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# Enhancing Trilateral Security Cooperation in the Western Pacific

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Security experts from Japan, the United States and Australia were brought together under the auspices of the Kokoda Foundation in November 2010 to discuss options for enhancing trilateral security cooperation in the Western Pacific. While all three nations have important contributions to make, US engagement and continued strong presence in the region is pivotal. A regional strategy needs to be developed, including a shared vision of the region, together with a set of pragmatic actions. A rules-based multilateral approach is needed to ensure access to the global commons and regional stability. While several joint capability priorities need to be pursued by the three partners, capacity building must extend to non-military aspects and encompass other nations in the region, especially South Korea, India and Indonesia.

The Kokoda Foundation invited security experts from Japan, the United States and Australia to a trilateral security colloquium in late November 2010. The aim of the colloquium was to investigate the options for enhancing trilateral security cooperation in the Western Pacific. This report summarises the key points of discussion through Australian, Japanese and American eyes before arriving at some broad conclusions and options for moving the agenda forward.

## **Changing Strategic Realities in East Asia and the Future of the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue**

Strategic realities in East Asia are changing as the countries of North Asia and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) enjoy continued economic growth and improved military modernisation. China, in particular, epitomises this growth and modernisation, with its economy predicted to continue to grow at a significant rate such that by 2015 its share of global output could be over twelve percent (noting that in 1990 it was less than two percent). In comparison, the International Monetary Fund suggests that the United States' share of global output will have fallen from 26.2 percent to 22 percent over that same twenty-five year period. Military modernisation programs need to be accompanied by openness and transparency if regional concerns over improving military capability are to be minimised. This is especially needed in East Asia where strategic uncertainties, territorial disputes and long-standing tensions join with new security challenges.

A substantial challenge will be bringing China into a rules-based regional partnership. If this is not feasible the question of how best to shape China's role in the region will need to be addressed. It will be important to

encourage China to listen to the region and highlight that China can contain itself by the choices it makes. Good actions invite cooperation. Bad actions invite containment by the region. The best approach to China would seem to be through overlapping and interlocking trilaterals so that Japan, the United States, South Korea, Australia and India in various mixes could work to shape the environment, the agenda, and China's role.

It is also important to recognise that China does not have alliances, so it struggles to see the need for any trilateral or multilateral relationship that brings allies together. Its assertiveness can only be reined in through enmeshment in multilateralism, noting that it will never want to lose face in a multilateral forum. A multilateral framework must include all regional powers with a mandate to address the array of security issues from economic to societal to military, and it must meet at summit level to garner political commitment. Its agenda must be to create the 'rules of the road' and ensure that they are adhered to by all. In this, the notion of 'community' should not be viewed as it is in Europe; rather, it should be seen as one of communal interaction. The centrality of ASEAN can offset the concern that one or more major powers might hijack the agenda.

China's assertiveness might be on an upward trajectory as the military balance starts to tilt in favour of Beijing. In this arena, the focus must be on countering China's anti-access and area denial strategy not just its deployed military units. The United States needs to balance conceding power with contesting power; and indeed, in the final analysis it might have to be sharing power.

Hence, the trilateral must dovetail in with other regional security architectures. The East Asia Summit (EAS), linked to the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM+), provides that underpinning architecture. The way in which the United States makes use of the next EAS meeting, which will be the first it has attended, will be important for the future.

For the future, the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) which Australia, Japan and the United States established in 2001 must build on its successes, the latest being a set of joint projects to strengthen counter-terrorism capabilities in the region that were agreed in late 2010. More can be done to improve the coordination of responses to disasters in the region; not just in the immediate aftermath but also in subsequent reconstruction efforts. And more can be done in developing international norms on space security, addressing the challenges around cyber security, and dealing with the security aspects of climate change.

It is time to bring together the multitude of security programs that the three countries are running in the Western Pacific—not just for reasons of situational awareness but also to achieve economies and greater synergies in training and capacity building. Unfettered access to space and cyber is

key to each of the three countries. Cyber cooperation needs to increase, particularly in international forums. Individual stances of the trilateral partners need to be better coordinated in order to gain greater traction in multilateral forums. It might also be time to enhance combined exercising for credible contingencies. For example, the evacuation of non-combatants from the Korean Peninsula on the cessation of hostilities would be a good realistic test of joint planning, capability and interoperability. The three countries could also collaborate more on international development assistance and reinforce the connections between their respective non-government organisations.

The allies will need to embrace information-based operations. They will also need to respond to non-state actors that will increasingly use information to their advantage; such as for crime, terrorism and piracy. Innovation will be needed to keep pace with evolving threats in these areas as well. In general, the allies will need to maintain a strategic edge, where autonomous unmanned systems, space and cyber will take on increasing importance. Innovation is vital and rapid transfer of innovation across defence, security and industry will be needed. Fiscal challenges will also drive innovation in management processes.

Ensuring access to the 'global commons' requires closer cooperation between the trilateral partners. Common rules of behaviour need to be established and followed. In this the three countries can play a pivotal role in combating piracy, championing a treaty banning the first-use of anti-satellite weapons, and pooling resources to develop situational awareness in cyberspace which is a prerequisite for preventing or mitigating network intrusions.

It is important to agree the initiatives on which the three countries wish to focus closer trilateral attention. This might start with articulating a shared vision of China's desired role and exploring the consequences of failing to confront the challenges that China poses. Territorial disputes are especially tricky near-term issues, but the three countries should be able to agree on the need to enforce the rule of law and oppose the arbitrary use of force.

## **The Australian Contribution**

Australia wishes to see shared and integrated economic growth throughout the region supported by clear rules. Regional economies must seek to shape their place in the global economy using free-market principles and not try to find an alternate model. Furthermore, as the military capability of many regional countries improves as a result of their increased economic growth, they must be clear and unambiguous about their intentions. Australia considers that the roles of China, the United States and Japan will be key to future regional security, and in this respect four principles may be discerned from Australian policy statements:

The first principle is support for the continuing strong presence and engagement of the United States. It was noted that on 8 November 2010, Secretary Clinton said that America's future will continue to be tied to Asia's success, which is one reason the United States is enhancing its defence presence and posture in the Pacific.

The second principle is for Japan to play a regional role that is commensurate with its economic strength, capability, and interests—it is a global power, with vast economic and technical capacity and a demonstrated commitment to regional peace and stability.

Related to these two principles is the third—the need to get the regional architecture right. This is not just about Australia, Japan and the United States, but involves all regional countries, including China, in developing a common framework for security cooperation in East Asia. The start-point for this must be an expanded East Asia Summit (EAS), including the United States and Russia, to ensure cooperation across the political, security and economic issues that confront the region. Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) will remain a vital regional forum for trade and investment liberalisation and structural economic reform.

The fourth principle is the need for a rules-based regional order that dovetails into a similar global order to clarify rights and responsibilities and so develop strong norms of nation-state behaviour. Such 'rules of the road' bring better security and better predictability and while they will not necessarily remove threats, they will help manage them by defining what constitutes acceptable behaviour and what does not. China has a key role to play in developing these rules. Australia believes that the Western allies must be clear-eyed and unequivocal in their stance and must make the limits of their tolerance to poor behaviour clear.

These four principles are all visible within the TSD. Using the TSD, an expanding EAS, and improved bilateral relationships, it should be possible to achieve greater stability and security. New bodies will evolve, but they should seek to complement the current region-wide architecture and improve habits of cooperation in enhancing the security of East Asia.

Within the TSD, the Australia/Japan security and defence link needs to be strengthened, and the gap between each country's perceptions of the security threats in the region and China's role must be narrowed. Australia could offer Japan access to training facilities in Australia, as it currently does for Singaporean forces. On Japan's side, changes to its arms exports policy could open up new areas for cooperation between the two countries. Currently, Japan's constitution constrains options for improved cooperation.

There are four key priorities for Australia in pursuing options for enhanced regional security cooperation: First, Australia must be forward-thinking and

interoperable with its partners. Indeed, it must keep testing its effectiveness and utility as a partner. Second, Australia must play a leading role in building engagement within the region, noting that Australia does not have the strategic weight to make a decisive difference to the balance of power. Nevertheless, it can continue to take a leadership role in shaping priorities. Third, Australia must ensure that strategic options are calibrated to economic growth. Fiscal restraint in capability planning and development is needed to ensure that economic strength is not undermined. Fourth, a broad approach is needed. The approach cannot be focused on one or two nations or on one or two issues. A strong intelligence capability is critical, especially in meeting a rapidly rising demand for information. Intelligence exchanges with major partners in helping to build a cohesive regional and world view are crucial.

### **The Japanese Contribution**

Japan sees the need to review and renew its defence capabilities and encourage regional countries to assist in dealing with an increasing belligerent North Korea and a more assertive China. In this, South Korea is becoming a key partner for Japan, as is Australia. India and Vietnam are also developing closer ties with Tokyo and links with Russia may strengthen in coming years.

In the past, Japan has wavered and sent mixed messages to its allies. It has previously agreed on common security objectives in its key bilateral relationships, but they now need to be updated and pursued with vigour. Japan needs to demonstrate its capacity to contribute to allied deterrence and common defence.

Japan considers itself to be a lynchpin for US involvement in the region and believes it has more reason to increase its contribution if the United States is fully engaged. In this respect, Japan sees the need to increase its capabilities in submarines; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR); and anti-submarine warfare (ASW). Japan also needs to increase the budget for its coastguard as well as improve its contingency planning. While arms export rules will be reviewed, the most likely first step would be for Japan to contribute subsystems to the programs of others, rather than export complete weapons systems.

Tokyo acknowledges that the Japan/Australia dialogue is a fundamental part of the trilateral and needs to be strengthened. Japan would like to see Australia play a greater role on the Korean Peninsula, which it might be able to do in conjunction with Japanese forces operating out of Guam. Similarly, it sees its dialogue with South Korea as a key part of US involvement on North Korean issues. While some might argue that bringing South Korea into the current trilateral framework would be 'a country too far' and China's

unease would visibly increase, such a move might send a powerful signal to China that its recent assertiveness has been counter-productive.

Japan would also like to see countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines assisted in their dealings with China. The fact that Indonesia is the only ASEAN member of the G20 might be a good reason to include Indonesia more fulsomely. And Japan would also like to see China included in discussions to improve regional confidence.

In Japanese eyes, there is a need to strengthen agreed rule-making. The economic security dialogue needs to be reinforced, as does the dialogue over disputed territories and resource pollution. Bringing India into discussions could result in improved rule-making such as the safety of navigation in the Indian Ocean, as well as internet freedom and improved cyber security.

## **The American Contribution**

The United States is a lynchpin in tying the Western Pacific to Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The actions taken by Russia and the United States in Europe, with respect to missile defence, will flow across to the Western Pacific. It would also be useful for the trilateral partners to discuss the issue of China with the Europeans, and the United States would be instrumental in this. The NATO+4 framework has been used recently, bringing in Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea. This could be expanded further to include India.

America's emerging Asia strategy centres on three principal elements— allies, institutions and new friends. First, President Obama wants to strengthen traditional US bilateral political military alliances in Asia with key partners Australia, Japan and South Korea. Second, he wants more US involvement in Asian regionalism through institutional innovations that also bring in the Pacific. Third, the administration wants to foster new friendships, particularly with India and Indonesia.

The rise of China is the most important issue for the United States. The United States believes that aggressive and provocative behaviour by any nation that undermines regional security must be met firmly.

In seeking to gain leverage with China, there are four points that stand out for Washington. First, countries must stand firm in terms of declaratory policy and operational behaviour, all the while insisting on Chinese transparency in capability and intent. Second, only a regional approach by the Western Pacific community will succeed in multilateralising China's behaviour through adherence to common norms. Third, basic human rights must be established and adhered to. Fourth, the way in which China is

regarded in the world has a substantial impact on how the Chinese see themselves domestically.

If Taiwan is crucial to a stable Western Pacific, what happens in the event that access to Taiwan is lost? It could not be used as a platform from which to mount alliance operations, and indeed, China would be able to extend its sea and air combat operational reach to Japan's flanks and across to the Philippines. Once tension, such as between China and Japan or China and Taiwan escalates to become a crisis, it would be too late to make plans, so more effective contingency planning is needed now. Increasing the strength of trilateral cooperation must be the first step and interoperability is key to this. However, the United States must first address interoperability of its own forces, which is encompassed to a degree in the Air Sea Battle concept. The Air Sea Battle concept becomes crucial to stop such a key anti-access, area denial outcomes, such as a loss of access to Taiwan, from ever eventuating.

In essence, there are three prongs to the current US posture and presence in the region—forces must be geographically distributed, operationally resilient (such as through hardening), and politically sustainable (by the United States and the host country). While these factors persist, US forces will remain deployed in forward locations.

Forward US presence is a form of political reassurance, especially for the Japanese. It allows training together, improved interoperability on operations, and an ability to respond to crises. The future role of Guam is of rising strategic importance for the United States. However, the extent to which Guam provides an opportunity for training with allies and potentially allied basing is uncertain. Guam is high-value, concentrated and is becoming militarily vulnerable. The time is right to re-visit thinking about the hardening of bases and the dispersal of forces in this theatre. As Guam lacks real strategic depth, alternative options will be required to stage and base US forces in the Western Pacific. That could mean the basing of some US forces elsewhere in the region in coming years, including in Australia.

## **Conclusions and Options**

Dialogue participants identified the following broad conclusions for enhancing trilateral security cooperation in the region:

- The importance of matching trilateral activity with dialogue—ensuring robust engagement, intent and focus. There is a limited window of opportunity, so it is important to take early action and not delay. Furthermore, closer engagement with Russia, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam should be encouraged.

- There was a difference of opinion over the inclusion of South Korea within trilateral processes. Establishing a quadrilateral might be going too far. Interlocking and interacting trilateral relationships would be a good first step—identifying those issues common to a number of these dialogues and creating interlocking agendas for discussion and action.
- It is important to address and align all dimensions of national power. A basic question for the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue must be: is the aim to contain or counter China? The relative importance of the various strands of national power will vary, depending on the strategic aim.
- It is important to determine current force capability and levels of interoperability and catalogue these. It would also be useful to examine prepositioning humanitarian assistance and disaster relief supplies, and improving overall planning and coordination of associated efforts.
- China provides an opportunity as well as a threat. Engagement with China should be multilateralised, noting that while multilateralism can work for policy development, operationalisation tends to work better on a country-by-country basis, as evidenced through recent counter-terrorism efforts.
- There are weaknesses in Chinese power—especially the relationship between the Chinese regime and the people. There is a need to push back in a manner that does not give weight to hard-liners in the regime. Effective communication with the Chinese people is essential.
- There is also a need to put some muscle behind the pushback against China's assertiveness by selecting three or four immediate issues on which to work. Candidates might include ballistic missile defence, space, cyber, and extending current joint maritime training and exercising to the land and air domains.
- It is important to discourage meaningful security links between Russia and China.
- The cyber domain is difficult to control but must not be ignored. Strong links are needed between governments and business. It is important to establish norms and principles for the global information commons to address the integrity of data and systems, protecting proprietary technology and information, and ensuring the freedom of access and transfer. There is a need for effective cyber defences, which could be developed collaboratively.
- There are several assumptions in respect of the trilateral that should be explored:

- Is there a weak China scenario and if so, should it be exploited?
- Will Japan have the energy to engage over the long-term?
- Will the United States continue its engagement and not be distracted in other parts of the world?
- Will Australia's economic performance allow it to maintain its current strong level of investment in Defence capability?

Dialogue participants identified the following options for moving the enhanced security cooperation agenda forward:

- Map out a shared vision for the Western Pacific, including the broader security intent for the region and a desired role for China. This might best be achieved through development of a new Asia Pacific strategy to put in place and operationalise a set of priority steps.
- Enforce the rule of international law and oppose the arbitrary use of force. Lines need to be drawn around what is and is not acceptable behaviour.
- Address access to and defence of the global commons.
- Better plan capacity building in the region.
- Enhance non-military resilience and capacity building as a way to counter perceptions of such capability as a threat.
- Identify and pursue the joint capability priorities—such as ISR, submarines, ASW, anti-satellite, and cyber.
- Articulate the role of Australian/United States/Japanese aid (beyond humanitarian assistance and disaster relief) in building strong partner states, using the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue as a foundation.
- Move beyond rhetoric with India—improved cooperation will only eventuate from greater trust. Also, engage more fulsomely with Russia, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam.
- Do not overlook the significance of the Pacific Islands for future Asia-Pacific geopolitics.

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