced in economic development and financial assistance, thus found a unique platform for interaction with NATO and NATO Ally leadership. This platform, together with Japan's efforts and initiatives, allowed it to increase its profile at NATO. As a result, Japan was invited to NATO Summit meetings on Afghanistan beginning in 2008, the only non-troop contributing, non-Ally country so designated.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, after Japan and NATO signed a Security of Information and Material agreement in 2010 permitting them to share classified materials, NATO was able to make documents on Afghanistan, generally restricted to Allies and troop contributing partners, available to Japan.<sup>27</sup> Such developments signal the value placed by the Alliance on Japan's

contributions to NATO efforts in Afghanistan – non-traditional though they might have been – and the beginning of a transformation in the psyche of the Alliance regarding the utility of Japan-NATO relations.<sup>28</sup>

As time went on, exposing the extent of the gap between Afghanistan’s needs and capabilities and revealing the indivisibility of economic development and sustainable security in the country, Japan’s added value to the NATO effort became increasingly apparent. A case in point is Japan’s donor coordination effort for Afghan reconstruction and development. The 2002 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan had inaugurated a biennial series of international funding conferences with rotating leadership. In 2012, that leadership returned to Japan, with a second Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan generating \$16 billion in pledges. The 2012 Tokyo Conference was closely aligned with the 2012 NATO Chicago Summit session on Afghanistan. The two meetings had complementary fundraising initiatives (Tokyo for development assistance and Chicago for security assistance) and produced inter-referential declaration texts.<sup>29</sup> Together with the 2011 United Nations Bonn Conference on Afghanistan, they set the stage for a new phase in the international community’s joint efforts, the so-called Transformation Decade of 2015 to 2024. Underlining the commonality of effort, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen highlighted the Tokyo Conference and the importance of donor country pledges at Tokyo during appearances ahead of the event, while NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan Simon Gass spoke at the conference.<sup>30</sup>

The 2000s and early 2010s also saw a budding of the Japan-NATO relationship outside of Afghanistan. Beginning in 2009, Japan and NATO both participated in international counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden and surrounding waters, leading to direct operational cooperation in the foiling of a pirate attack on a Greek vessel in August 2010.<sup>31</sup> Japanese and NATO leaders also participated in a series of mutual visits that emphasized shared values and interests. During his 2005 visit to Tokyo, Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer highlighted NATO and Japan’s mutual respect for democracy, pluralism and fundamental freedoms and underscored NATO’s interest in collaboration with Japan on global challenges.<sup>32</sup> Foreign Minister Taro Aso, who became the first Japanese minister to address the North Atlantic Council (NAC) in 2006, asserted Japan’s intention to work more closely with NATO in an era of common global threats.<sup>33</sup> Later that year, he featured NATO in another landmark speech on Japan’s strategic foreign policy vision, in which he described NATO as a partner for Japan in promoting freedom and prosperity among countries along the rim of the Eurasian continent.<sup>34</sup> Abe, elected as Prime Minister in 2006, became the first Japanese head of government to visit NATO headquarters in 2007. His speech before the NAC characterized cooperation between Japan and NATO in protecting and promoting common values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as “only natural,” and called for Japan and NATO to “move on to a new phase of cooperation.”<sup>35</sup>

The Japan-NATO relationship in the 2000s and early 2010s was underpinned by various global changes – in particular, those related to the September 11 attacks, U.S. alliance

politics, and Japan's regional security. For NATO, September 11 demonstrated the relevance of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (collective self-defense) beyond the context of the Soviet threat and the territorial defense of Europe. It also accelerated the trend toward broader international engagement begun after the end of the Cold War. In the post-September 11 environment, NATO developed a new focus on collaborative action against global threats, and, with it, a new appreciation for the benefit of relationships with countries outside of the Euro-Atlantic area.<sup>36</sup> As Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer succinctly put it, "we do face global threats – terrorism, WMD – and we do need global partners."<sup>37</sup> This broader awakening was compounded by the experience of Afghanistan, which showed Alliance leaders how much more readily out-of-theater missions could be undertaken with a global network of military and operational partners.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, NATO's 2006, 2008 and 2010 Summits saw strides in the development of programs for non-traditional partners such as Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea.<sup>39</sup> NATO revised its partnerships policy in 2011 to enable such partners "deeper political and practical engagement" with the Alliance based on "individual needs, circumstances and aspirations," a policy orientation well-suited to Japan's specific needs and restrictions.<sup>40</sup>

For Japan, September 11 underscored the importance of countries acting together against global threats like terrorism, providing additional support for cooperation with multilateral partners like NATO that held similar views.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, Japan's 2004 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), which outlined its security policy in the post-September 11 era, called on Japan to "voluntarily and actively participate in activities that nations of the world cooperatively undertake to enhance the international security environment" and planned for Japan to develop "multi-functional, flexible, and effective defense forces that are highly ready, mobile, adaptable and multi-purpose."<sup>42</sup> September 11 also created an imperative for active political support by Japan of its injured ally, the United States.<sup>43</sup> This imperative prompted Japan to take as proactive efforts in support of U.S. operations in Afghanistan as its domestic constraints allowed, paving Japan's way to direct practical cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan. Along with the 2004 NDPG, legislation passed in support of the United States on both Afghanistan (2001 *Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law* allowing Japan's refueling mission to the Indian Ocean) and Iraq (2003 *Iraq Special Measures Law* enabling SDF participation in international humanitarian and reconstruction efforts for the country) eased the path forward for NATO engagement by chipping away at traditional boundaries on the use of the SDF outside of Japanese territory.

Outside of the indirect role U.S. alliance politics played, the United States also advocated directly for greater Japan-NATO cooperation during the 2000s. This advocacy was formalized in the 2007 Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee meeting between the countries' respective foreign and defense ministers, which classified the broader development of Japan-NATO cooperation as a common strategic objective of the United States and Japan.<sup>44</sup> The growing security challenges posed during the 2000s and early 2010s by China and North Korea, both of which feature prominently in Abe and Aso's speeches to the NAC, also played a role in Japan's orientation towards NATO. During the 2000s, Japan worried about the lack of transparency in China's growing military build-up, a

concern compounded by the European Union's mid-2000s forays into lifting its China arms embargo.<sup>45</sup> In the early 2010s, Japan's concerns expanded to China's increasing assertiveness in the East and South China Seas. The threat from North Korea was starker, following its efforts to intensify nuclear and missile programs throughout the 2000s, including through the test-firing of ballistic missiles in 2006 and conduct of nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009. In this regard, NATO was again seen as a venue in which Japan could inform European countries' security perceptions of Asia and affect European views of and behavior toward China and North Korea.<sup>46</sup>

### *Engagement under the Second Abe Administration*

The Japan-NATO relationship took on new momentum in the early 2010s, facilitated by the developments in NATO's partnership policy and the second administration of Prime Minister Abe. Abe's return to office in 2012 kick-started the "new phase of cooperation" between Japan and NATO that he had promised during his short-lived first term.<sup>47</sup> In 2013, Japan and NATO signed a Joint Political Declaration laying out their priorities for future cooperation and paving the way for a formal partnership agreement.<sup>48</sup> Secretary General Rasmussen marked the occasion with a visit to Tokyo, during which he delivered a speech characterizing NATO and Japan as "like-minded," "natural partners," and asserting, "We share the same values. We share the same security challenges. And we share the same desire to work together."<sup>49</sup> The formal agreement, the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP), came a year later, elevating the Japan-NATO relationship to a new level. The IPCP mechanism is intended to enhance political dialogue and strengthen cooperation between the Alliance and its partners. Signed during a visit by Prime Minister Abe to NATO Headquarters in May 2014, the IPCP laid out nine specific areas for Japan-NATO cooperation, including cyber, arms-control and non-proliferation, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security, and counter-terrorism.<sup>50</sup>

Abe addressed the NAC for a second time during his 2014 visit, delivering a major policy speech affirming his intention to develop Japan's partnership with NATO through the lens of "proactive contribution to peace," the catchphrase of his foreign policy vision.<sup>51</sup> Abe echoed Rasmussen's "natural partners" language, stating, "We are more than simply 'natural partners' that share fundamental values. We are also 'reliable partners' corroborated by concrete actions."<sup>52</sup> Continuing the trend, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg invoked the "natural partners" language in 2017, during a major speech in Tokyo outlining NATO's interests in the stability and security of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>53</sup> Stoltenberg's Tokyo visit was preceded by one to NATO by Abe earlier in 2017. The exchange of visits set the stage for a 2018 renewal of the IPCP.<sup>54</sup> While largely similar to the 2014 version, the 2018 IPCP streamlines the priority areas for cooperation from nine to seven.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, it contains modified language on participation in military exercises. Whereas the 2014 version cited Japanese participation in NATO exercises, the 2018 version changes the language to "participation in each other's exercises." More significantly, it adds new language noting that "NATO may consider contributing assets to

Japanese exercises in the Indo-Pacific region,” an area where Japan is seeking to show an active presence in light of China’s activities.

In accordance with the cooperation areas identified in the IPCP, and taking advantage of the proximity of assets deployed in the Gulf of Aden, Japan and NATO held their first joint naval exercise in September 2014, involving a Japanese Maritime SDF destroyer and the flagship of NATO’s counter-piracy mission in the region, Operation Ocean Shield.<sup>56</sup> A second exercise followed in November 2014 and two others in February and October 2015.<sup>57</sup> Coordination between Japan and NATO as part of international counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden and surrounding waters had continued since 2009 and surveillance by Japanese air patrols had become a leading source of information for participating international vessels by 2014, but direct operational cooperation between Japan and NATO against pirate vessels had been minimal.<sup>58</sup> Joint exercises were therefore important for increasing interoperability between Japanese and NATO naval assets and moving operational cooperation from incidental to intentional. Maritime security cooperation with NATO fits Japan’s broader interests in international maritime law, protection of international shipping lanes, and freedom of navigation.<sup>59</sup> In line with these priorities, Japan and NATO have made moves to expand their maritime cooperation beyond piracy. Taking advantage of the presence of a Japanese Maritime SDF training squadron sailing around Europe in August 2018, they undertook basic exercises in the Baltic Sea and off the coast of Spain, involving the squadron and NATO Standing Maritime Groups.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Japan has appointed a liaison officer to NATO’s Allied Maritime Command in London, United Kingdom.<sup>61</sup>

The designation to Allied Maritime Command complements Japan’s designation of a liaison officer to NATO’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, in Mons, Belgium, the headquarters of NATO Allied Command operations.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, Japan provides a SDF officer to NATO Headquarters as a voluntary national staff contribution to the office of the Secretary General’s Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security.<sup>63</sup> All of these appointments serve to familiarize Japan with NATO bureaucracy and procedures and to enhance information exchange and/or interoperability. Further to this end, Japan became a member in 2014 of the newly-created NATO Interoperability Platform (IP), a standing NATO initiative intended to increase general interoperability with partners.<sup>64</sup> In addition to its interoperability benefits, the IP can meet in various formats, including NAC, Military Committee, and Operations Policy Committee, enhancing partner access to NATO deliberative forums.<sup>65</sup> Japan also announced its intention in January 2018 to join the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn, Estonia, and contributes experts to multiple projects under the NATO Science for Peace and Security Partnership, a consortium for collaboration on security-related research and development.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, Japan established an official mission to NATO in July 2018, based on an earlier NATO request.<sup>67</sup> Although the establishment of Japan’s mission to NATO was done via the dual-hatting of Japan’s Embassy in Belgium, the move nonetheless creates a more official channel of communication between Japanese, NATO, and Ally officials in Brussels.



The relationship between Japan and NATO has flowered during the 2010s. This growth has been accompanied by a solidifying of common values, a deepening understanding by each party of the mutual relevance of revisionist powers in their respective regions, and a greater concurrence between Japan and NATO's strategic orientations. The period has also seen an uptick in the formalization of Japan's engagement with key NATO Allies like the United Kingdom and France.<sup>68</sup> As in the 1990s and 2000s, the United States has played a role, including through behind-the-scenes diplomatic support for closer Japan-NATO ties.<sup>69</sup> The joint respect for common values first invoked by Secretary General Rasmussen and Prime Minister Abe in the mid-2000s has become an established narrative with the shorthand "natural partners" during the 2010s. Shared values have become the semantic bridge used by both Japan and NATO to span the geographic divide between Japan's seat in Asia and NATO's core in Europe. These values – individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – are also invoked as values shared in contrast to Russia and China. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and China's increasing military assertiveness and buildup in the East and South China Seas during the early and mid-2010s set the stage for a greater acknowledgement by both Japan and NATO of the benefits of common positions on the challenges to the status quo posed by the actions of these states and North Korea.

A significant portion of Abe's 2014 address to the NAC was devoted to the aspects of China and North Korea's behavior that held repercussions for the broader international community, continuing his 2007 approach of utilizing NATO as a platform for influencing European perceptions of the region. This time, however, Abe also used his address to draw parallels between the behavior of China and Russia, framing Japan's concern over China in a way that could resonate with Europe, stating, "...Ukraine is the greatest challenge for post-Cold War Europe. We cannot accept changes to the status quo by force or coercion. This is a global issue that also impacts Asia."<sup>70</sup> Notably, these views were echoed by NATO leaders, lending credibility to Abe's approach. During Abe's 2014 visit, Secretary General Rasmussen, in talking about the impact of the crisis with Russia over Ukraine, stated, "...there is no doubt that the security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific regions cannot be treated separately."<sup>71</sup> Secretary General Stoltenberg made similar statements during his 2017 speech in Tokyo, asserting that NATO's security was "bound up" with that of its close partners in the region.<sup>72</sup> He also classified North Korea as threat to both regional partners and NATO Allies, given the country's development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, following an earlier condemnation of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs by the NAC.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, Stoltenberg took the highly unusual step of criticizing China in an official statement (although indirectly). In a joint press release with Abe, issued during Stoltenberg's 2017 visit, the two "...express our concern about the situation in the East and South China Seas..." and "...reaffirm our opposition to unilateral coercive actions that could alter the status quo and increase tensions."<sup>74</sup>

Japan and NATO's strategic orientations have also coincided more significantly during the 2010s. Japan's 2013 National Security Strategy (NSS), the country's first, establishes Japan as a "Proactive Contributor to Peace" a status that can be understood to encompass more active Japanese promotion and fostering of international peace and stability, in cooperation with the international community.<sup>75</sup> In describing the proactive contribution to peace concept, Abe notes, "...Japan must, on the basis of international cooperation, play an even more proactive role than ever before in maintaining world peace and stability."<sup>76</sup> He draws a distinct connection between global security and Japan's security, arguing that "[w]ithout world peace and stability, Japan cannot safeguard its own peace and stability."<sup>77</sup> The means through which Japan intends to pursue its proactive contribution to peace include: "playing a leading role in the settlement of disputes," including by working through the United Nations on preventive diplomacy, mediation and post-conflict assistance; leading international efforts on disarmament and non-proliferation; "strengthening the international order based on universal values and rules, including via capacity-building efforts for developing countries;" and promoting cooperation against terrorism.<sup>78</sup> In this regard, Abe is clear that Japan's proactive contribution to peace will involve the more active participation of the SDF.<sup>79</sup> Juxtaposing the importance of operational cooperation with Japan's SDF prohibitions, he states, "[t]hat is exactly why it is incumbent upon us in Japan to reconstruct the legal basis pertinent to the right of collective self-defense and to international cooperation..."<sup>80</sup> Security reforms passed by the Diet in 2015, which will be discussed in the next policy brief in this series, effectively accomplish this goal.

NATO's strategic orientation portrays the Alliance as one that not only protects its member states from attack, but also "projects stability" beyond its borders by engaging in "crisis management" and "cooperative security" with partners. In their 2016 Warsaw Summit Communique, in a formulation similar to Japan's proactive contribution to peace language, NATO heads of state and government "...seek to contribute more to the efforts of the international community in projecting stability and strengthening security outside our territory, thereby contributing to Alliance security overall."<sup>81</sup> Their means of doing so are through the "essential core tasks" of the Alliance detailed in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, its ten-year framework. The Strategic Concept lays out three such tasks: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.<sup>82</sup> Collective defense (deterrence and defense against aggression and mutual assistance against attack) is aimed largely inward, towards NATO territory, but also includes working with partner countries on countering terrorism beyond NATO territory. Crisis management and cooperative security, meanwhile, are capabilities explicitly directed beyond NATO's borders. Crisis management involves NATO's role in preventing and mitigating conflicts, along with post-conflict stability and reconstruction operations. Cooperative security encompasses deepening cooperation with the United Nations, arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, the induction of countries sharing common values, and practical cooperation and capacity-building with partners, including for counter-terrorism. Both capabilities involve activities similar to those identified in Japan's NSS.

## *Conclusions*

The preceding survey brings to light four aspects of Japan-NATO relations that may be relevant to the future trajectory of the relationship. First, as indicated above, the growth in the relationship has been accompanied by an alignment in values and strategic orientations between Japan and NATO. Scholars Paul Bacon and Joe Burton posit a similar state of affairs in their 2017 study, which notes that NATO's projection of narratives of natural partnership, "strategic parallelism," and cooperative security to Japan was successful precisely because "Japan was ready and waiting to embrace [these narratives] for its own reasons, and indeed had already articulated its own versions of them."<sup>83</sup> This alignment in values and strategic orientations enables each side to articulate the benefits of the relationship in a way that aligns with its policies and resonates with its publics, providing a rationale for Japan-NATO engagement that is not dependent on outside factors or events. Second, practical and/or operational cooperation in the Japan-NATO relationship has expanded over time, in both incidence and focus area, but it has also appeared to result primarily from seized opportunities that are temporal in nature. These opportunities have mostly come from mutual participation in multilateral initiatives with overlapping relevance to each side, principally, Afghanistan and piracy, but have also, as in the case of 2018 naval exercises, resulted from occasions of mutual proximity.

New opportunities for practical and operational cooperation from Afghanistan and piracy are effectively finished, at least for the time being. Although both Japan and NATO remain engaged on Afghanistan, they have long since reached the limits of their practical cooperation options there. Similarly, the success of counter-piracy operations around the Gulf of Aden has vastly reduced further need for them, and, while Japan continues to maintain assets in the area, NATO ended its Operation Ocean Shield in 2016.<sup>84</sup> In the absence of another international security threat that rises to the level of their mutual engagement, Japan and NATO will have to actively create opportunities for practical and operational cooperation to continue the growth of such cooperation going forward. Although the long plateau to the relationship during the 1990s and early 2000s does not provide a positive precedent in this regard, the Japan-NATO relationship has evolved significantly during the mid-2000s and 2010s, bringing into question the predictive value of the earlier plateau phase. Japanese officials continue to view cooperation with NATO as desirable.<sup>85</sup> Further military exercises remain an option and non-regionally specific issue areas, like cyber defense, which provide fruitful opportunities for cooperation between geographically distant partners, are particularly interesting.<sup>86</sup> Even if Japan and NATO eventually decide to become the kind of partners that only come together actively to respond to intermittent crises, they will still need to pursue a level of practical and operational cooperation to ensure compatibility and interoperability in crisis situations. The second and third policy briefs in this series explore how Japan and NATO can create opportunities for such cooperation.

Third, the momentum surrounding the Japan-NATO relationship during the late 2000s and 2010s was boosted not only by cooperation opportunities derived from Afghanistan and

piracy, but also by the low-hanging fruit of novel high-level visits and administrative formalizations like the signing of the IPCP, joining of the IP, and designation of a Japanese mission to NATO (finished in 2018 but in the works for some time). Although clearly significant, both practically and symbolically, such events are the standard steps partner nations use to climb the NATO threshold and the flurry of activity surrounding this initial climb eventually levels off for all partners. It would be a mistake to automatically equate a leveling off of this kind in the coming years with a change in the health or vitality of the Japan-NATO relationship. Administrative formalization and diplomatic signaling through speeches and visits remain an important and necessary part of Japan-NATO relations, but a better barometer for the trajectory of the relationship will be the steps each side takes to deepen relations beyond such formalities, an issue that will be addressed in the third brief.

Finally, the Japan-NATO relationship has been influenced by third-parties, particularly the United States, China, and North Korea, but also Russia. While U.S. direct and indirect influence has had a positive effect on the relationship, waning U.S. focus on the priority of NATO under the administration of President Donald Trump leaves in question how much high-level support the United States will provide for the Japan-NATO relationship going forward. With the evolution of the Japan-NATO relationship, direct U.S. support is likely less important than ever before, but it certainly remains helpful. Given the slow pace of bureaucratic change, the longer-term U.S. orientation toward NATO – that is, beyond the current Trump administration – will have significance; a second Trump administration would likely be more determinative of the direction of U.S. support. Meanwhile, Japan and NATO have found increasing common ground on challenges to the status quo posed by Chinese, North Korean and Russian actions, even though that common ground has, thus far, been largely semantic.<sup>87</sup> The challenges posed by these states, and how/whether Japan and NATO choose to respond to them, will likely continue to impact the relationship. China's influence, in particular, is likely to grow as Japan reorients the SDF to face new challenges from China and NATO powers like France and the United Kingdom become increasingly active in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>88</sup> China's military buildup and activities have already affected Japan's security posture and legislation in ways that facilitate operational cooperation with NATO Allies, a topic that will be discussed in the next brief.

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<sup>1</sup> The head of Japan's Defense Agency visited NATO Headquarters in 1979, 1981, and 1984 and the Japanese foreign minister met with the NATO Secretary General in 1986. Additionally, after 1980, Japanese parliamentarians participated as observers in what later became known as the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. See Masashi Nishihara, "Can Japan Be a Global Partner for NATO?," *Riga Papers, NATO and Global Partners: Views from the Outside*, Ronald D. Asmus, Editor, Riga, Latvia, November 27-29, 2006, pp. 36, 37; and Brian Bridges, "Japan and Europe: Rebalancing a Relationship," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (March 1992), p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Scott Stokes, "France Blocks Japanese Bid for Informal Ties to NATO," *New York Times*, April 2, 1983, <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/02/world/france-blocks-japanese-bid-for-informal-ties-to-nato.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Stokes.

<sup>4</sup> Takashi Oka, "Japan takes firm stand with West on defense issues at summit," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 3, 1983, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1983/0601/060153.html>.

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- <sup>15</sup> Javier Solana, “NATO’s Role in Building Cooperative Security in Europe and Beyond,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, October 15, 1997, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1997/s971015a.htm>.
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<sup>75</sup> It is important to note that Japan’s strategic orientation as a Proactive Contributor to Peace is not an entirely new development of the 2010s. Rather, this orientation is the leading edge of a trend-line that dates back to the early 1990s, and its antecedents are clearly visible in the preferences and policies of the Koizumi and first Abe administrations, as well as the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administrations of 2009-2012. However, Abe’s ability to institutionalize this strategic orientation within the Japanese security policy-making structure – through the creation of the NSS and the establishment of other important legislative and administrative changes – is new in the 2010s.

<sup>76</sup> Kantei, “‘Second Gathering with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’ hosted by Japan Akademia, Speech by Prime Minister,” December 19, 2013, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201312/19speech\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201312/19speech_e.html).

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<sup>78</sup> Kantei, “National Security Strategy,” pp. 5, 28-31.

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<sup>80</sup> See Abe’s keynote address at the 13<sup>th</sup> IISS Asian Security Summit – the Shangri-La Dialogue, May 30, 2014, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201405/0530kichokoen.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201405/0530kichokoen.html), accessed October 12, 2018.

<sup>81</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” paras. 6 and 80-85, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm#outside-nato](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm#outside-nato).

<sup>82</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation,” para. 4, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_68580.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm).

<sup>83</sup> Paul Bacon and Joe Burton, “NATO-Japan Relations: Projecting Strategic Narratives of ‘Natural Partnership’ and Cooperative Security,” *Asian Security*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2018), p 2.

<sup>84</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO Concludes successful counter-piracy mission,” December 15, 2016, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_139420.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_139420.htm).

<sup>85</sup> Author interview at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, February 6, 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Author interview at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, February 6, 2019.

<sup>87</sup> Bacon and Burton also note that Japan’s actions toward Russia are sometimes out of sync with these semantics. See “NATO-Japan Relations: Projecting Strategic Narratives of ‘Natural Partnership’ and Cooperative Security,” pp. 1,2,9.

<sup>88</sup> See for example: Erik Brattberg, Philippe Le Corre, and Etienne Soula, “Can France and the UK Pivot to the Pacific,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 5, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/07/05/can-france-and-uk-pivot-to-pacific-pub-76732>.