

Almost An Alliance:

The Development of Japanese-Australian Relations

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Abstract

From Australia's colonial era, up to the Second World War, Australian governments felt considerable anxiety over Imperial Japan's rising power. From being bitter enemies in the Second World War, in a remarkable historical development, Australia has since enjoyed positive relations with Japan for many years. A Commerce Agreement was signed between Australia and Japan in 1957, and a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation in 1976, by which time Japan had become Australia's largest trading partner, particularly in minerals and other commodity exports. Japan is still the second largest trading partner for Australia today (after China). An Economic Partnership Agreement concluded in 2014 will likely continue to increase bilateral trade even further.

Apart from deepening economic and social ties, Australia and Japan have grown even closer in their security relations, to the official level of a 'Special Strategic Partnership'. Both Japan and Australia share the United States as their main ally, and the three countries have regularly held meetings of the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue since 2002. The Japanese Self-Defense Forces and the Australian Defence Force have increased their co-operation in security training and operations since the 1990s, including Peacekeeping Operations in Cambodia, East Timor, and Iraq. Australia and Japan also participate together in international organizations, particularly APEC, and have stoutly promoted and defended the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Despite disputes between the two countries over Japan's whaling program, diplomatic relations between Australia and Japan have grown ever closer in recent times. As the Asia-Pacific region and the international political order faces increasing uncertainty, particularly after the onset of the USA's Trump administration, and China's rising hegemonic geopolitical challenges, the bilateral Australia-Japan relationship is proving to be an ever more important contribution to the mutual economic and strategic benefit of both nations. However, a formal military alliance involving Australia and Japan is unlikely, since such a development would definitely provoke China, for no real practical strategic purpose.

Introduction

Early Imperial Relations

The earliest recorded contact between the societies of Australia and Japan was an obscure adventurous episode. A group of convicts led by William Swallow, who had been transported to the prison colony of Tasmania, in 1829 stole the ship *Cyprus*, and escaped. They sailed to New Zealand and Tonga, before reaching the coast of Japan, where they sought refuge. However, as Japan was still in its Edo period of self-imposed isolation, the convicts' ship

was forced away by cannon fire. The escapees then sailed to Canton in China, before finally making their way back to Britain, where they were arrested and tried for piracy; three were hung, and Swallow was transported back to Tasmania (Sissons, 2008: 253-265).

From 1885, Japanese divers (mostly coming via Hawaii) were recruited to work in Australia's pearling regions, operating from Thursday Island, Darwin, and Broome. Nearly 6000 passports were issued to Japanese citizens by the British colonies of Australia between 1891 and 1900. After Australia's Federation as a Dominion of the British Empire in 1901, the new independent government's White Australia Policy to control immigration severely restricted the number of Japanese people who could temporarily visit Australia. This racial discrimination was naturally viewed with resentment in Japan (SBS, 2011).

The first indirect military cooperation involving Australia and Japan was the suppression of the nationalist Boxer Rebellion in China, in 1900. A small naval contingent from the Australian colonies was sent to join the British Empire forces of the Eight-Nation Alliance, of which the Japanese Empire provided the largest numbers (Lary, 2007: 26-29).

Reflecting the anxiety felt about their position as a British imperial outpost in the Pacific, Australian politicians viewed the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 with suspicion, and were perturbed by Japan's victory over Imperial Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 (Connaughton, 2003: 343). Australia had little choice but to accede to Japan joining the Allies in the First World War. After initial successes occupying Germany's small Pacific colonies, Japan played only a small part in the Allies' war effort. This included the Imperial Japanese Navy helping to escort Australian troop convoys to the Middle East and Europe (Stevenson, 2015: 43).

At the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference, the irascible Australian Prime Minister William 'Billy' Hughes greatly antagonised the Japanese delegation by insisting a Racial Equality clause be excluded from the League of Nations' founding charter, in order to preserve Australia's White Australia Policy. With the backing of United States (US) President Woodrow Wilson, Hughes' opposition prevailed. This internationally public blow to Japan's diplomatic prestige was a highly significant factor in generating the distrust and resentment felt by its leaders towards the new League of Nations. It was no doubt a root cause towards Japan abandoning the League in 1932, after the occupation of Manchuria by the Imperial Japanese Army in 1931 (Guoqi, 2017: 199-205).

The Pacific War and its Aftermath

Despite the strategic concerns in Australia over Japan's growing military strength into the 1930s, particularly after Japan's full-scale invasion of China in 1937, Japan had by this stage already become one of Australia's major trading partners, badly needed in the weak global economy burdened by the Great Depression. By 1937, Australia's trade surplus with Japan funded over a third of its interest payments to British banks. Australia automatically entered the Second World War as part of the British Empire against Nazi Germany (and later Fascist

Italy). Australian military planners were concerned that sending the majority of Australia's combat forces to support Britain's campaigns in the Middle East and Europe left the Australian mainland and its approaches vulnerable to Japanese incursion (Burke, 2008: 64-65).

To boost Britain's regional defences based around its naval base in Singapore, the 8th Australian Imperial Force (AIF) Division and supporting Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) units were sent to the colony of British Malaya. When the Pacific War commenced on December 8th 1941, with Japan's attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, the AIF was driven back along with other British Empire forces during Japan's successful Malaya campaign. After the fall of Singapore in February 1942, the 8th AIF Division was taken into a three-and-a-half-year period of brutal Japanese captivity. Other Australian units in the Dutch East Indies fell back or were captured (Griffiths, 1993: 1-4).

The Australian mainland was then under direct threat. The port of Darwin was bombed in February 1942, Sydney Harbour came under submarine attack, and the Australian government and public feared invasion. An attempted seaborne invasion of the Australian base at Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea was checked by the defeat of the Imperial Navy by the US Navy in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942, and the Japanese Imperial Army suffered its first defeat of the war, when Australian forces prevailed in the gruelling Battle of Kokoda, pushing the Japanese offensive back over the jungle mountain ranges of Papua by November 1942 (Ham, 2010: 289, 379-386).

While Australia was then safe from invasion, its northern ports suffered sporadic air raids, and Japanese submarines occasionally sank shipping off the Australian coast. But Japan was now on the defensive, and Australia was a vital logistics hub for the US-led counter-offensive in the Southwest Pacific, led by General Douglas MacArthur. The fall of Singapore, and the reliance on the US for Australia's defence from the Japanese threat thus became the most important strategic pivot in Australia's modern history. From 1943, Australian forces were junior partners in the US Southwest Pacific campaign, contributing to operations in and around New Guinea and Borneo, to the end of the war (Heinrichs and Gallicchio, 2017: 56, 528).

Following Japan's surrender in September 1945, Australia was a member of the Allies' Tokyo War Crimes Trials, and Australian troops were part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) from 1946 to 1952, based around Hiroshima. One of the social consequences from this period was around 650 Japanese women becoming 'war brides', marrying Australian BCOF servicemen despite rules against fraternisation. Due to the White Australia Policy, these women were initially forbidden from migrating to Australia, but the ban was finally lifted in 1952. Postwar reconciliation between Australia and Japan therefore began at the most personal level, and was the first direct challenge to Australia's long-held racist migration policy, which would eventually be dismantled in 1972 (Bevan, 2007).

Entrenching Trade Relations

Reconciliation became more official in July 1957, when the conservative Australian Liberal

Party-led government of Prime Minister Robert Menzies and Japan's Liberal Democratic Party government of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi (grandfather of current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe) signed the Agreement on Commerce between Australia and Japan, largely at the instigation of Menzies' Treasurer, Country Party leader John McEwen. Overcoming lingering feelings of public hostility in Australia towards Japan due to the war, this treaty aimed to restore the pre-war trade relationship, through mutual assistance. Australia readily provided exports of raw material commodities, which contributed to Japan's 'economic miracle' into the 1960s. Rapid reconstruction of industry, guided by government finance, regulation and intervention, saw Japan become the world's second-largest economy, and Australia's largest export market by 1967, replacing the UK. This deepening trade relationship also contributed to Australia's postwar economic boom, which allowed an increase in Japanese manufactured imports by the 1970s, particularly electronics and vehicles (Megalogenis, 2012: 23).

This close trading relationship was formally confirmed by the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between Australia and Japan in 1976, under the instigation of the Liberal-Country Party Coalition government of Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, and Japan's Prime Minister Takeo Miki. The closer economic ties eventually led to Australia and Japan engaging in the diplomatic initiative of jointly lobbying for and launching APEC in 1989. APEC's first Finance Ministers' meeting was held in Canberra, at the behest of the Hawke Labor government. By the end of the Cold War, Australia and Japan were thus at the forefront of attempts to rebuild the multilateral trade institutions of the Asia-Pacific region (Firth, 1999: 105-106).

While China later eclipsed Japan to become Australia's largest trading partner from the 1990s, Japan still remains its second largest export market today (with South Korea third, and India fourth). The pattern of trade has remained fairly similar, with Australia exporting primary commodities, principally coal, iron ore, natural gas, and beef; and Japan exporting vehicles and electronics. One major change that has occurred in the trade relationship is a reversal in tourism numbers; Australian tourists to Japan (over 495,000 visits) outnumbered Japanese tourists to Australia (427,000) in 2016-2017. For 2017, total merchandise trade between Australia and Japan was worth over A\$66 billion (Australian exports to Japan were nearly A\$45 billion, imports from Japan were over A\$21 billion); exports of Australian services to Japan were over A\$2.25 billion, imports of services from Japan were worth over A\$3.5 billion. Australian investment in Japan for 2017 was over A\$125 billion; Japanese investment in Australia was over A\$219 billion (DFAT, 2018).

Australia and Japan have also been key drivers of the ambitious Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) multilateral trade treaty. Australia joined the TPP negotiation process in 2008, and Japan followed in 2013; both signed the treaty along with the other ten participating countries in February 2016. After the Trump administration withdrew the US from the TPP in 2017, Australia and Japan were central in renegotiating the treaty into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), or the 'TPP-11'. The

CPTPP was signed by the remaining eleven participating countries in March 2018, and was ratified by Japan in July 2018 (Nikkei, 2018).

While Japan and Australia have cooperated closely in the multilateral economic structures of the region, such as APEC and the East Asia Summit (EAS), there have been some risks in business relations though, particularly for Japanese investment in Australia. Japan Post made a loss after its purchase of Australian logistics group Toll Holdings, and Kirin is likely to sell its loss-making food and dairy subsidiary Lion (Earl, 2018). There is great potential for Australia and Japan to deepen their cooperation in renewable energy, but only if Australia can finally develop a coherent energy policy to develop a low-emission economy (Murphy, 2018).

Sport is another area of close social, as well as economic association, as Japan and Australia are frequent rivals in the Asian group for the soccer World Cup. Many Australians will no doubt be paying close attention to the Rugby World Cup, which will be held in Tokyo in 2019, and also the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

An Evolving Security Partnership

The post-Cold War era saw changes to both Japan's domestic politics and the global security environment that resulted in a new paradigm for military cooperation between Australia and Japan. Although both countries have shared the United States (US) as their key military ally ever since 1951, this had not seen any form of military cooperation during the Cold War, principally due to the restrictions on Japan's use of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), imposed by Article 9 of the US-drafted Constitution of 1947 (Hook, 2012: 526, 528-529).

Smarting from criticism by the US that Japan had only been able to make a financial, and not a military contribution to the US-led Persian Gulf War of 1990-91, the Miyazawa government passed a bill in 1992 to allow the SDF to contribute to UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs). The SDF was then dispatched to the UNTAC PKO in Cambodia, under Australian leadership and supervision. Another Australian-led UN PKO in East Timor from 1999 then allowed another opportunity for the SDF to contribute, with units serving there from 2002 to 2004. From 2001, after passing the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, the LDP government of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi had the MSDF provide logistic support, primarily maritime refuelling and water resupply, to the US-led multinational war effort in Afghanistan against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, to which Australia contributed combat forces (Hatakeyama, 2018: 156-158).

An even more controversial operation was the SDF's participation in 'reconstruction' operations in Iraq, following the US-led invasion in 2003 to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein. After special legislation was passed by the Koizumi government in July 2003, SDF engineering units, with supporting security and logistics forces, were deployed to supposedly safe 'non-combat' areas in southern Iraq, with Australian infantry units providing additional security protection (Hatakeyama, 2018: 159).

By this stage, Japan had joined Australia in forming a high-level diplomatic structure

aimed at improving security policy coordination with their mutual military ally, the US. The first Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) meeting between the US, Japan and Australia was held in 2002, at the bureaucratic level, and was upgraded to ministerial level in 2005, with the first ministerial meetings held in 2006. The first informal TSD leaders' meeting briefly took place at the sidelines of the 2007 Sydney APEC summit, between Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and John Howard, and President George W. Bush (Ashizawa, 2010: 100-101). During his first term in office in 2007, Prime Minister Abe proposed the extension of the TSD into a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD, or 'Quad') by inviting India's participation, but this ambition was stymied in 2008 by the new Labor Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, who wanted to pursue closer ties with China (Medcalf, 2008).

One of the outcomes of the TSD was a gradual steady increase in defence cooperation between the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and SDF, formally established in 2007 through the bilateral Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (JDSC), and the trilateral Security and Defence Cooperation Forum (SDCF). These agreements authorised unit-level exchanges, ship and aircraft visits, and occasionally joint trilateral training involving both defence forces with the US military, which began from 2008 when the SDF first began its participation in the regular *Kakadu* manoeuvres held in northern Australia (MoFA, 2008). Being highly-trained, well-equipped, and technologically adept armed forces, there are distinct mutual benefits the ADF and SDF can both enjoy through these closer relations. The SDF is nearly four times larger than the ADF, but the ADF has extensive combat experience, having been in action nearly continuously since 2001, as an ally in the US-led 'War on Terror'.

To facilitate further cooperation between the ADF and SDF, in 2010 an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) was signed, allowing for mutual supply and maintenance of defence equipment. Following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, the Australian Labor government of Julia Gillard swiftly offered its support, including RAAF transport aircraft to assist disaster relief efforts, in *Operation Pacific Assist*, and guaranteed supplies of coal and natural gas, to provide energy security. A small ADF contingent also supported the SDF's UN PKO mission in South Sudan, from 2012. An Information Security Agreement (ISA) was signed in 2012, to allow greater intelligence cooperation between Australia and Japan (Schoff, 2015: 44).

Also in 2012, the Gillard Labor government launched its *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, which considered Japan as one of the key countries for Australia's regional relations, along with China, India, South Korea, and Indonesia. The White Paper noted the deepening economic and security ties between Australia and Japan, and their mutual cooperation in multilateral institutions, such as APEC, the East Asia Summit, and the International Committee on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) (Mark et al, 2012).

Relations with the contemporary Australian Coalition Government

Relations between Australia and Japan took further leaps forward in 2014. After years of

negotiations, which had started in 2007, the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement (JAEPA) was finally agreed to, when Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott visited Tokyo in April 2014, and was signed in July, when Prime Minister Abe visited Australia, and became the first Japanese Prime Minister to address the Parliament of Australia. The JAEPA pledged to substantially remove all trade barriers, although the level of Australian tariffs on Japanese manufactured imports, particularly vehicles, was already fairly low; Australian agricultural exports were granted greater access to Japanese markets, but only at a very gradual rate (ABC, 2014). A Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology Agreement was also signed. The first formally official TSD leaders' meeting was finally held on the sidelines of the G20 Brisbane Summit in 2014, between Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Tony Abbott, and President Barack Obama (Satake, 2017: 3-4).

The warm spell of defence relations between Australia and Japan then suffered an unexpected interruption. In early 2015, Prime Minister Abbott had favoured granting a consortium of Mitsubishi and Kawasaki Heavy Industries the lucrative contract, worth around A\$50 billion, to build *Soryu*-class boats for the Royal Australian Navy's next generation of conventionally-powered submarines. Under domestic political pressure, Abbott was driven to open a wider tender process. Japan's bid lost out to French corporation DCNS, decided in April 2016 by Abbott's rival Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, who seized the Liberal Party leadership in September 2015 (Lang, 2016).

However, relations soon recovered from this setback; by the end of 2016, a Trilateral Intelligence Sharing Agreement between the US, Japan and Australia was signed, and ACSA was revised during Abe's visit to Australia in early 2017, to allow mutual supply of ammunition (Satake, 2017: 5). The Coalition government's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper considered Japan one of the regional democracies of 'first order importance to Australia', alongside Indonesia, India, and South Korea, and called Japan a 'Special Strategic Partner' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017: 40-41). A ministerial-level meeting of the TSD was held in August 2017 (MoFA, 2017), followed by a leaders' summit between President Donald Trump, and Prime Ministers Abe and Turnbull on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Manila, in November (Reuters, 2017).

Turnbull's visit to Tokyo in January 2018 indicated discussion was proceeding on a Reciprocal Access Agreement between the ADF and SDF, which would bring defence cooperation to its closest extent so far (Mark, 2018). One outcome of this visit was the decision to have P-8A Poseidon maritime reconnaissance aircraft of the RAAF operate patrols from SDF air bases in Japan, to enforce sanctions against North Korea, in what could be a regular, long-term deployment. This increase in Australia-Japan defence cooperation has also come at a time when the MSDF conducted its first anti-submarine warfare drills in the South China Sea (Mainichi, 2018). If a serious confrontation with China develops, the prospect of joint trilateral 'freedom of navigation' flights or cruises in the South China Sea between the US, Japan and Australia cannot be ruled out. Scholars and observers are becoming increasingly concerned

that under the Trump administration, the US and China may already be slipping into a new 'Cold War' (Bisley, 2018).

Agreeing to Disagree on Whaling

The single issue which has remained in constant dispute between Australia and Japan is over whaling. Ever since the International Whaling Commission (IWC) introduced a global ban on commercial whaling in 1986, Japan has defiantly continued its program of 'scientific whaling' (officially known as the Japanese Whale Research Program under Special Permit in the Antarctic - JARPA II). Australian governments have consistently maintained diplomatic opposition to Japan's whaling, which culminated in a proceeding being brought against Japan by Australia in 2010 (later joined by New Zealand) in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the Hague. Hearings began in 2013, and in March 2014, the ICJ found that JARPA II was not in accordance with the International Whaling Convention (ICJ, 2018).

Despite this defeat, Japan supposedly 'restructured' JARPA II, and continued whaling as before, amid continuing muted diplomatic protests from Australia. At the September 2018 meeting of the IWC, Japan attempted to reintroduce commercial whaling, but was outvoted. After this loss, Japan will withdraw from the IWC altogether (ABC, 2018).

The whaling issue is therefore not only the rare major diplomatic issue of dispute between Australia and Japan, but also puts Japan out of step with one of the norms of international environmental law. It poses the question, if Japan can ignore the international regime to protect whales, could it potentially reject others in future, if it is perceived to be in the 'national interest'? At the very least, Japan's 'scientific whaling' stance remains the most damaging to its international image, undermining its diplomatic efforts to project 'soft power'.

Conclusion

Towards a Formal Alliance?

A federal election due by May 2019 in Australia could likely produce a change of government. The Liberal-National Party (LNP) Coalition continues to remain behind the Labor Party opposition in opinion polls, after Malcolm Turnbull was replaced as Prime Minister by his former Treasurer Scott Morrison, in a party-room challenge in August 2018. Given the usual bipartisan direction of foreign policy in Australian politics though, a new Labor government is unlikely to seek any major changes in relations with Japan, apart from the potential option of taking Japan to the UNCLOS tribunal, if its whaling program continues (Readfearn, 2018).

Since 2017, Australia and Japan have both had to deal with the erratic leadership of the Trump administration, with Japan particularly under threat from a hike in US tariffs, of 25% on steel, and 10% on aluminium (Hurst, 2018). During this period of greater uncertainty in international society, the bilateral Australia-Japan relationship has proved to be one constant of reliability and mutual strategic and economic benefit. Reflecting this constancy, Prime Minis-

ter Abe visited Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory in November 2018, the first Japanese leader to commemorate the bombing of the port of Darwin in 1942, before attending the APEC summit in Papua New Guinea. This diplomatic visit will therefore stand as a highly symbolic gesture of the remarkable extent of reconciliation between former wartime foes, now close 'special strategic partners' (Greene, 2018).

The unprecedented level of trilateral military cooperation between the US, Japan and Australia does not yet mean Japan and Australia are formally obliged to come to each other's assistance, if they come under direct military threat. The Australian government has been generally supportive of the defence policies of the Abe government, including the revision of security laws in 2015, which allowed the SDF to participate in collective self-defence operations in support of friendly states (Mark, 2016: 100, 113). However, either a move towards a formal trilateral military alliance among the US, Japan and Australia, or an overlapping bilateral alliance between Australia and Japan, is unlikely for the near future.

Any such move would be sure to provoke and anger China, which is already asserting its geostrategic posture more stridently in the Asia-Pacific region. At such a sensitive time, when both Japan and Australia are attempting to manage favourable relations with China, which remains the largest trading partner of both countries, such an alliance would therefore be far too risky. It is also unnecessary at the present time, given that the separate bilateral alliances with the US remain the ultimate security guarantee for both countries.

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