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AUKUS AND JAPAN

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The sudden announcement of AUKUS's establishment was for the most part greeted favorably by Japan, although France was furious that a seventy billion USD contract for submarines ordered by the Australian Navy had been scrapped. The awkward handling of the French-Australian submarine project was unfortunate, but AUKUS itself will be a great contribution for making the Indo-Pacific region more secure, stable, prosperous, free, open and democratic.

In comparison with NATO in Europe, the American alliance system in the Indo-Pacific region is sadly weak. NATO has thirty members and a robust secretariat focused on the singular threat from Russia. It has a single streamlined chain of command and a common operational plan, with members pledged to stand "one for all and all for one". Among NATO's members are the nuclear powers of Great Britain and France. Germany is an economic engine of Europe and the Bundeswehr is a formidable military force. The Turks are proud to have the second-largest armed forces in NATO. Italy and Spain are great naval powers, while Estonia is leading the way in cyberwarfare.

In the Western Pacific, China is now a daunting military power whose military budget is bigger than those of Japan, the UK, France, and Germany combined. China no longer hides its ambition to invade Taiwan and it seeks to carve out its own sphere of influence in Asia, where China stands high as a moral and political leader as did the Chinese emperor for millennia.

Despite the Chinese appetite for regional hegemony, a liberal international order is emerging for the first time in the Indo-Pacific region. Many Asian nations came through different paths from the Western industrial democracies. They were subjected to colonization and racial discrimination and suffered from dictatorship for half a century after gaining their independence. Following spectacular economic development, they turned to democracy one by one from the late 1980s: the Philippines in 1986, South Korea in 1987, and Taiwan in 1996 as well as the coastal or island ASEAN nations.

As Asia's oldest democracy since the Imperial Diet first met in Tokyo in 1890, Japan has the responsibility to prove to and persuade Asians that all humans are born absolutely equal in dignity and that freedom and democracy are not only Western but Asian as well as universal values.

The only American allies in the Western Pacific are Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand. There is no single secretariat, no co-operational plan, no common exercises, and no common threat perception like NATO.

South Korea is now a great power whose economy is as big as Russia's or Canada's and which has a six hundred thousand-strong army and a military budget as big as Japan's or the UK's. However, its strategic orientation is confused under a leftist Blue House, which still sticks to an old-fashioned Cold War ideology of opposing American and Japanese imperialism.

Japan has expanded its role in regional security since it regained independence in 1952. Under the 1960 revisions to the Japan-US alliance treaty agreed to by Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, Japan pledged to allow US forces based in Japan to defend South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines, ex-Japanese imperial territories and a US colony left without strong defenses after WWII. This was seen to be in Japan's national security interest as well.

In the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea's development of nuclear weapons became a new regional threat. Japan pledged under Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi to help US forces operate in dealing with contingencies in the vicinity of Japan, inclusive of South Korea, through non-combat operations with the Self Defense Forces. In 2015, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pushed through a new law to give the SDF the authority to engage in combat operations itself under the right of collective self-defense. Unfortunately, South Korea is still hesitant to commit itself to regional security alongside Japan and the US.

The Philippines occupies a vitally important location on the southern side of the Bashi Channel facing Taiwan at a chokepoint for three key sea lanes connecting Northeast Asia with Europe, the Gulf region and Australia. To the west, the Philippines faces the South China Sea that China claims entirely as its own sea. Unfortunately, its military force is, like that of Thailand, not strong enough to take on China's PLA.

India is a future superpower whose population will surpass that of China soon and has an average age ten years younger than China's. India is a born

democracy and will be a responsible superpower to sustain the Free World with the Western nations during this century. However, it will take time – until around 2035 -- for India to catch up with Japan in terms of economic size.

In this security environment, Japan is growing more and more nervous as China rises. Japan is the only effective outpost of US forces in Northeast Asia. If a Taiwan contingency happens, Japan, so near to Taiwan, will be immediately involved as US forces will make full use of their bases in Japan. Many Japanese have started to ask the question “can the US deter China from invading Taiwan not only today but in the foreseeable future?” It can do so today, but it is not clear if this will hold true ten or fifteen years from now.

The US is still sticking to its policy of ambiguity on Taiwan and will not extend its nuclear umbrella to defend Taiwan. When China becomes adventurous under Xi Jinping around 2030, will the West led by the US truly be capable of deterring China? By that time, China could be on par with the US.

AUKUS is good news for the security of Northeast Asia. The nuclear submarines to be given to Australia will make a tremendous contribution to regional security. Great Britain will provide formidable support in Asia. This Anglo-Saxon triangle was a leading force in bringing the Allies to victory in WWI, WWII and the Cold War, and it should replicate this success by dissuading China from adventures this century.

Japan should bear the burden of sustaining a Free and Open Indo-Pacific together with AUKUS by redoubling its national defense efforts. Prime Minister Abe increased the military budget during his term from 47 billion USD in 2012 to 53 billion USD in 2019 in addition to a two billion USD supplementary defense budget every year. Nevertheless, this increase is dwarfed by China’s dramatic military build-up. The defense budget should be doubled to reach two percent of Japan’s GDP.


There are several issues that need to be addressed at home beyond that, but let me point out just two today.

First is intelligence cooperation. Japan should join the Five Eyes club. For that purpose, Japan should become a full-fledged partner with AUKUS. The Five Eyes is not merely a tactical framework for cooperation in intelligence; it is a

part of much broader strategic cooperation. The Five Eyes was born in the war to defeat Hitler. They shared a common mission of defending the Free World. To join the Five Eyes, Japan should stand up as a real partner willing to commit itself to the cause of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Japan should also make uphill efforts in cyber intelligence. Prime Minister Suga established a brand-new Digital Agency but its cybersecurity is inadequate and its cyber intelligence not effective. The Japanese government should establish a government cloud with a perfect firewall against sophisticated and persistent cyberattacks. Japanese private companies have a solid technological base for hardware. Political leadership is an absolute MUST for coordinating with a heavily stove-piped intelligence community whose rivalries with other institutions are as ferocious as those in other nations.

Second, the Japanese government should break the ice to obtain the cooperation of Japanese academia. Japan was bitterly torn by the Cold War. The Japanese socialists stood with the East led by Moscow. This was not the case for the British Labourites, the French Socialists or the German SPD. Natural scientists in Japan joined with the leftists. Under strong political pressure from peers, no scientist has cooperated with the Japanese government on national security matters, although the government pours forty billion USD into academia every year for R&D. Hi-tech cooperation on national security has always been the least successful area, if not a total failure, of Japan-US alliance management. Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the situation has not changed.

Quantum technology will be a game changer in the near future. It will change not only telecommunications and cyberspace but also every aspect of warfare as well as people's daily lives. AUKUS is determined to lead the scientific world in quantum science and other fields. Japan is lagging behind. It is now time to engage the best and brightest of Japan's scientists in national security, a necessary task for Japan if it is to cooperate fully with AUKUS. 

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