

Japan and NATO As “Natural Partners”
Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan,
at the North Atlantic Council
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1. Introduction: Natural partners

Secretary General Rasmussen, thank you very much for your warm words of welcome.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

“Japan is ready to carry out what is required of it on the international level.”

That is the statement I made in 2007 when I had the honor of being the first Japanese Prime Minister to deliver an address at the North Atlantic Council.

Seven years have passed, and I have returned once again to this venue to address you as the Prime Minister of Japan.

It gives me great pleasure to state that Japan, having hoisted the banner of “Proactive Contributor to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation, is now fulfilling the commitment I made seven years ago.

Over the almost 70 years since the end of World War II, Japan has followed the path of a peace-loving nation and consistently made efforts to realize the fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law embodied in the United Nations Charter. Japan will continue to adhere steadfastly to this course into the years to come.

At the same time, Japan has made steady contributions to world peace and stability across various individual fields, from international peace cooperation, disarmament, non-proliferation, international counter-terrorism, and the advancement of “human security” to disaster management cooperation.

In Cambodia, the Golan Heights, Haiti, and South Sudan, as well as in the Indian Ocean for the fight against international terrorism, and in Iraq for providing reconstruction assistance, as many as 50,000 members of the Self-Defense Forces since the end of the Cold War have worked for peace in such locations all around the world..

Japan is shouldering roughly 11 per cent of the total UN PKO budget, a figure second only to the United States. Japan has carried out more than

US\$300 billion of ODA in total to 190 countries and regions to date. Japan's ODA marks its 60th anniversary this year. Looking back, we see that Japan has extended hands of assistance to our friends in Asia and elsewhere around the world since the time when Japan was still impoverished after the war.

On the foundation of this kind of unwavering path we have followed as a peace-loving nation, Japan will commit even more strongly than ever before to fostering global peace and prosperity.

Moreover, I believe that Japan should play a more proactive role in order fully to defend freedom of overflight, freedom of navigation, and other global commons.

This is the "Proactive Contribution to Peace" that I have been advocating. I have articulated my determination in this regard by setting forth Japan's first-ever National Security Strategy. Japan has also prepared a new structure in order to realize this Strategy without fail. All important decision-making is now undertaken flexibly by the National Security Council, which is under my direct supervision.

Japan is a "natural partner" of NATO. This was what Secretary General Rasmussen has stated. I agree wholeheartedly.

Why Japan and NATO?

Under the "diplomacy that takes a panoramic perspective of the world map" I have been advancing, European countries are partners with which we, together with our ally the United States, share common values. Moreover, NATO is an alliance that transcends the Atlantic Ocean to connect the United States and Europe, espousing the principle of "an alliance based on values."

A Japan that takes a panoramic perspective of the world map. A Japan that puts the policy of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" into practice to contribute to world peace and prosperity. For this kind of Japan, NATO, which shares our fundamental values, is indeed our "natural partner."

2. Facing security challenges closely related to us that we also hold in common

Together we triumphed in the Cold War, and more than two decades have passed since that time. The security environments surrounding Japan and Europe are each once again becoming increasingly severe.

(The security landscape of the European region)

It is fair to say that the current situation in Ukraine is the greatest challenge for post-Cold War Europe. We cannot accept “changes to the status quo by force or coercion. This is a global issue that also impacts Asia. Japan strongly urges all parties concerned to respect the rule of law and territorial integrity and to behave responsibly with maximum self-restraint.

The easing of tensions in eastern Ukraine is of the foremost importance. We will encourage the restoration of democracy as well as national dialogue and integration.

Towards that end, Japan will steadily implement the US\$1.5 billion of economic assistance to Ukraine that it already pledged at the G7 summit in The Hague. We will be proactive in providing assistance towards the upcoming presidential election and in making contributions to the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission.

(The security landscape of the Asia-Pacific region)

The security landscape of the Asia-Pacific is also becoming increasingly severe.

North Korea’s ongoing development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles is a “clear and present danger.” Even this year, North Korea has repeatedly launched ballistic missiles towards the Sea of Japan and released statements indicating another nuclear test.

These launches and another nuclear test clearly violate the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The situation also involves the risk of proliferation of nuclear materials and related technologies to third countries including Iran. This is no longer an issue confronting East Asia alone, but rather a critical challenge facing the international community.

It is a matter of course that the NAC released a statement that condemns in the strongest terms the nuclear test North Korea conducted in February 2013.

In the Asia Pacific, defense expenditures and arms imports have been increasing dramatically in recent years. In particular, China’s foreign policy approach and its military developments have become issues of concern for the international community, including Japan.

Defense expenditures have kept increasing at a rate of over 10 per cent annually more or less consistently ever since the time that the Cold War was just

about to end and have now expanded to 40 times greater than 26 years ago. Even over the past decade, defense expenditures have escalated to four times their original amount, in contrast to Japan's defense budget, which has shrunk by 1.2 per cent over the same period. These expenditures have now become roughly equivalent to the total amount of defense expenditures of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, which are leading member countries of NATO. What's more, its expansion of defense expenditures lacks transparency without clarification of the breakdown.

In response, Southeast Asian countries are now also increasing their defense expenditures, which have expanded to 1.8 times their original amount over the last decade.

Here we see the reality of the rapidly-changing power balance in the Asia-Pacific, where tensions are rising in terms of security.

Once again Japan calls strongly for stringent export control of arms and sensitive dual-use goods and technologies to ensure that these do not become factors for instability in the region.

In the East and South China Sea, there have been frequent attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion.

In the East China Sea, we have seen persistent intrusions into Japan's territorial waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands. Still fresh in our minds is the move to establish an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that unduly infringes on the freedom of overflight on the high seas. The number of times that Self-Defense Force aircraft scramble in response to military aircraft approaching our territorial airspace has now reached the same level as during the height of the Cold War.

As a responsible major power in the region, Japan will continue to exercise restraint as we address such situations in a level-headed manner, while exhibiting our firm determination. We will also continue to call for an early launch of operations of a maritime and air communication mechanism in order to prevent a contingency.

In the South China Sea, there has been a series of actions based on unilateral claims, and a sense of urgent vigilance is mounting among regional countries.

For Japan, realizing peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific is a top priority. We will act in cooperation with any nation who seeks to play a constructive role towards that end.

At the same time, Japan will adhere to the rule of law and defend the maritime order, including freedom of navigation, as well as freedom of overflight. This is because Japan views that to be the sole path forward for ensuring the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific.

I intend to promote further cooperation with NATO and its member countries sharing such values.

3. Developing the legal basis that will embody the policy of “Proactive Contribution to Peace”

Threats such as weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, terrorism and cyber attacks transcend national borders instantly. This is an era in which it is no longer possible for any one nation to secure its own peace and security by itself.

We will ensure peace in the region and the world through cooperation with the international community. In order to carry this out, Japan has both the intention and the ability to play a more proactive role than ever before.

In addition, we are currently advancing discussions regarding the relationship between the Constitution of Japan and such issues as the right of collective self-defense, collective security measures, and peacekeeping operations.

For instance, under the current interpretation of the Constitution, even if a U.S. Aegis-equipped vessel on the high seas near Japan on guard against a possible missile launch suffers an armed attack, Japan’s Self-Defense Forces are unable to defend it. Our only option is simply to overlook the situation. Is that an appropriate response?

Our Self-Defense Forces, which participate in peacekeeping operations together with forces from the member states of NATO, are unable to come to the aid of these other countries’ forces even should they come under attack by guerrillas. We are unable to do so even though these forces of NATO can and would protect the Self-Defense Forces. Again I ask you, is that an appropriate response?

Experts have been holding discussions about such points at great length, under my direction. Upon receiving their report, the Government intends to set its policy orientation regarding what Japan should and can do to contribute to world peace and stability and what kind of domestic legal structure is needed.

4. The mutually overlapping evolution of Japan and NATO

NATO played a critical role in bringing the Cold War to a victorious ending for the free world. Now, 20 years since the end of the Cold War, democracy and peace continue to be ensured within Europe. Mindful of this, I wish to express once more my respect for the contributions which NATO has made over the years.

Secretary General Rasmussen has demonstrated strong leadership in reinforcing NATO's partnerships with non-member countries. Japan, a "contact country" when I visited NATO seven years ago, has now become a "partner across the globe."

Japan has reliably been materializing the assistance to Afghanistan that I pledged seven years ago.

Japan has shouldered 30 per cent of the salaries of Afghanistan's national police personnel, and, together with NATO and others, we have contributed to maintaining and increasing the number of police officers, including female police officers, while also helping to build their capacity. The outcome of these efforts has been a doubling in the number of Afghanistan's police officers between 2008 and the present.

Through our partnering with NATO's Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Japan has implemented 144 projects in 16 of Afghanistan's provinces. These projects are in fields that are directly useful to the local people, such as medical care and education.

Japan's assistance to Afghanistan, at a total scale of US\$5.4 billion since 2001, has steadily brought forth positive results through partnerships with NATO and others in the international community.

NATO's future directions are now under consideration towards its next Summit to be held in Wales, the United Kingdom in September. Japan will for its part develop its partnership with this "future NATO" from the standpoint of putting our "proactive contribution to peace" into practice.

5. Putting Japan's policy of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" into practice

In April last year, during his visit to Japan, Secretary General Rasmussen

and I announced a Joint Political Declaration, the first political document between Japan and NATO.

I am extremely pleased that on the basis of that Declaration, just a little while ago we signed the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme, or “IPCP,” which will serve as the main guiding principles for future Japan-NATO cooperation.

During our meeting, Secretary General Rasmussen and I decided to cooperate across a broad range of fields based on this IPCP, from global commons such as the seas and cyberspace to disaster relief and defense exchanges.

Within this wide array of fields, I would like to lay out in concrete terms the future of Japan-NATO cooperation that I am particularly eager to press forward with, shedding light on the areas of “the sea” and “women.”

(Cooperation in the area of maritime security)

Japan and NATO share responsibility in promoting the rule of law on the world’s seas. Strengthening our cooperation within anti-piracy efforts off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden will be the touchstone for this.

About six hundred members of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces are currently serving there, and our surface force has to date escorted more than 3,400 vessels. Eighty per cent of those are foreign flag ships having no connection whatsoever to Japanese businesses. These actions are based on Japan’s strong commitment in safeguarding the safety of navigation without regard to national affiliation.

In addition, Japan’s P-3C maritime patrol aircraft cover 60 per cent of all warning and surveillance flights over the Gulf of Aden. To date, we have provided information approximately 10,000 times to relevant countries and organizations, including countries participating in NATO’s Operation Ocean Shield.

Today, Secretary General Rasmussen and I newly decided that Japan will engage in joint exercises with the countries participating in Operation Ocean Shield. Japan is determined to mutually exchange with NATO wisdom and lessons learned and safeguard the seas that support the prosperity of both our regions as well as the world.

(Cooperation in the areas of women, peace, and security)

Fully utilizing the power of women is a key concept in making the 21st

century an era of peace and prosperity.

It is the activities of women to which we must attach the greatest importance if throughout the world we are to alleviate poverty, promote peace, and provide a new engine for growth by endowing society with vitality. I am now ardently working to bring about “a society in which women shine.” As I stated in my address to the United Nations General Assembly last year, I am promoting women's participation and protection in the areas of peace and security as a priority.

Japan places great importance on the concept of “human security.”

We are implementing down-to-earth assistance in such areas as capacity building for women as well as maternal and child health and the protection and promotion of women’s rights in countries around Asia and in other developing countries. It is truly tragic that during armed conflicts a large number of women suffer wounds of both the mind and body that do not easily heal—a situation that remains rife even here in the 21st century.

Japan, attaching importance to the role of the International Criminal Court, will make a contribution to the Trust Fund for Victims.

I believe that NATO’s approach within the area of women’s issues, spearheaded by Secretary General Rasmussen, is entirely consistent with Japan’s approach.

Japan has been engaged very similarly to NATO in cultivating Afghanistan’s female police officers. Together with their male colleagues, these women took the lead in maintaining law and order during the recent presidential election and have been engaged in many other efforts to foster an environment in which women can contribute to democratization with peace of mind. At the Embassy of Japan in Afghanistan, female civilian personnel have been active as liaisons with NATO’s Senior Civilian Representative Office.

Today, Secretary General Rasmussen and I decided that Japan will dispatch to the NATO Headquarters female government personnel with experience in international peace cooperation.

Japan and NATO will cooperate with each other in promoting the protection and participation of women globally.

6. In closing: Reliable partners

I would like to close by asking one more time: Why Japan and NATO?

We are more than simply “natural partners” that share fundamental values. We are also “reliable partners” corroborated by concrete actions.

Based on that kind of relationship of trust, and taking the opportunity of my visit to the NATO Headquarters, I sincerely look forward to Japan turning new pages of cooperation in the months and years to come as a “reliable natural partner” of NATO.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.