

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



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Japan's search for security: Building 'strategic partnerships' in the Asia-Pacific

The rapid rise of China and relative decline of Japan and its American ally have led to a radically changed strategic landscape in the Asia Pacific. Compared to the Cold War years, Tokyo now perceives a more unstable and potentially hostile security environment and has sought to forge a viable grand strategy to adapt to new circumstances. This has taken the form of 'internal' and 'external' mobilization. First, self-imposed restrictions on Japan's international activities have been loosened, military capabilities are being streamlined and redeployed, and the public mood has become more robust in the face of external challenges. National commentator Yoichi Funabashi declares that "Japan can no longer afford the delusion of 'graceful decline'. Our choice is rebirth or ruin."

Second, external mobilization has taken the form of a reinforcement of the traditional US security alliance, a pro-active role in regional security institutions, and a new initiative to build enhanced bilateral security cooperation with other key states in the Asia-Pacific. It is these 'strategic partnerships', principally with Australia and India, and several key South East Asian states that represent a new and third pillar of Japan's alignment policies.

This presentation seeks to detail and analyze this new mechanism for security cooperation and look at the impact and prospects for Japan's strategic partnership relations. Based upon a conceptual model drawn from Business/Organizational Studies and adapted to explain 'strategic partnerships' in an International Relations (IR) context, my research seeks to identify the formation, implementation and future trajectory of Japan's bilateral security cooperation with Australia, India, and South Korea. This research project builds aims toward a comprehensive understanding of this new mechanism of security alignment as it has been applied in the context of Japanese grand strategy. It concludes that such partnerships both provide reinforcement to Japan's traditional alliance with the US, and offer alternatives to overdependence on Washington DC by creating new diplomatic axes.

Thomas S. Wilkins is Senior Lecturer at the University of Sydney. He is spending the 2012-2013 academic year at Tokyo University via a Japan Foundation Japanese Studies Fellowship and currently completing a manuscript for Lynne Rienner Publishers on 'Asia-Pacific Security Alignment'.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for young scholars and Ph.D. candidates in the field of Social Sciences organized by Maren Godzik, Phoebe Holdgrün and Barbara Holthus. All are welcome to attend, but registration (holthus@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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