



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG POLICY BRIEF

The Australia-Japan Summit

Author

Lalit Kapur

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Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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Author

Commodore Lalit Kapur (Retd.), Senior Fellow for Maritime Strategy, Delhi Policy Group

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Cover Photographs:

HMAS Sirius refuels JS Kaga and JS Ikazuchi in the South China Sea, September 2020.

Source: Japan MOD

Prime Ministers Kishida Fumio and Scott Morrison hold up signed copies of the Reciprocal Access Agreement on January 6, 2022. Source: Kantei.go.jp

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The Australia-Japan Summit

by
Lalit Kapur

Two months after meeting in London on November 2, 2021 and committing to raising the Special Strategic Partnership between their countries to an even higher level¹, the Prime Ministers of Japan and Australia met virtually on January 6, 2022. The outcome was a Joint Statement and a landmark Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) for cross-deployments of their respective militaries.

The Joint Statement reaffirms the shared commitment of both countries to democracy, human rights, free trade and a rules-based international order, as well as close coordination to contribute to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific². The leaders agreed to enhance information sharing and cooperation on maritime domain awareness through cooperation between Japan's Coast Guard and Australia's Department of Home Affairs. They committed to addressing illicit technology transfers, building resilient supply chains and strengthening the protection of critical infrastructure, to elevating cooperation on cyber and critical technology including through research and development in AI and quantum technologies, to promoting the application of international law and agreed norms in cyberspace, and to cooperating on standard setting in international fora.

Further, they recommitted to opposing coercive behaviour and countering harmful disinformation. They reiterated the importance of both countries reinforcing their alliances with the US and promoting Japan-Australia-US cooperation, including through the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and Trilateral Defence Ministers' Meeting, and welcomed the stated US intention of developing an Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. They welcomed growing quadrilateral cooperation among Japan, Australia, India and the US and looked forward to the next Quad leaders' meeting to drive forward coordinated responses to the most pressing challenges of the region, including through the production and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines and the development of quality infrastructure.

¹ Japan-Australia Summit Meeting, https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/ocn/au/page3e_001152.html

² Australia – Japan Leaders' Meeting Joint Statement, 6 January 2022, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100283824.pdf>



Prime Ministers Kishida Fumio and Scott Morrison hold up signed copies of the Reciprocal Access Agreement on January 6, 2022. Source: Kantei.go.jp

The serious concern of both countries about China's activities was evident in references in the Joint Statement to the South China Sea, East China Sea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. They reaffirmed their strong objection to China's unlawful maritime claims and actions that are inconsistent with UNCLOS, reiterating that the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Tribunal decision is final and legally binding on all parties. Other regional concerns included North Korea's ongoing development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, the situation in Myanmar, and extension of the NPT.

The RAA³ establishes a framework for Japan's Self Defence Force and the Australian Defence Forces to undertake cooperative activities on each other's territory. Ostensibly intended to facilitate joint exercises and disaster relief operations by army and air force units from each other's soil (naval operations take place in international waters and are thus not included), the provisions can be extended to stationing of troops and aircraft on each other's territory. Japan

³ Agreement between Japan and Australia concerning the facilitation of reciprocal access and cooperation between the self-defence forces of Japan and the Australian Defence Force, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100283786.pdf>

has similar arrangements only with the US, but reports indicate it plans to expand them to the UK and France⁴.

China's official reaction was subdued. Its spokesman said, "We always believe that state-to-state exchanges and cooperation should be conducive to enhancing mutual understanding and trust among countries in the region and safeguarding regional peace and stability, rather than targeting or undermining the interests of any third party"⁵. He added, "The Pacific Ocean is vast enough for the common development of countries in the region. Along the same line, peace and stability in the Pacific depends on the joint efforts of countries in the region. We hope that the Pacific will be an ocean of peace, not a place to make waves"⁶.

Following WWII, diplomatic relations between Australia and Japan were established in 1952. A treaty of friendship and cooperation was signed 1976⁷. The Australia–Japan Partnership was established in May 1995⁸. US presence was accepted by both as the foundation of regional security⁹. It was only in March 2007 that Prime Ministers John Howard and Shinzo Abe agreed on strengthening cooperation on security matters¹⁰. Cooperation was, however, restricted to tackling transnational crime, illegal migration, counter-terrorism and disarmament, as well as peace operations, exchange of strategic assessments, humanitarian operations including disaster relief and contingency planning, including for pandemics¹¹. Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations in the 2 + 2 format started in June 2007, with the 9th

⁴ "Japan and Australia sign 'landmark' defense treaty amid concern over China", <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/01/06/national/japan-australia-landmark-defense-treaty/#:~:text=Japan%20and%20Australia%20signed%20a,its%20military%20and%20economic%20clout.&text=Australia%20is%20the%20second%20country,accord%20after%20the%20United%20States>.

⁵ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on January 5, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202201/t2020105_10479204.html

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Australia and Japan, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/japan/Pages/basic-treaty-of-friendship-and-co-operation-between-australia-and-japan>

⁸ Joint Declaration on the Australia-Japan Partnership, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/australia/join_au.html

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Japan – Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/australia/joint0703.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

such dialogue being held in June 2021¹². An agreement on reciprocal provision of supplies and services was concluded in May 2010¹³. A security of information agreement came into force in March 2013¹⁴. The partnership was expanded to a Special Strategic Partnership in July 2014¹⁵. An agreement concerning the transfer of defence equipment and technology was also signed, leading to hopes that Japan's defence industry would gain entry into the international arms market through export of Soryu submarines to Australia¹⁶. This hope was, however, dashed when, less than two years later, DCNS of France won the bid to build Australia's new submarine fleet¹⁷.

The RAA, which has been under negotiation since 2014, indicates Japan has not allowed its disappointment at the loss of the Soryu submarine export contract to prevent movement forward in strengthening its security embrace of Australia. The joint statement following the 9th Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial consultations had committed to concluding the RAA at the earliest, to enable undertaking "targeted, effective and practical defence activities in support of a secure and stable region"¹⁸. Both countries have delivered on this commitment.

Media reports quote Australia's Defence Minister, Peter Dutton, as having said that it was inconceivable for Australia not to join the US should Washington decide to defend Taiwan¹⁹. The RAA effectively enables Australian troops and aircraft to be positioned in Japan, to pre-empt just such a contingency. It is another indicator of a new US-led hard security architecture crystallising in Western Pacific. The RAA will, along with AUKUS, act as a strong signal for

¹² Ninth Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/ninth-japan-australia-22-foreign-and-defence-ministerial-consultations>

¹³ Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of Australia concerning reciprocal provision of supplies and services between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Australian Defence Force, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/australia/pdfs/agree1005.pdf>

¹⁴ Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of Japan on the Security of Information, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/2013/15.html>

¹⁵ Joint Statement with Prime Minister Abe – Special Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-23633>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ How France sank Japan's \$ 40 billion Australian submarine dream, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-submarines-japan-defence-in-idUSKCN0XQ1FC>

¹⁸ Ninth Japan-Australia 2+2 foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/ninth-japan-australia-22-foreign-and-defence-ministerial-consultations>

¹⁹ 'Inconceivable' Australia would not join US to defend Taiwan – Australian defence minister, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/inconceivable-australia-would-not-join-us-defend-taiwan-australian-defence-2021-11-12/>

China, whether or not it actually decides to use force to incorporate Taiwan, or continues with its ongoing grey zone coercion.

At the Japan-US virtual summit held on January 21, President Biden applauded the signing of the RAA which will enable closer trilateral cooperation among the three allies.



HMAS Sirius refuels JS Kaga and JS Ikazuchi in the South China Sea, September 2020.

Source: Japan MOD

Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had, in his 2012 essay, envisaged a strategy "whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the US state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the Western Pacific" and affirmed that he was "prepared to invest, to the greatest possible extent, Japan's capabilities in this security diamond"²⁰. He had, in the same essay, complimented his political opponents for continuing along the path of strengthening ties with Australia and India that he laid out in 2007, and said that of the two, India deserved greater emphasis²¹. While the four countries of his vision have emerged as partners in the revived and reinforced Quad, Japan's security cooperation with Australia has expanded far more rapidly and purposefully than with India. Tokyo's security relationship with New Delhi is, in contrast, marked by tokenism rather than effective actions. This reflects the underlying fact that the Japan – Australia partnership is glued together by their respective alliance relations

²⁰ Shinzo Abe, "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond", <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>

²¹ Ibid.

with the US, and by the US security umbrella that each enjoys. The RAA reinforces this trend.

Increasingly, the focus and attention of the three allies within the Quad is singularly directed towards East Asia and the Western Pacific, or the erstwhile Asia Pacific. Their priority will be to checkmate China within the first island chain where China's maritime threat originates; they demonstrably lack the will, capacity or interest to buttress security in the more distant Indian Ocean which is vital for India. There is a clear divergence between the geographic priorities of the three allies and India. Moreover, the Quad plays no role in reinforcing India's security in the continental domain. Thus, while the Quad can serve as a useful soft security mechanism to counter China's influence and assertions in the Indo-Pacific, India needs to rely on its own regional strategy, diplomacy and military power to develop a countervailing security architecture for the Indian Ocean.



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India

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