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UK–Japan Relations and the Indo-Pacific Tilt: The Cornerstone

Philip Shetler-Jones

The UK's relationship with Japan is the cornerstone of the Indo-Pacific 'tilt' and provides unique insights into its motivating logic and the UK's role in world politics, Philip Shetler-Jones argues. First, it exhibits the importance the UK gives to universal principles unrestricted by cultural or geographic markers in its choice of 'like-minded' partners – an aspect of Global Britain that is reciprocated in Japanese policy, informing how the 'tilt' is received in the region. Second, it represents the prime example of how the tilt maintains the equilibrium of UK foreign policy in the midst of a shifting global power balance, by means of a more diversified, flatter framework of 'quasi alliance' relations built on the foundation of the transatlantic alliance. Third, the foremost commitment in the Integrated Review that the UK remain a leading technology power is reflected in the defence technology and industry partnership that is becoming central to the UK–Japan relationship.

The centrality of the Indo-Pacific in determining the future world order – by virtue of its rapidly emerging economic and demographic power – implies that the UK needs to be firmly established in that region to succeed in terms of the role defined in the 2021 Integrated Review. The Integrated Review's projection of the UK's role in the world (as a science and tech superpower; strengthening international order; strengthening defence; and enhancing resilience), envisions the UK shaping the open international order of the future, working with partners to reinvigorate the international institutions, laws and norms that enable open societies and economies such as the UK to flourish.¹ Because the Indo-Pacific is both distant from the UK and host to other major powers, London cannot achieve this shaping role alone. Hence the partnership modality expressed in the Indo-Pacific 'tilt', to make the UK by 2030 'the European partner with the broadest and most integrated presence in the Indo-Pacific –

committed for the long term, with closer and deeper partnerships, bilaterally and multilaterally'. This article argues that Japan is the 'cornerstone' partner for the UK to achieve its aims in the tilt, and so fulfil the ambition of 'Global Britain'.

Since the 2012 Japan–UK Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, both countries have identified each other as their most important security partners in their respective regions. The primacy of the UK–Japan relationship in this context was confirmed when Commodore Stephen Moorhouse, commander of the Royal Navy Carrier Strike Group that sailed to the Indo-Pacific in 2021 (CSG21), said that the Japan leg 'is seen as a cornerstone of this deployment'.²

This metaphor of Japan as the 'cornerstone' of the UK's position in the Indo-Pacific is not just relevant for one naval deployment; it can be seen in several areas of strategic cooperation. One is civilian nuclear energy.³ Even more important in the context of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's

1. HM Government, *Global Britain in A Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (London: The Stationery Office, 2021).
2. Royal Navy, 'Pacific Training for Carrier Strike Group as Japan Visit Comes to an End', 10 September 2021, <<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/september/10/210910-carrier-strike-group-in-japan>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
3. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), 'Tenth Annual Japan-UK Nuclear Dialogue', 9 February 2022, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenth-annual-japan-uk-nuclear-dialogue#:~:text=The%20%27Japan-UK%20Framework%20on,range%20of%20civil%20nuclear%20activities>>, accessed 11 November 2022.



UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly greets his counterpart Yoshimasa Hayashi at the G7 in Germany, November 2022. *Courtesy of Reuters / Wolfgang Rattay / Pooln / Alamy Stock*

post-Brexit vision of Global Britain, Japan plays a ‘pivotal’ role in support of the UK’s accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).⁴ During Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s visit to London in May 2022, the term ‘cornerstone’ was used in the official Number 10 press release about the role of the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), or future fighter programme.⁵

The relative decline of US supremacy due to the rise of aspirant powers such as India and China, and the prominence of competition as a theme of recent foreign and security policy with attendant rise in defence budgets, suggests the world order may be in a process of becoming less steeply hierarchical, and conditioned more by a broader global military balance. Defence modernisation and networked approaches to alliance relations are thus essential for middle powers to retain their position. Armaments cooperation programmes such as the one the UK has with Japan on FCAS, and accompanying cooperation on industry security

and intelligence, may come to be seen as points on a trend line towards a security order connected to, but less limited by or dependent on, US leadership.

The metaphor of ‘cornerstone’ can be extended to describe the position of UK–Japan relations in the UK’s overall tilt to the Indo-Pacific.⁶

The Indivisibility of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific Security

An essential basis for the UK–Japan partnership is the emphasis both currently put on commitment to universal principles that transcend cultural or geographic markers in the determination of ‘like-minded’ partners. While it is common for statements of bilateral relations to pay lip service to shared values, and that is a point on which both the UK and Japan could have been criticised in the past, the current partnership is marked by the enactment of material commitments to universal principles,

4. Department for International Trade, ‘Japan Will “Spare No Effort to Support the UK” in Joining the CPTPP–UK’, press release, 31 July 2018, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/japan-will-spare-no-effort-to-support-the-uk-in-joining-the-cptpp>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
5. HM Government, ‘PM Meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida: 5 May 2022’, press release, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-japanese-prime-minister-fumio-kishida-5-may-2022>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
6. Okabe Noburo, ‘Japan and “Global Britain”: Expanding the Trans-Pacific Partnership’, Nippon, 22 June 2021, <<https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00697/>>, accessed 30 November 2022.

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as their reactions to the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war demonstrate.⁷

Before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, in a new year address Prime Minister Fumio Kishida described his ‘realism diplomacy for a new era’ (新時代 Realism 外交), of which pillar number one is emphasis on universal values.⁸ This assertion was tested soon after, when Russia’s renewed invasion of Ukraine divided the world into those who stood for principle, and those who evaluated prohibitions against aggression on a more expedient, or ‘case-by-case’ basis. The Japanese prime minister has not just taken a clear position in favour of the former, he has worked to actively promote this perspective in Asia. As he put it to the 27th International Conference on The Future of Asia: ‘This issue is not a question of, “Do we side with the United States or with China?” but rather, “Do we protect universal values and the peaceful world order, or lose them?” I will continue to seek understanding and cooperation from Asian leaders on this matter’.⁹

Japan’s response may be driven less by an abstract attachment to values, and more by a pragmatic calculation that if aggression in Europe is seen to pay off at a low cost, then there will be a direct normative effect on East Asian security. As Kishida put it:

Ukraine might be the East Asia of tomorrow. Unilateral changes to the status quo by force in Ukraine could happen anywhere in the world. In order to safeguard the peaceful world order and to achieve sustainable prosperity in the region, no violation of sovereignty or territorial integrity, nor unilateral change of the status quo by force, shall be tolerated in any region. This fundamental principle must be observed.¹⁰

One of the ideas that is toxic to the notion of universal principles for global order is cultural

relativism, specifically the suggestion that established norms are not actually global, but merely a means to mask the dominance of Western values and the subordination of other political customs based on assumptions of cultural or even racial superiority. Culturally based differences in social customs certainly feature in the relationship between Japan and the UK, for instance over the issue of capital punishment. However, when this difference threatened to become an obstacle to a defence cooperation agreement, the approach to resolving it suggests such challenges to the relationship are manageable.¹¹

The tilt faces headwinds when tropes like nostalgia for empire, or a bygone age of Anglo-Saxon domination, are used to undermine the enterprise.¹² While the alliance of 1902–22 between Imperial Japan and Edwardian Britain may contribute to acceptance of the current close partnership, this historical fact is referred to more by Japanese than British commentators, who may be playing it down – consciously or otherwise – out of reluctance to draw accusations of nostalgia or longing for empire. Institutions such as the Five Eyes intelligence formation (the UK, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), or AUKUS (Australia, the UK and the US) are particularly vulnerable to this kind of criticism and have been held up as examples that ‘Anglo-Saxon blood lineage’ is a determining factor in choice of security partners.¹³

By making Japan its cornerstone, the UK demonstrates that its identification of a ‘like-minded’ partner is based on sharing confidence in and commitment to a set of universal principles. The closer the UK and Japan become, and the more the UK is integrated into regional organisations such as CPTPP, accusations that UK, European or Western

7. Government of Japan, ‘Japan Stands With Ukraine’, 30 June 2022, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/ongoingtopics/pdf/jp_stands_with_ukraine_eng.pdf>, accessed 30 November 2022. It should also be noted that in the case of the earlier Russian action to take Crimea and Donbas, the response of the Japanese government under the premiership of Shinzo Abe was quite different, perhaps due to his attempts to negotiate an improved relationship with Russia at the time.
8. Hosoya Yuichi, ‘What Kishida’s “Realism Diplomacy for A New Era” Actually Means for Japan’, *Japan Times*, 22 February 2022, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2022/02/22/commentary/japan-commentary/kishida-realism-diplomacy/>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
9. Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, ‘Speech by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at the 27th International Conference on The Future of Asia’, 26 May 2022, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202205/_00014.html>, accessed 30 November 2022.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Japan Times*, ‘Japan and Britain Resolve Jurisdiction Issue in Talks over Military Pact’, 18 May 2022, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/05/18/national/jpn-uk-reciprocal-access/>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
12. Philip Stevens, ‘Nostalgia has Stolen the Future’, *Financial Times*, 26 July 2018.
13. Tuvia Gering, ‘Why China is Genuinely Worried about AUKUS’, *Sup China*, 29 November 2021, <<https://supchina.com/2021/11/29/why-china-is-genuinely-worried-about-aukus/>>, accessed 30 November 2022.

powers pursue an ethnocentric system of global order will have more difficulty gaining purchase.

By making Japan its cornerstone, the UK demonstrates that its identification of a 'like-minded' partner is based on sharing confidence in and commitment to a set of universal principles

The notion of 'indivisibility' of security is a way of affirming the common commitment to universal principles of the security order. As UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss repeatedly asserted, 'Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security are indivisible'.¹⁴ Speaking alongside India's Minister for External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar (one of those with a more case-by-case view on the operation of universal values in international relations),¹⁵ Truss said: 'We also need to think more widely about the message it would send across the globe if he [Putin] was successful. If he was able to have success invading a sovereign nation, what message would that send to other aggressors around the world?'¹⁶

Responses to Russia's renewed war on Ukraine demonstrate that Japan and the UK are in sync on support of universal principles and the indivisibility of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security. In the case of Japan, this view does not seem to be limited to the policy elites. A Sankei Shimbun and Fuji News Network joint opinion poll in March 2022 revealed that 84.2% of respondents were 'very concerned' or 'somewhat concerned' that Russia's invasion of

Ukraine 'could lead to Chinese military aggression causing a crisis in Taiwan or the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture'.¹⁷

Diverse Alliance Relations for Strategic Resilience

The UK–Japan relationship is the prime example of how the UK seeks to maintain its equilibrium in the midst of a shifting global power balance, by means of a more diversified, flatter framework of 'quasi alliance' relations set on the bedrock of the transatlantic alliance.

The UK–Japan relationship has come through dramatic reversals of fortune over the past century, only for each side to settle on one foundational assumption in their national security worldviews. Ever since the irresistible rise of US power broke the Anglo-Japan Alliance in the early 1920s, London and Tokyo both – albeit via quite diverging paths – converged on the same conclusion: that the best conditions for the preservation of their national security lie in a close alliance with the US.¹⁸ Through the turbulence of the post-war decades (decolonisation and the Suez Crisis for the UK, the Korean and Vietnam Wars and renewal of US–Japan security agreements for Japan), both countries emerged into the post-Cold War era as Washington's most loyal, yet also in some ways its most dependent, partners.

Looked at from London and Tokyo today, although US power remains a kind of North Star for the orientation of defence and security planning, it is also apparent that the degree of military, technological and economic primacy is decreasing in relative terms due to domestic as well as external

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14. FCDO, 'The Era of Complacency is Over: Atlantic Council Makins Lecture 2022 by the Foreign Secretary', 10 March 2022, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-liz-truss-speech-at-the-atlantic-council-annual-makins-lecture>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
 15. Anirban Bhaumik, 'India Contradicts US, Says No Parallel Between Russian Military Build-up Around Ukraine and China's Aggression in Indo-Pacific', *Deccan Herald*, 20 February 2022, <<https://www.deccanherald.com/national/india-contradicts-us-says-no-parallel-between-russian-military-build-up-around-ukraine-and-china-s-aggression-in-indo-pacific-1083394.html>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
 16. Liz Truss, 'First India-UK Strategic Futures Forum', 31 March 2022, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rbQsReWPnQ>>, accessed 8 December 2022.
 17. Sankei Shinbun, '8 in 10 Japanese Concerned Russian Aggression Would Inspire China – Poll', Japan FORWARD, 20 March 2022, <<https://japan-forward.com/8-in-10-japanese-concerned-russian-aggression-would-inspire-china-%E3%83%BC-poll/>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
 18. As the 2021 Integrated Review put it, 'We will sit at the heart of a network of like-minded countries and flexible groupings, committed to protecting human rights and upholding global norms. Our influence will be amplified by stronger alliances and wider partnerships – none more valuable to British citizens than our relationship with the United States'. See HM Government, *Global Britain in A Competitive Age*, p. 6.

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developments.¹⁹ Japanese and British national interests are therefore equally well served by diversifying their strategic partnerships. Japan and the UK are not alone in this analysis. An International Institute for Strategic Studies report in December 2021 on alliances described a trend towards alliance diversification as a response to the rise of challenger states, using the examples of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.²⁰ Where possible, this should be done in ways that prolong the era of US dominance that promises to serve UK and Japanese interests more effectively than might any realistic alternative.²¹

What is for some an obvious diversification option for the UK – to pool Asian security engagement with European partners – looks to be largely foreclosed. The reasons have little to do with the politics of Brexit. Rather, gaps among Europeans on how to respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 give some clue to the degree of European convergence on the principle of dealing with the rise of states that challenge the world order. A fundamental divergence of perspectives towards US power is particularly relevant for partnering on the Indo-Pacific, where – despite concerns about its relative decline – the US remains the major structuring power. The European movement (led by France) to engage more in the region is still shaped to a great extent by ideas of 'strategic autonomy' and the appeal of offering an alternative to the US-led security order.²² In the case of Germany, the visit of Chancellor Olaf Scholz to Beijing in November 2022 accompanied by a large German business delegation is at odds with concerns about deepening economic dependence on China.²³ In contrast with

its continental neighbours, there is little evidence that the UK is looking for a similar kind of strategic autonomy on security and defence. It might be better to say it is rather seeking to diversify alliance relations to improve its strategic resilience.

A challenge such as Russia, but also China for that matter, where the UK and Japan share more in common than either does with its immediate neighbours, requires a more broadly diversified framework that builds on the bedrock of alliance with Washington. Such a partnership network needs not merely a wider membership than the EU or even NATO, but also to have in an institutional sense its hands on levers that mobilise instruments of finance, trade and technology, not just those of the military. The role taken by the G7 as the platform for coordinating a common international response to Russia over Ukraine is indicative of this trend.²⁴

A prominent argument against this approach to Indo-Pacific security, which surfaced with the CSG21 deployment, is that the UK lacks the capacity to bring to bear a force capable of tipping the Asian balance of power in favour of allies and like-minded friends such as Japan.²⁵ This is based on a mistaken view of the power differential between the US and its allies, such as the UK and Japan, who can deploy and sustain in the Indo-Pacific theatre. True, the Royal Navy has two aircraft carriers to US's 11. However, the US Navy has only one based in East Asia (Yokosuka, Japan), with the rest a hemisphere away on the US west coast. In 2019, maintenance schedules put six US Navy carriers in dock on the US east coast, meaning only one out of the total 11

19. As the interim US National Security strategy admits, 'We will only succeed in advancing American interests and upholding our universal values by working in common cause with our closest allies and partners, and by renewing our own enduring sources of national strength. That begins with the revitalization of our most fundamental advantage: our democracy', The White House, 'Interim National Security Strategic Guidance', March 2021.
20. IISS, 'Changing Alliance Structures', Research Paper, 22 December 2021.
21. Japan's most recent National Security Strategy (2013) enumerates the following strategic approaches to achieve security objectives: (1) strengthening and expanding Japan's capabilities and roles; (2) strengthening the Japan–US Alliance; (3) strengthening diplomacy and security cooperation with Japan's partners for peace and stability in the international community; (4) proactive contribution to International Efforts for Peace and Stability of the International Community; (5) strengthening cooperation based on universal values to resolve global issues; and (6) strengthening domestic foundations that support national security, and promote domestic and global understanding. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'Japan's Security Policy', <https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.html#:~:text=Japan%27s%20national%20interests%20and%20national%20security%20objectives&text=Maintain%20its%20own%20peace%20and,on%20universal%20values%20and%20rules>, accessed 8 December 2022.
22. Republic of France, 'National Strategic Review 2022', intermediate version November 2022, <<http://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/uploads/2022/11/rns-uk-20221121.pdf>>, accessed 30 November 2022.
23. William Yang, 'Scholz's China Trip Raised more Doubts than Congratulations', *DW*, 5 November 2022.
24. Tom McTague, "'We're Not Going to Make that Mistake Again'", *The Atlantic*, 9 May 2022.
25. In a typical piece on this theme, Philip Stephens wrote: 'Doubtless the exercise will anger Beijing, but it is not about to dent China's strategic calculus', in Philip Stephens, 'Nostalgia is No Substitute for a Post-Brexit Foreign Policy', *Financial Times*, 26 November 2020.

carriers might have been available in the region at a time.²⁶ In such a scenario, the difference made by the ability of the Royal Navy to put another aircraft carrier or two to sea – and be interoperable with not just the US Navy, but also with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force – becomes much more appreciable. As an illustration, when HMS *Queen Elizabeth* entered the Pacific in August 2021, the USS *America* Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) was the only unit of similar size in the Western Pacific. At that moment, the USS *Carl Vinson* Carrier Strike Group (CSG) was in the mid-Pacific. The carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* was off the US west coast, and the USS *Ronald Reagan* CSG and *Iwo Jima* ARG were far away in the western Indian Ocean.²⁷

A challenge such as Russia requires a more broadly diversified framework that builds on the bedrock of alliance with Washington

The interpretation that arose in 2021 that the US did not welcome the tilt but preferred the UK to focus on security in its home region seems to have been put to rest by the initiation of UK–US consultations on the Indo-Pacific at National Security Council-level in March 2022.²⁸ The 2022 US National Security Strategy offers further clarification that:

U.S. interests are best served when our European allies and partners play an active role in the Indo-Pacific, including in supporting freedom of navigation and maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. Similarly, we want our Indo-Pacific allies to be engaged cooperatively with our European allies on shaping the order to which we all aspire, and by standing up to Russia and cooperating with the European Union and United Kingdom on our competition with the PRC. This is not a favor to the United States. Our allies recognize that a collapse of the international order in one region will ultimately endanger it in others.²⁹

A New Centrality for Defence Technology and Industry Cooperation

The first pillar of the UK Integrated Review sought to promote the UK as a science and technology superpower and thereby sustain ‘strategic advantage’ in the political, economic and security realms. This aspiration is mirrored in the defence industry and technology partnership that is becoming central to the UK–Japan relationship.

Within this partnership, technology cooperation is taken to mean pre-acquisition science and technology-level research efforts. This technology cooperation is best understood as part of the overall chain of activities from research, development, procurement/support and related industrial matters, that is to say ‘acquisition’. This may be termed ‘armaments cooperation’, although ‘defence equipment and technology cooperation’ would be equally descriptive.

This represents a natural extension of historical patterns of cooperation. The provision of advanced warship technology formed the strategic backbone of Anglo-Japan relations in the Victorian era and played a key role in Japan’s rise to regional hegemony through victories over China and Russia prior to the First World War. Japan also successfully learnt naval aviation from the UK and developed a formidable carrier force in the lead up to the Second World War.

After a long period of relatively limited interaction, defence technology cooperation is re-emerging as a core strategic element in the revived ‘quasi alliance’ today. Following the first tentative steps set forth in the 2012 defence cooperation agreement, the level of ambition has dramatically increased. The two countries signed Japan’s first Defence Equipment Cooperation Framework in July 2013 and the first cooperative research project, on chemical and biological protection technology, beginning in July 2013 and lasting until July 2017.³⁰ From November 2014, collaboration started on a Joint New Air-to-Air Missile (JNAAM) aiming to integrate a Japanese

26. Paul McLeary, ‘All 6 East Coast Carriers In Dock, Not Deployed: Hill Asks Why’, *Breaking Defense*, 28 October 2019.

27. USNI News, ‘USNI News Fleet and Marine Tracker: Aug 9, 2021’, <<https://news.usni.org/2021/08/09/usni-news-fleet-and-marine-tracker-aug-9-2021>>, accessed 30 November 2021.

28. John Bradford and Philip Shetler-Jones, ‘US-UK Consultations on the Indo-Pacific: An Unexpected Development for Southeast Asia’, IP22026, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore, 8 April 2022, <<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip22026-us-uk-consultations-on-the-indo-pacific-an-unexpected-development-for-southeast-asia/#.YpST2e5Bw2w>>, accessed 30 November 2022.

29. The White House, ‘National Security Strategy’, October 2022, p. 17.

30. HM Government, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, ‘Foreign Secretary Signs Groundbreaking Defence and Security Agreements with Japan’, press release, 4 July 2013.

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seeker with the UK's Meteor missile. The significance of this was noted because it 'marks the first step toward actual development and marks Tokyo's first defence project with a partner other than the United States'.³¹ There was also a research project from July 2016 termed 'Personnel Vulnerability Evaluation', on protective vests.³²

A much more strategically significant level of cooperation began to be seen from March 2017, with the announcement of a preliminary study on opportunities for collaboration on the UK's FCAS and Japan's future fighter (F-X). Over the following five years, one joint development project has led to another, from the certification process on jet engines involving Rolls Royce in 2018 to a feasibility study on Japan–UK cooperation on an advanced radio-frequency system (JAGUAR) in February 2021.³³ In December 2021 it was announced that Rolls-Royce and IHI Corporation (formerly known as Ishikawajima-Harima Heavy Industries Co., Ltd), would collaborate on development of a new fighter engine and, in the same announcement, the two governments agreed to develop a memorandum of cooperation, addressing issues around information security, intellectual property and export.³⁴ A formal agreement to develop JAGUAR was also announced in February 2022.³⁵

An RAF flypast greeted Prime Minister Kishida on his May 2022 visit to London, which saw the announcement that 'with regard to the cooperation between Japan and the UK on future combat air system, the two leaders shared the view to reach mutual understanding on the overall picture of cooperation by the end of 2022, in cooperation with allies and other countries'.³⁶ Subsequent reporting has talked up the preference of the UK and Japan to jointly develop their future fighter with each other rather than with the US, on the basis of cost, better

aligned procurement schedules, and UK willingness to support Tokyo's requirement for freedom of upgrade and modification.³⁷

The choices made by the UK and Japan about the object for defence industry cooperation may help in overcoming obstacles that have formerly led to disappointing results in this area

Were this to be the result of the current negotiations, it would prove strong confirmation of the depth of trust and commitment each side places in the relationship. It would also put down a marker in terms of the character of alliances in today's global order, signalling that where US allies see advantages in working together directly through their own bilateral relations, this can improve their individual and collective strategic resilience without any sacrifice in relations with the US itself.

The choices made by the UK and Japan about the object for defence industry cooperation may help in overcoming obstacles that have formerly led to disappointing results in this area. For instance, over nearly 40 years the US and Japan have signed more than 20 agreements on defence research and related technology transfers. Only one of these – the Standard Missile 3 Block IIA BMD interceptor – made the transition from research to 'programme of record' acquisition.³⁸ A key ingredient for success in that case seems to have been matching the research focus to the identification of a common requirement in the form of a defined acquisition interest.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Jeffrey W Hornung, *Allies Growing Closer: Japan–Europe Security Ties in the Age of Strategic Competition* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2020).

33. Bradley Perrett, 'Japan and UK Move Towards Partnership to Develop Combat-aircraft Systems', *ASPI Strategist*, 17 February 2021.

34. Douglas Barrie, 'Analysis: UK and Japan Power Ahead with Defence Ties', *Military Balance* blog, 17 January 2022, <<https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2022/01/analysis-uk-and-japan-power-ahead-with-defence-ties>>, accessed 30 November 2022.

35. Alessandra Giovanzanti, 'UK and Japan to Jointly Develop JAGUAR Sensor System', *Janes*, 15 February 2022.

36. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'Japan-UK Summit Meeting and Working Lunch', 5 May 2022, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/gb/page4e_001242.html>, accessed 30 November 2022.

37. Gaston Dubois, 'F-X: Japan Moves Away from Lockheed Martin and Towards BAE Systems', *Aviacion Line*, 16 May 2022, <<https://www.aviacionline.com/2022/05/f-x-japan-moves-away-from-lockheed-martin-and-towards-bae-systems/>>, accessed 8 December 2022.

38. Arthur Herman, 'Closing the Defense Industrial Security Gap with Japan', conference report, Hudson Institute, July 2018, <<https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/files/publications/HermanJapanFINAL.pdf>>, accessed 30 November 2022.

UK–Japan joint development of an advanced Meteor missile derivative has this potential and sets useful precedents for more ambitious collaboration as now envisaged between FCAS/Tempest and F-X. However, other factors such as continued progress on information security will likely also be a condition for a closer defence industry alliance.

Is Intelligence Next?

The depth of trust indicated by partnership on a platform as significant as a future fighter will inevitably need to be accompanied by closer intelligence cooperation. Alignment on information security is necessary as an enabler of joint research and development in sensitive areas, and to guarantee that sensitive information can be shared without exposure to the risks of espionage.

A closer intelligence partnership developed on the technical working level to protect joint industrial research and development is further likely to have the potential, if not the natural tendency, to mature into a channel for bringing strategic perceptions and understandings into closer alignment. ‘Exchange of strategic assessment and relevant information’ has anyway been among the list of cooperation since at least the 2017 joint declaration.³⁹ Both overlapping but distinct aspects will have to be addressed: industrial security matters related to acquisition programmes, and more general information security concerns that impact any serious consideration of Japan joining ‘Five Eyes’ arrangements.

Despite Japan’s progress in addressing two of the three major factors that could hamper closer cooperation on armaments (export restrictions and defence acquisition/industrial policy), the third area of information and industrial security remains a serious challenge. Notwithstanding the 2014 National Secrets Law, Japan’s procedures for assuring information security still diverge to a great extent from those of Five Eyes and other partners. The review of the National Security Strategy due in December 2022 will be closely watched to see if it promises substantive change in this area.

UK support on re-establishing Japan’s place at the top level of intelligence comes at a good time. The fact that Japan overcame opposition and some public protest to succeed in passing new laws on secrecy in 2014, among other intelligence reforms, indicates that the broad mass of opinion is gradually coming to accept the need to subordinate apprehensions associated with Japan’s authoritarian era in response to the threats Japan faces today.⁴⁰ When former Foreign Minister Kono Taro called for Japan to be admitted as the ‘sixth eye’ to the Five Eyes intelligence grouping, this was a further indication that this kind of thinking has moved from the fringe to the mainstream.⁴¹

The depth of trust indicated by partnership on a platform as significant as a future fighter will inevitably need to be accompanied by closer intelligence cooperation

To the extent public opinion is more permissive, the areas of internal policy and institutional reform that might be expected to indicate progress include a National Designated Security Authority, a cadre of dedicated Japanese government security officials, industry-wide security programmes and procedures, a national background investigation programme covering government employees as well as industry civilians, and a classified court system. In seeking to close this gap, Japanese governments will need to continue to work at explaining to their attentive public the need for more comprehensive security measures to implement the 2014 legislation. Efforts to coordinate inter-agency (even intra-agency) information security measures promise to be a work in progress for some time.

The UK should aim to work with Japan to align capability standards, both to enable armaments cooperation ambitions, but also so that should a decision be taken at a later date to bring Japan into

39. HM Government, ‘Japan–UK Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation’, 31 August 2017, < https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/641155/Japan-UK_Joint_Declaration_on_Security_Cooperation.pdf >, accessed 30 November 2022.

40. Richard J Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo’s Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2007).

41. Ankit Panda, ‘Is the Time Right for Japan to Become Five Eyes’ “Sixth Eye”?, *The Diplomat*, 15 August 2020.

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Five Eyes, it would be taken on a purely political basis, all technical gaps that might act as an obstacle having been eliminated.

Conclusion

The revived UK–Japan ‘quasi’ alliance has grown across a range of areas (defence, trade, energy), and to an extent that justifies it being termed the cornerstone of the UK Indo-Pacific tilt. The sense of commitment shared by the UK and Japan to universal principles, together with their similar positioning regarding a US-led world order, provides the structural roots for the further growth of a resilient and durable partnership that anchors the UK strategy for the region.

Cooperation in strategically significant areas of defence equipment development and acquisition is moving towards the centre of the relationship. Joint future fighter development may be a quieter example of this trend compared with AUKUS, but both reflect

how the tilt underpins security priorities in an era of defence modernisation and networked approaches to alliance relations. Bilateral intelligence cooperation is emerging naturally alongside defence industrial cooperation, adding a further point on a trend line suggesting both countries are positioned to play a strategically resilient role in a security order connected to, but less limited by or dependent on, US leadership. ■

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