ISSUE BRIEF

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JAPAN-AUSTRALIA RECIPROCAL ACCESS AGREEMENT: EXTENDED NETWORK IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

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On January 6, Australia and Japan signed bilateral defense and security agreement, termed as "Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement" (JA-RAA)[1] that grants reciprocal access between Australian Defense Forces (ADF) and the Self-Defense Forces of Japan (SDF)[2]. The underlying goal of the pact is to advance 'security of their shared strategic interests'[3] in the broader Indo-Pacific region via opting for an assertive foreign policy to counter Chinese military assertiveness which the pact identifies as 'the uncertainty both the states face now in the Indo-Pacific.'[4]

What does the JA-RAA entail?

RAA enables 'extended deployment' and allied support as part of the Indo-Pacific extended network policy. Article V of the agreement provides for 'access by the vessels or aircraft of their forces to ports or airports'[5] to extend their reach and military influence in the Indo-Pacific. JAA provides

1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement January 6, 2022 Japanese". Tokyo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, January 6, 2021,https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/ocn/au/page4e_001195.html
2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Australia.
3 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.
4 "Australia, Japan Sign 'Historic' Defence Pact Amid China Concerns", Aljazeera, accessed January 6, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/6/australia-japan-sign-historic-defence-treaty-amid-chinas-rise.
5 Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Australia with maritime extension into the East China Sea, while it already has a military presence in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.[6]

RAA ensures US sustenance of capable and modernized allied military presence in the Indo-Pacific.[7] To meet this purpose, RAA provides for reciprocal access between both the states' 'facilities and areas'[8] for naval operations in the Indo Pacific. Moreover, Japan and Australia would enter into bilateral information exchange and facilitation cooperation as per article X and XI of the agreement.[9] Moreover, the agreement facilitates technological cooperation, military training and stationing between Japan and Australia.

The agreement enables Japan -Australia cooperation for ensuring maritime security as their 'respective obligation under the International Law' while advancing America's 'Freedom of Navigation' policy under the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) strategy. For these countries, the region comprising the Indo-Pacific is crucial as Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) that traverse this region are crucial for international trade and commercial activities. Meanwhile, this region has maritime disputes among East Asian nations, including Japan's claims over islands. Similarly, Australia's '2020 Defence Strategic Update' marks the region from "the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland SouthEast Asia to Papua, New Guinea and the South West Pacific" as its 'immediate region'[10] and contends 'freedom of navigation' and the 'free and open Indo-Pacific.'

JA-RAA: US-Led Security Architecture in the Indo-Pacific

The 'strategic reassurance' policy of the US in the Indo-Pacific seeks to strengthen East Asian allies and partners. For policy-makers in Washington, enhanced military presence, and expanding

6 Daniel Hurst, Australian military to continue patrolling South China Sea as Beijing warns Taiwan independence 'means war'," *The Guardian,* last modified January 29, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/29/australian-military-to-continue-patrolling-south-china-sea-as-china-warns-taiwan-independence-means-war

7 "Maritime Security In The Indo-Pacific And The UN Convention On The Law Of The Sea", *Asia Society*, accessed January 13, 2022, https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/maritime-security-indo-pacific-and-un-convention-law-sea

8 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

9 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

10 Australian Government Department of Defence, "2020 Defence Strategic Update," page 11, https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020_Defence_Strategic_Update.pdf

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cooperation with US allied countries across the Indo-Pacific is the imminent response to re-establish the balance of power in the region as China modernizes and deploys advanced naval capabilities.[11]

The Australia-Japan bilateral security cooperation is aligned with the US National Defense Strategy 2018 based on strengthening the US allies and partners for maintaining a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and for defending the free and open international order.[12] The purported goal of the RAA is to balance China's growing reach in the Indo-Pacific, yet the Australian PM in his press-statement did not mention China and sought to portray it as a mechanism for "secure and stable Indo-Pacific".[13] These developments are part of the expanded regional consultative mechanisms, collaborative planning, and deepening interoperability to create 'integrated deterrence' via networked security architecture by the regional states in the Indo-Pacific.[14]

Australian Assertiveness

Increasingly, Canberra is being assertive in creating a US-led security architecture in the Indo-Pacific and is constructing strategic interoperability mechanism by building joint military capabilities in the region. Recently concluded AUKUS arrangement for developing advanced nuclear submarines in collaboration with the US and the UK;[15] and its escort by the Japanese Self Defense Force in the Shikoku water[16] are indications of Australia-led multilateral defense cooperation emerging in the Indo-Pacific.

RAA: A Shifting Defense Policy Approach for Japan?

For Japan, the RAA is the first reciprocal defense and military forces accord since 1960, when it signed a military pact with the US. It is a reinterpretation of the defense policy of Japan which, under Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, forbids threat or the use of military force for settlement of

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11 "Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, April 29, 2021, Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea - Hearings - House Foreign Affairs Committee.

12 "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy", U.S. Department of Defense, accessed January 13, 2022, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf

13 Prime Minister of Australia, AUSTRALIA-JAPAN LEADERS' MEETING JOINT STATEMENT," January 6, 2022, https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-japan-leaders-meeting-joint-statement

14 "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy."

15 "Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Government of Australia, and the Government of the United States of America for the Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information," Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, November 22, 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1036009/MS_8.2021_Agreement_UK_USA_Australia_Naval_Nuclear_Propulsion.pdf

16 Gabriel Dominguez, "Japan's first escort of Australian frigate highlights deepening defense ties," *The Japan Times,* December 7, 2021, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/12/07/national/japan-australia-defense-china/

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international disputes that involve Japan.[17] The pact also indicates Japan's intent for 'security normalization' in its foreign policy, this time through collaboration with a similar middle power for constructing a regional security nexus. Japan's notable Indo-Pacific deployments under cooperative partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, include JS KAGA (DDH-184)', JS SHIRANU, and JS MURASAME (DD-101); the Japan-Vanuatu Goodwill Exercise, and the 'Japan-Palau Goodwill Exercise.'[18]

Chinese response to JA-RAA and Possible Regional Security Situation in Indo-Pacific

In its initial reaction, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin stressed that cooperation between countries should "safeguard regional peace and stability, rather than targeting or undermining the interests of any third party".[19] This indicates that while Beijing will respond at the diplomatic level, in parallel, it will undertake measures to safeguard its interests in the face of deepening collaboration between regional states. China is already pursuing the dissuasion strategy against the US led security network in the Indo-Pacific by enhanced military capabilities and presence across the region. China is pursuing bilateral agreements for security cooperation with Southeast Asian nations, in a bid to counterbalance the US strategy.

Conclusion

The Reciprocal Access Agreement between Japan and Australia is intended to reconstruct a regional balance of power within the Indo-Pacific through middle powers collaboration in defense and security. This development is an extension of the US strategic reassurance policy for the Indo-Pacific via alliance and partnerships to construct an 'integrated deterrence' against China which is perceived as a mutual threat to the US interests, and its allies. The pact is of significance because it indicates a robust 'security normalization;' and bilateral defense and security cooperation between regional powers in the Indo-Pacific.

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17 "The Constitution of Japan," https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

18 "Indo-Pacific Deployment 2021(IPD21)," Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/exercises/IPD21.html

19 "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on January 5, 2022", PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 5, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202201/t20220105_10479204.html

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