

Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: An Opportunity for Australia, Japan and Europe?

Background

Australia, Japan and Europe share many common economic and strategic interests. This can be best seen by the extensive network of bilateral agreements and instruments in place, including the 2014 Australia- Japan Special Strategic Partnership, the 2017 EU- Australia Framework Agreement and the 2019 EU- Japan Economic and Strategic Partnership Agreements. Additionally, the parties also intensify their engagement with NATO, as seen with the 2019 renewed partnership agreement with Australia, the establishment of Japan's Mission to NATO in 2018 and the renewal of its individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) with the Alliance in June 2020. Against this background, it is worth asking whether and how can the relations between Australia, Japan, the EU and NATO be taken to the next level.

The Indo-Pacific space has been undergoing a profound transformation, with changing power balances and great power rivalries putting the rules and institutions that underpin regional peace and security under strain. This new strategic dynamic compels like-minded partners, with a shared commitment to the global rules-based order, to work together to reinforce the multilateral system that has supported regional stability and prosperity. With new leaders in the EU and an American presidential election on the horizon, it is an opportune moment to take stock of the relations between Australia, Europe and Japan and explore how their interactions can reinforce the security of the Indo-Pacific geostrategic axis.

Among the many common security challenges, maritime security in the Indo-Pacific stands out as one of the most prominent areas for potential cooperation. Can the trilateral relations between these actors be enhanced, and, if so, in what ways? Is there an appetite to act more comprehensively in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific? Is there scope for bringing the multitude of bilateral agreements and initiatives together? What are the political obstacles to an enhanced Australia, Europe and Japan strategic footprint in the Indo-Pacific? To answer these questions, the event brings together experts and policy practitioners from Australia, Japan and Europe, aiming to build a network of relevant expertise and assist with developing closer ties between the three involved parties in view of future cooperation.

The seminar is organised by the newly established Japan Program at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), in cooperation with the Australian Embassy to Belgium, Luxemburg and Mission to the EU and NATO, and the Japanese Embassy to Belgium and Mission to NATO.

Key questions

- The Indo-Pacific is a geopolitical space that could benefit from closer cooperation between Australia, Japan and Europe. In what ways should this trilateral cooperation begin and evolve? How will the partners work together to ensure maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and can they craft diplomatic and strategic relationships with other major players in the region?
- In what practical ways can the partners enhance maritime security? Should the focus be primarily on enhanced training and exercises, the joint development of capabilities and a shared operational doctrine, or joint efforts to build the capacity of third countries in the Indo-Pacific? What internal constraints inhibit each of the partners playing a greater role in maritime security?
- How do Australia and Japan view international partners such as the EU and NATO? Are they satisfied with the existing level of cooperation? If there is room for improvement, in what ways can maritime security cooperation be enhanced and what is expected of the EU and NATO?

Expert seminar

Date: 3 November 2020
Location: Microsoft Teams

8.50-9.00 Opening of the digital meeting room

9.00-9.15 Opening Remarks

- **Prof. Karel de Gucht**, President, Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB)
- **H.E. Makita Shimokawa**, Ambassador to Belgium and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Japan.
- **H.E. Justin Brown**, Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the European Union and NATO, Australia.

09.15-10.30 Session 1: Maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific: views from the capitals

The Indo-Pacific maritime environment is home to a multitude of security challenges, ranging from mounting strategic rivalries, lasting territorial disputes, militarisation and unilateral interpretations of international law, to less traditional ones, such as IUU fishing, seaborne crime, resource depletion and environmental degradation. What are the most burning security concerns from the perspectives of Tokyo, Canberra and Brussels? How do respective capitals rank their interests and priorities in the region and why? What are the perceived benefits and obstacles for a closer AUS - EUROPE – JPN trilateral cooperation at the national and regional levels? The first session seeks to provide a basis for discussion by comparing the priorities of the four actors involved (Japan, Australia, the EU and NATO) in order to explore the level of interest and identifying common areas for future cooperation.

Chair: **Prof. Luis Simon**, Head of International Security, Institute for European Studies (IES), Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

Impulse statements:

- Dr. David Brewster**, Senior Research Fellow, Australian National University (ANU).
Prof. Yuichi Hosoya, Professor of International Politics, Keio University, Japan.
Dr. Eva Pejsova, Senior Japan Fellow, Institute for European Studies (IES), Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

Format: Closed-door expert discussion

10.30-10.45 *Digital Coffee Break*

10.45-12.00 **Session 2: Joining forces in the Indo-Pacific: strategies, partnerships and capabilities**

How can Australia, Japan and Europe contribute to a safer and more stable maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific? From political dialogues, functional cooperation, table-top exercises or capacity building with third parties, what are the current ways of engagement and what concrete steps can be taken to deepen trilateral cooperation (i.e. EU-JP-AUS and NATO-JP-AUS)? Given the many bilateral and multilateral security arrangements in the region, what would be the most suitable setting? Having discussed the potential areas of common interest, the second session aims to explore the concrete means for enhancing cooperation – including policy instruments, capabilities, communication channels, as well as the most effective formats.

Chair: **Dr. Daniel Fiott**, Security and Defence Editor, EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and Visiting Professor, Institute for European Studies (IES), Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

Impulse statements:

Mr. Michael Shoebridge, Director, Defence, Strategy & National Security, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI).

Mr. Tomonori Yoshizaki, Director, Policy Simulation, National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), Japan.

Dr. Alessio Patalano, Reader in East Asian Warfare and Security; Director, King's Japan Programme, King's College London.

Format: Closed-door expert discussion

Public Roundtable

Date: 3 November 2020

Location: Zoom

12.15-13.15 Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: an opportunity for Australia, Japan and Europe?

A free, safe and stable maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific is not only a shared concern for all involved parties, it provides a plethora of opportunities for enhanced political and security cooperation at the trilateral level. Building up on the two expert discussions above, the third public session aims to summarise the key findings and open the floor for a broader debate with experts and policy makers.

Chair: **Dr. Eva Pejsova**, Senior Japan Fellow, Institute for European Studies (IES), Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

Speakers:

- **Mr. Richard Maude**, Executive Director, Policy, and Senior Fellow, Asia Society Policy Institute and Director of the ANU Crawford Leadership Forum, Australia.
- **Dr. Michito Tsuruoka**, Associate Professor, Keio University, Japan.
- **Dr. Céline Pajon**, Senior Fellow, Institute for European Studies (IES), Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB); Head of Japan Research, Center for Asian Studies, IFRI, France.

Format: public roundtable (streaming)