

POLICY BRIEF

France, Japan and a greater Aukus

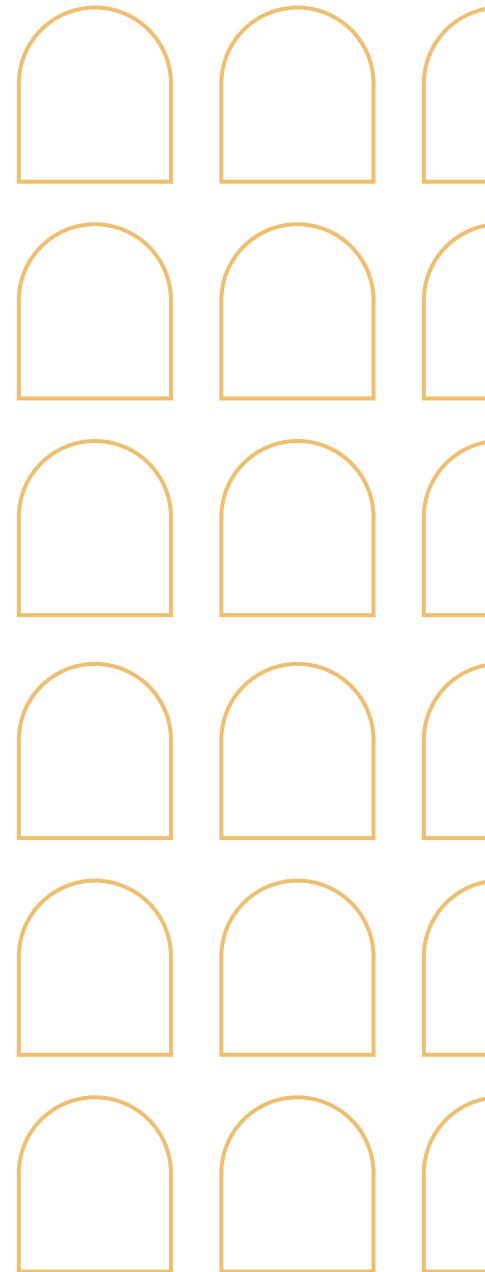
France was understandably disappointed by Aukus. Japan had also entered a 2016 bid for the construction of 12 conventional submarines, which the French won only to be rejected in September 2021. However, France and Japan drew different conclusions when Aukus was announced. Japan started preparing for an expansion of Aukus as early as November 2021, when former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō suggested Japan could join Aukus's future developments in cyber security, quantum technology and artificial intelligence.¹ It has not done this so far, but it has been stepping up its defence cooperation with Australia, the UK and the US. Aukus is to become a technological alliance, which New Zealand, India and Canada may also join at some stage. The cultural and historical ties that bind its three core parties, and the intelligence alliance and security treaties Aukus is based on, allows it to achieve a strong level of deterrence vis-à-vis China. Hoping to constitute a credible alternative, the French have taken a different path.

This brief describes Japan's defence efforts and the simultaneous strengthening of its security ties with the UK, Australia and the US in fields relevant to Aukus. It shows why France is not as attractive

1 "安倍元首相、オーカス関与に前向き サイバー分野など" [Former PM Abe favourable to cooperation with Aukus in fields like cybersecurity], Nikkei, 19 Nov. 2021.

Author

Guibourg Delamotte, Professor of Political Science, Inalco, France; Japanese security and domestic politics expert; author of *Le Japon, un leader discret*, Eyrolles, 2023; coed. of *Géopolitique et géoéconomie du monde contemporain*, La Découverte, 2021.



Issue 2023/20
December 2023

a partner for Japan as the Anglophone countries and argues that France, though a southern Pacific nation, risks becoming peripheral in an Indo-Pacific security architecture based on concentric circles.

Japan has been building up its defence posture and reinforcing its security relations with the US, the UK and Australia in areas relevant to Aukus.

In the fields of space and other ‘emerging and disruptive technologies,’ Japan’s defence posture has been evolving in pace with bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The Japanese 10-year basic space policy plan (January 2015) was closely followed by revised Japan-US bilateral guidelines for defence cooperation (April 2015) which for the first time seek to address threats in space and cyberspace. A joint statement by the 2022 Japan-US ‘2+2’ committee stressed the significance of cross-domain capabilities (“integrating the land, maritime, air, missile defence, space, cyber, electromagnetic spectrum, and other domains”).² In line with its new defence strategy in 2022, Japan is to build a 50-satellite constellation starting in 2023.³ It is seeking US and EU cooperation on cybersecurity⁴ and “emerging and disruptive technologies.”⁵ In January 2023, the US and Japan signed a broad framework agreement on space cooperation.⁶ Meanwhile the Quadrilateral security cooperation, ‘the Quad’ (Japan, Australia, India and the US), is also turning to “critical and emerging technologies” (May 2023).⁷

Japan has been tightening its cooperation with Australia and the UK. Japan and Australia signed

their first acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA) in 2010, the only one Japan had at the time apart from a 1998 (later upgraded) ACSA with the US. Japan entered negotiations for a reciprocal access agreement (RAA) with Australia in 2017. The process gained speed after Aukus and the Japan-Australia RAA, signed in January 2022, came into force in August 2023. Industrial cooperation with Australia is now moving fast. In October 2023 Mitsubishi Electric Australia and the Australian Department of Defence agreed to jointly develop laser technology “to improve the surveillance and survivability of defence equipment.”⁸ In April 2023, the chief of staff of the Maritime self-defence forces, Admiral Ryō Sakai, visited HMAS Stirling, the Australian base on the Indian Ocean where American and British submarines will call and rotate starting from 2023.⁹ Japan could receive port calls from the Aukus-class submarines in the future, were it to join Aukus.¹⁰

The month following the Aukus announcement, Japan and the UK, which have also signed an ACSA, entered negotiations for an RAA. Signed in January 2023, this became applicable on 15 October 2023. With the Hiroshima Accord, the UK-Japan partnership was further “enhanced” (An Enhanced Japan-UK Global Strategic Partnership, 18 May 2023).¹¹ Attempts at industrial cooperation in the field of missiles with the UK date back to 2012. Japan and the UK are now planning to build their future combat aircraft with Italy.

In contrast, industrial cooperation between Japan and the French never took off. France has shown no interest so far in joining Aukus. However, while the UK boasts two ‘permanently deployed’ but rotat-

2 Joint Statement by the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (‘2+2’), 6 Jan. 2022.

3 “Japan eyes network of 50 satellites to track enemy missiles,” *Asahi*, 15 Dec. 2022.

4 METI is organising an ‘Industrial control systems cybersecurity week for the Indo-Pacific Region’ in which the US and the EU take part.

5 G7 Digital and Technology Minister Meeting in Takasaki, Gunma, on 30 April 2023.

6 The United States and Japan Sign Framework Agreement on Space Cooperation, 13 Jan. 2023.

7 Quad Leaders Joint Statement, 20 May, 2023.

8 “Mitsubishi Electric Australia and Australian Department of Defence Agree Joint Development of Laser Technology to Enhance Surveillance and Survivability of Defense Platforms,” 19 Oct. 2023. <https://www.mitsubishielectric.com/news/2023/10/19.html>

9 Interview with (anonymous) former MoD senior official, Paris, 13 October 2023.

10 “Aukus front: Japan’s top admiral visits Australian submarine base,” 5 Apr. 2023.

11 Prime Minister’s office. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-hiroshima-accord>

ing patrol vessels in the South Pacific,¹² France has three regional ‘sovereign’ commands (on Réunion, in New-Caledonia and in French Polynesia) and 7000 to 8000 military personnel to look after its 2 million citizens scattered around the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific.¹³ France has been actively promoting, and taking part in, multilateral military exercises with Japan and its partners in the region (Jeanne d’Arc 2023, Pégase 2023). Why, then, is France not Japan’s preferred partner and why did Australia turn its back on Paris and sign into Aukus?

France seems at odds with its allies over China and has created tensions with Nato allies and partners, particularly Japan.

A joint communiqué released when President Macron visited China in April 2023 does not mention Taiwan.¹⁴ In an interview the returning French president gave on the plane, he told three journalists that Europeans should not let themselves be dragged into other peoples’ wars.¹⁵ No state should give a blank cheque to support Taiwan. That might embolden it and be perceived as threatening by China. However, Japanese, British, EU and US leaders stress the importance of maintaining the status quo. No sooner had Macron left China than Beijing conducted military exercises around Taiwan.

Macron went on to reject the opening of a Nato-Tokyo liaison office when Nato’s Secretary General said Nato was considering one.¹⁶ The French argument ran as follows. Nato has geographical limits. Furthermore, a Nato member embassy already acts as a contact point. For Japan, which supported the expansion of the US-Japan alliance, the notion of a geographical limit to an alliance is a false ar-

gument. Prime minister Kishida has consistently emphasised the continuity between the Asian and European theatres with his European counterparts¹⁷ to enlist their support in maintaining a strategic balance in Asia. By publicly taking a stance that opposed Jens Stoltenberg’s, Macron appeared to be reaching out to China, making Nato appear all the more antagonistic. China could portray the US as fuelling international tension. The Nato allies appeared divided and the collective deterrent was undermined.

The French president is hoping to renew popular historical Gaullism by presenting himself as loosely non-aligned in the contest between the West, China and the ‘global south.’ However, this strategy only serves to alienate France’s allies. The French positioning is all the more unfortunate given the commonalities between the French and Japanese viewpoints. Japan also wants to bridge the world’s divisions resulting from the war in Ukraine. It displayed this willingness by inviting regional organisations and representatives of the global south to the Hiroshima G7 summit in May 2023¹⁸. Japan also maintains a dialogue with China, as indeed do German and American leaders.¹⁹

In a regional security architecture now based on concentric circles, France could become peripheral.

The region’s security architecture is increasingly shaped in concentric circles. The Quad (India, Japan, the United States and Australia) is occasionally a Quad+ including the Republic of Korea (RoK), New Zealand and Vietnam. Japan, the RoK, Australia and New Zealand were invited to the Nato

12 Prime Minister’s office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, 2 July 2021.

13 Ministère des armées, “Indopacifique: quels enjeux pour la France ?” 1 Dec. 2022.

14 <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2023/04/07/declaration-conjointe-entre-la-republique-francaise-et-la-republique-populaire-de-chine>

15 On this, see François Godement, “Macron et la Chine: les désastres du “en même temps,” 12 April 2023. <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/macron-et-la-chine-les-perils-du-en-meme-temps>

16 “France opposed to opening of Nato liaison office in Japan, official says,” *The Guardian*, 7 June 2023.

17 In May 2022 when he met Rishi Sunak, in June 2023 in his meeting with Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels and in Vilnius at the Nato July 2023 summit.

18 G7 Leaders’ Communiqué, Hiroshima, 20 May 2023.

19 Olaf Scholz met Xi Jinping in China on 4 Nov. 2022 and Foreign Minister Qin Gang in Berlin on 10 May 2023, for instance.

Madrid and Vilnius summits (2022, 2023). Aukus is one such concentric-circle.

Aukus appeared necessary to Australia when China introduced economic sanctions against it, after its Prime Minister called for an investigation into the origins of Covid-19. The Indo-Pacific became attractive to the UK after Brexit. Japan, Australia and the UK view their relationship with the US as essential for their defence, and the US sees them as trustworthy allies. For Japan, its defence cooperation with the UK and Australia is a continuation of the Japan-US alliance. Aukus in itself is not an alliance, but is embedded in existing cultural and historical bonds, security treaties and the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing organisation (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the US and Britain), which Japan also wishes to join, as former Defence Minister Kôno Tarô stated in August 2020.²⁰ These developments make Aukus the best of deterrents.

The Quad, Aukus and Five Eyes now overlap and supplement each other. Further intersections between Indo-Pacific strategic circles are likely in the near future. At a time when the UK is open to cooperation with France,²¹ it should put aside its wounded pride, see where its interest lie and participate.

20 "Japan wants de facto 'Six Eyes' intelligence status: defence chief", *Nikkei Asia*, 14 August 2020.

21 House of Commons Defence Committee, *UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific*, 17 Oct 2023.

The Global Governance Programme

The Global Governance Programme (GGP) is research turned into action. It provides a European setting to conduct research at the highest level and promote synergies between the worlds of research and policy-making, to generate ideas and identify creative and innovative solutions to global challenges. The Programme is part of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute, a world-renowned academic institution. It receives financial support from the European Commission through the European Union budget. Complete information on our activities can be found online at: globalgovernanceprogramme.eui.eu

EU-Asia Project

The EU-Asia project is a research and educational initiative within the Global Governance Programme. It is designed to contribute to mutual understanding and exchange between Asia and Europe at a time of unprecedented change in international politics and global governance. The project also aims at an ambitious academic programme on EU and Asia, with a particular focus on Japan.

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS), created in 1992 and directed by Professor Erik Jones, aims to develop inter-disciplinary and comparative research on the major issues facing the process of European integration, European societies and Europe's place in 21st century global politics. The Centre is home to a large post-doctoral programme and hosts major research programmes, projects and data sets, in addition to a range of working groups and ad hoc initiatives. The research agenda is organised around a set of core themes and is continuously evolving, reflecting the changing agenda of European integration, the expanding membership of the European Union, developments in Europe's neighbourhood and the wider world.

www.eui/rsc



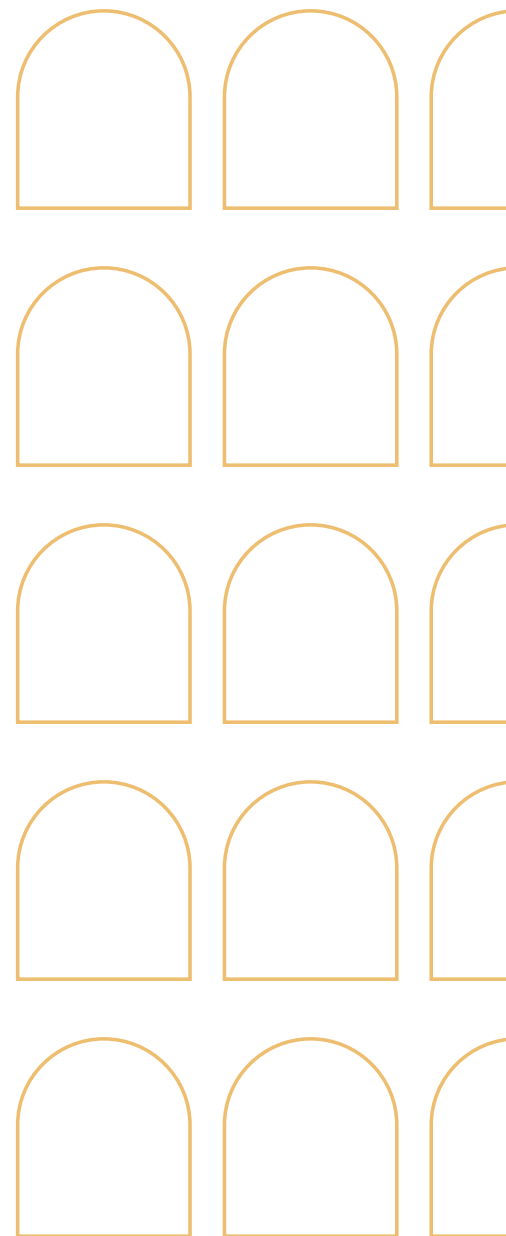
Co-funded by
the European Union

© European University Institute, 2023
Editorial matter and selection © Guibourg Delamotte, 2023

This work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 \(CC-BY 4.0\) International license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) which governs the terms of access and reuse for this work. If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the series and number, the year and the publisher.

Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual authors and not those of the European University Institute.

Published by
European University Institute (EUI)
Via dei Roccettini 9, I-50014
San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy



doi:10.2870/76268
ISBN:978-92-9466-378-8
ISSN:2467-4540
QM-AX-23-020-EN-N