

POLICY BRIEF

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Japan and Canada: Enhancing Security Cooperation

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Under the Abe administration, Japan continues to expand its security partnerships with likeminded countries as part of the country's Proactive Contribution to Peace. The emphasis on enhancing partnerships that complement Japan's alliance with the US has also been outlined in Japan's National Security Strategy and its regional approach to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Japan and Canada share the value of and need to defend the international rules-based order and promote free and open markets. In this regard, there has been some uptick in security cooperation between Canada and Japan over the past few years aimed at addressing regional security challenges in East Asia and beyond.

One key example of this is the presence of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in the Pacific working, alongside the US and other partners, to prevent ship-to-ship transfers involving North Korean vessels that are intended to skirt the UNSC sanctions placed against Pyongyang. Canada -which is working closely with Britain, the UK, Australia, the US and Japan – has sent one of its CP-140 Aurora long-range patrol aircraft to the East China Sea. The patrol aircraft, which is based out Kadena air base in Okinawa, is a tangible example of growing security cooperation between Tokyo and Ottawa. This cooperation on ship-to-ship transfers has been a positive take away from Canada's hosting of a meeting earlier this January on the security and stability of the Korean Peninsula. The meeting, which was held at the Foreign Minister's level, reinforced international solidarity in opposition to North Korea's "illegal and dangerous actions, and to advance diplomatic efforts towards a more stable, secure and denuclearized Korean Peninsula."

There was some initial concern in Japan on Canada's motivations on hosting such a meeting (in addition to accompanying concerns that the summit with other UN Command sending states may focus too much on a diplomatic solution rather than increasing pressure on Pyongyang). The worry was that this approach would overly cater to a negotiated settlement with North Korea over its program – as

pushed by the dovish administration of Moon Jae-in in South Korea – and erode the unity of the international community’s opposition to Pyongyang’s provocations. However, at the conclusion of the summit, these concerns were mainly assuaged as the grouping authoritatively denounced Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons program with Foreign Ministers stressing “unequivocally that North Korea will never be accepted as a nuclear power and committed to exerting continued pressure, including by strengthening sanctions, in order to bring North Korea back to negotiations. They reaffirmed that these measures will remain in place until North Korea changes its course and takes decisive, irreversible steps to denuclearize.”

Japan and Canada also recently concluded an Acquisition and Cross Servicing (ACSA) agreement in late April, during the visit of Japan’s Foreign Minister Taro Kono to Canada. This agreement will strengthen cooperation between the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and will allow both countries to make efficient use of each other’s military equipment during operations and exercises in Canada, Japan and other locations. The agreement will also advance cooperation between the two countries in response to humanitarian and disaster crises, peacekeeping initiatives, and allow greater collaboration with third-partners, including the US.

Canadian and Japanese officials are encouraged by the ACSA’s completion and look forward to more steps in enhancing their security relationship. More specifically, the ACSA will enable the CAF and the SDF to “exchange supplies and services, such as food, water, fuel, repair and maintenance services, spare parts and components, transportation, clothing, communications and medical services, use of facilities, training services, storage services, and airport and seaport services.” Japan has concluded ACSAs now with a range of partners including the United States, Australia

and the United Kingdom.

What are some of the next steps to enhance security cooperation?

First, of course will be to ratify and implement ACSA to work towards more operational cooperation. While the CAF and the SDF already take part in a significant amount of multilateral exercises in the region – including the large-scale Rim of Pacific (RIMPAC) naval games – the ACSA will allow for more seamless cooperation on bilateral and/or trilateral exercises and elevate defense relations. This will also help improve the interoperability of the two forces.

A second key element will be to conclude a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) – which would allow both sides to more easily share military information and intelligence - and other matters. Japan has now conducted a GSOMIA with a range of countries – including US, Australia, Korea and others – and this can serve as an important intelligence complement to the ACSA agreed to earlier this year.

Third, it will be important to increase the exchange between the SDF and CAF through more high-level visits and also routine port visits from naval vessels. A strong example of this was the visit last summer of the HMCS Ottawa to Tokyo. The Maritime Self Defense Force has also been increasing its port visits in Canada and has included some key Canadian ports – such as Halifax – on its itinerary of stops for the JS Kashima – a training vessel for its new naval officers.

Fourth, these operational exchanges should be complemented by high-level diplomatic and intellectual dialogue. Based on the 2010 Canada-Japan Joint Declaration on Political, Peace and Security Cooperation – Tokyo and Ottawa regularly undertake a “2+2” Dialogue (attended by Minister-level officials responsible

for Foreign Affairs and Defense). With an increasing focus on East Asian security issues, these talks must continue to take place and produce tangible ideas. A second complement to this is the support for intellectual exchange on security issues. For the past fifteen years, Canada and Japan have hosted a track 1.5 symposium on Peace and Security Cooperation, which brings together academics, think tank officials, and government officials from both countries together to discuss important regional security and bilateral cooperation topics.

Finally, Canada and Japan both share concerns – albeit at different levels - on China’s increasingly aggressive moves in the

South China Sea and also its development of infrastructure and plans for a “maritime silk road” that traverses through the Indian Ocean Region. The volatility in the region underpins the need for Japan to mobilize the diplomatic capital it has amassed under Abe’s tenure – in order to push forward the rules-based liberal order. Abe should look to drive forward the expansive – but still relatively nascent – security network in the region made up of several US allies and partners. Canada can play a role here also in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy to work together with Japan – and other likeminded partners in the region – to promote these shared interests.