

Expanding Horizons: Reciprocal Access Agreements, the Japan-Australia Special Strategic Partnership, and Japan's Novel Security Cooperation

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This paper outlines the contours of Japan's newly strengthened security cooperation with aligned powers in the Indo-Pacific and beyond through the case study of its so-called "Special Strategic Partnership" (*tokubetsuna senryakuteki pātonāshippu*) with Australia. In particular, it discusses the new bilateral framework constituted by the so-called Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement (*Nichigō enkatsuka kyōtei*) signed by the two countries in 2022, focusing both on its legal contents and wider significance for security cooperation between its signatories. Such an analysis is prefaced by a discussion of its doctrinal and geopolitical backgrounds, which are identified as the FOIP vision (*jiyūde hirakareta Indo-Taiheiō*) and integrated deterrence against a revisionist China, respectively. In light of the highly politicized rhetoric regarding the Special Strategic Partnership, the actual capabilities of this security partnership between Japan and Australia, as well as their attendant legal instruments, are analyzed in comparison with those of the US-Japan Alliance. Finally, in light of the reproducibility of the RAA framework and the signing of a second RAA between Japan and the UK in 2023, the geopolitical implications and outlook of Japan's newly expanded sphere of security cooperation are also discussed.

Keywords: Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement (JA-RAA), Japan-Australia Special Strategic Partnership (JA-SSP), Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), Japan-Australia Relations, Integrated Deterrence

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INTRODUCTION: TOPICAL OUTLINE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Japan is currently in the process of signing bilateral security agreements in the form of a new framework known as a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA). As suggested by its novel name, RAAs, defined in its own terms as a “legal framework for facilitating mutually beneficial defense cooperation,” deepens the “security and defense relationship between the parties” by defining the status of forces of one signatory country stationed for the purposes of security cooperation in a counterpart country (Gaimushō, January 2022). While not a mutual defense pact in the conventional sense, RAAs are part and parcel of an effort by Japan to enhance defense and security cooperation with countries that it deems to share key values and interests with. It is made clear, from the rhetoric of the RAAs’ chief negotiators, that these key values and interests are subsumed under the foreign policy doctrine known as the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP), which denotes the late Shinzo Abe’s conceptual framework (now a widely adopted doctrine within the foreign policy *modus operandi* of many US-aligned powers) to transform the Indo-Pacific region into a network of economic and security partners governed by shared values. Despite the neutral veneer of much of the rhetoric surrounding FOIP, there has been significant criticism of the new RAA agreements, raised most vigorously by Chinese-controlled media, as allegedly being part and parcel of Japan’s efforts to establish “defense pacts,” “military alliances,” or even an “NATO in the Asia-Pacific region” with countries actively interested in containing China (Liu and Zhang, 2022). In particular, much controversy centers around the significance of Japan’s tightening security cooperation with its first RAA signatory, Australia, and how the 2022 Japan-Australia RAA (JA-RAA) complements a “Special Strategic Partnership” between the two Indo-Pacific nations that has been described as constituting a “quasi-alliance.”

This paper will first analyze the JA-RAA’s relationship with the larger doctrinal framework of FOIP, discussing the widening scope of operations for Japanese military power abroad as well as some geopolitical consequences vis-à-vis China in light of recent foreign policy developments and the burgeoning security concept of “integrated deterrence.” An analysis of the text of the Japan-Australia RAA will follow, outlining its main points and significance vis-à-vis security cooperation between its signatories. In light of the exaggerated conflation of expanded security cooperation under the RAA framework with formal military treaty alliances, further analysis will be focused on this burgeoning security cooperation, in the process comparing the main capabilities of the so-called “Special Strategic Partnership” between Japan and Australia with those of the US-Japan Alliance (Japan’s sole military treaty alliance). In view of the RAA’s reproducibility as a legal framework, the conclusion comments on the outlook of Japan’s newly expanded horizons for security cooperation following the expansion of the Japan-Australia Special Strategic Partnership (JA-SSP).

A bird’s eye view of the literature regarding the topic of the JA-RAA and other new developments in Japan’s Special Strategic Partnership with Australia reveals an overall dearth of academic papers and secondary source material on the topics, given their recency. Unsurprisingly, the most relevant analyses are contained within Japanese

sources, with these papers written almost exclusively by the research arms of the bicameral National Diet or by military and legal commentators. Since the signing of the 2022 RAA, two papers were commissioned and published in 2023 by the Secretariats of the *Shūgiin* and *Sangiin*, both on the topic of the RAAs and security cooperation (Shūgiin, 2023) (Imai and Okuri, 2023). Another shorter column was penned from the perspective of a security expert for the JMSDF (Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force) Command and Staff College (Ishihara, 2022). A more opinionated oppositional piece in direct opposition to the RAA and global security cooperation was featured on a mouthpiece publication of Japan's socialist left, the increasingly rarified traditional defenders of "one-nation pacifism" (Kozuka, 2022). Various articles from Japanese media also provide occasional and concise commentary on the topic.

With regards to the commentary in English-speaking countries, the most pertinent sources are situated within Australian analysis and commentary by policy watchers and security experts. Following the RAA, relevant commentary has been published under the auspices of such organizations as the Australian Strategic Policy Institute as well as a scattering of other English articles that highlight the growth of Japan-Australian security cooperation in recent years. The mainstream view is that the sudden timeline and ambitious scale of these developments have furnished the partnership with capabilities that were unthinkable earlier this century. Closely echoing these sentiments, Chinese contributions to this topic have come in the form of oppositional commentary and analysis published via the medium of state media (especially the *People's Daily's* more confrontational and sensationalist cousin, the *Global Times*). Not surprisingly, the most dominant narratives present in Chinese sources are those that situate Japan-Australia security cooperation within reach of de-facto alliance status and that trace the motives of such cooperation to the increasingly explicit desire of aligned democracies to counter or deter a rising China.

In informing its analysis on this topic, this paper consults such primary sources as the JA-RAA, the first of two such agreements heretofore signed by Japan, bilateral agreements and joint statements endemic to the Japan-Australia SSP and other security partnerships, domestic laws specifying the bounds of Japanese defense policy, and more bilateral legal agreements underpinning the capabilities of the modern US-Japan alliance. It also cites Japan's two National Security Strategy (NSS) documents, relevant government publications on the FOIP strategy, and other white papers outlining the policies of Japan's security partners including the US and Australia. In addition, relevant Japanese language sources on the JA-RAA and JA-SSP were accessed via the National Diet Library of Japan. Finally, as seen above, a plethora of secondary source commentary and analysis of English, Japanese, and Chinese origin have also been consulted.

DOCTRINAL CONTEXT: FREE AND OPEN INDO-PACIFIC¹

Japan suffers from a major deficit of legitimacy when it comes to any exercise of either military power or so-called "hard power" abroad due to the events of the previous century. "Military power" and "hard power" are loaded terms with definitional

controversy, but even when applying such conceptualizations in international relations as Robert Art's Four Functions of Military Power (Art, 1980), it becomes clear that Japan's abilities to engage in each is severely limited; indeed, of the four modes of military power (i.e., defense, deterrence, compellence, and swaggering), Japan has historically been largely precluded from the exercise of each except defense (Japan does now dabble in "deterrence" activities via the security cooperation outlined below and recent "extended deterrence" discussions or EDDs with the US vis-à-vis North Korea while also engaging in some measured swaggering through, *inter alia*, its annual military parades involving the SDF, although such activities are still thoroughly couched in terms of defense) (US Department of State, June 2022).

Even within defense, until the passing of the 2015 Law on Peace and Security (*Heiwa anzen hōsei*), Japan was precluded from the UN-enumerated right to collective self-defense (*shūdanteki jieiken*) and has been struggling to codify the SDF's de facto status as a legitimate tool for individual self-defense (*kobetsuteki jieiken*) within its so-called "Peace Constitution." Although scholars interpret Japan's post-2015 legal environment as facilitating Japan's exercise of military or hard power in such specific scenarios as peacekeeping operations (PKOs), gray zone operations, and collective self-defense operations (Nasu, 2016), the legitimizing pretext or excuse for Japan's participation in such operations remains elusive to the point that Japan's use of a right enumerated in the UN Charter was restricted by what has been called legal "brakes" or "*hadome*" (Hughes, 2017) to apply to only scenarios affecting "national survival" (*wagakuni no sonritsu*) (Naikaku-kanbō, n.d.).

Elucidating legitimizing pretexts is therefore a crucial step for Japan in exercising its military power abroad, especially when such "military power" is defined as the deployment and use of the SDF outside Japan. Even countries with both the legitimacy and the means to exercise military power on a global stage like the United States tend to couch their operations in euphemistic terms invoking certain positive and universal values (e.g., "Operation Enduring Freedom," "War on Terror," US adoption of the term "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"). Japan, especially during the second Abe cabinet, has subtly inflected its political rhetoric to change the policy implications of Japan's long-standing doctrine of pacifism.

In contrast to the chaste "one-nation pacifism" (*ikkoku heiwashugi*) of Shōwa era Japan, the second-Abe cabinet's first NSS, an inaugural document first published with the establishment of the National Security Council in 2013, emphasized "proactive

¹ This paper uses "doctrinal" as a descriptor for FOIP as the conceptual boundaries and usage of the term is wider than that of a "FOIP strategy" (*jiyūde hirakareta Indo-Taiheiyō senryaku*), as FOIP is still often referred to as in secondary source commentary. Indeed, the Japanese government has recently been disassociating FOIP from the belligerent phraseology of "strategy," instead using the term on its own or occasionally with the term "vision." This paper thus identifies FOIP as a foreign policy or security "doctrine" in the sense that it sets a framework for understanding the goals and rules endemic to current Japanese foreign and security policy. Though doctrines are often equated, *totem pro parte*, with the policy pronouncements of individuals (e.g., the Abe Doctrine), this paper acknowledges the broader use of the term doctrine outlined in the previous sentence while noting that the doctrine of FOIP is now a mainstay of successive Japanese administrations and independent from the exclusive ideation of the late Shinzo Abe.

pacifism” (*sekkyokuteki heiwashugi*) as a new guiding security doctrine. Japan’s first NSS emphasizes that the condition of being “surrounded by an increasingly severe security environment” has made it “indispensable for Japan to make more proactive efforts in line with the principle of international cooperation” (Shushō Kantei, 2013). The next line is especially telling: “Japan cannot secure its own peace and security by itself, and the international community expects Japan to play a more proactive role for peace and stability in the world, in a way commensurate with its national capabilities.” Embodying a “proactive contributor to peace” is defined as a Japan actualizing its national capability as the world’s third largest economy and actively enforcing such regional and global standards as “FOIP,” “global commons” (i.e., UNCLOS and cybersecurity), and a “peaceful, stable, and highly predictable international environment” based on international law and “universal values” (*fuhenteki kachi*). Japan’s NSSs also list what Japan perceives to be the main challenges to this facilitatory order, with an emphasis being placed on the shift in balance of power politics constituted by the rise of such revisionist powers as China. Japan’s second NSS released in December 2022 strengthened the break from erstwhile passivity by naming Japan’s basal security policy as a “proactive contribution to peace,” while stating that Japan will secure the means for such goals by “decisively taking on necessary reforms and reinforcing our national security capabilities and roles” (Naikaku-kanbō, December 2022).

These “necessary reforms” have been manifested in sharp increases in the defense budget and cybersecurity capabilities (the latter in anticipation of so-called “hybrid warfare”), development of counterstrike capabilities, and expansion of security cooperation and interoperability exercises with aligned powers (allies as well as so-called “friendly nations”). Especially notable within the trio of national security documents which included the new NSS was the doubling of annual defense spending to around 2 percent of GDP by fiscal year 2027 as well as the use of such funds to fuel upgrades in missile technologies (e.g., “standoff missiles” and Tomahawk cruise missiles) to provide counterstrike capabilities against hostile military bases. The latter development, originally debated under the belligerent and politically controversial title of “enemy base strike capability” (*tekikichi kōgeki nōryoku*) and subsequently realized under the more euphemistic title of “counterstrike capability” (*hangeki nōryoku*), leans into the idea that Japan should exercise deterrence during times of peace as well as prevention or preemption as legitimate modes of defense during times of emergency. Such developments cap a sea change in Japan’s security policy that have been gradually increasing the military capabilities and geographical scope of a constitutionally pacifist country since the end of the First Gulf War. As seen above, while “one nation pacifism” entrenches Japan within a restrained and solipsistic inertia vis-à-vis the issue of defense, “proactive pacifism” posits Japan as a truly global agent for the proactive maintenance of universal values such as peace.

Within this overall *zeitgeist* shift vis-à-vis postwar pacifism, post-Abe Japan routinely utilizes the FOIP concept as an ideational tool for justifying the use of military power and the SDF abroad in the form of joint military exercises or operations with aligned powers. Thus far, one can identify three major pretexts for overseas deployment of the SDF: peacekeeping operations (PKOs) mostly linked to UN humanitarian causes, material (and troop) support for America’s previous “War on Terror” (anti-terrorism

in general now constituting a constituent goal within FOIP), and “maintenance of peace and stability” in the Indo-Pacific region under the FOIP vision (all actions that fit comfortably within the concept of “proactive pacifism”). As a pretext for global action, FOIP thus constitutes a third major arena for Japan to engage its military strength abroad.

Table 1 below summarizes the previous arenas of engagement for the SDF abroad, while also detailing their operations and basal legal framework. What is notable is that the modifier of “UN” behind “peacekeeping operation” (PKO) is becoming an increasingly nominal tool for getting the world used to Japanese military might abroad (perhaps in the eyes of critics a certain humanitarian and liberal internationalist Trojan horse). In 2019, this nominal veneer changed as Japan, for the first time in history, deployed the SDF to assist a non-UN PKO force, the MFO (Multinational Force & Observers) in the Sinai Peninsula (Hornung, 2019). The legal basis for this was the de jure specification of PKOs outside the purview of the UN (*hikokuren tōkatsugata kokusai renkei heiwa anzen katsudō*) in a 2015 revision of Japan’s PKO Law (*Kokusai heiwa kyōryokuhō*) (Naikaku-fu, 2022). Although an even earlier deployment of SDF troops

Table 1. Arenas of Engagement for the SDF Abroad

Arena	Detailed Operations	Legal Framework
United Nations PKOs	9 PKOs (out of 11 listed by MOFA) involved the SDF (Cambodia, Mozambique, UNDOF, East Timor, Timor-Leste, Nepal, Sudan, Haiti, South Sudan) (1992 -) (Gaimushō, May 2015)	Legal codification of PKO activities “centered on the UN” [SDF Law (<i>Jieitaihō</i>) Article 3] [PKO Law (<i>Kokusai heiwa kyōryokuhō</i>)] (1992 -)
“War on Terror”	Japan SDF Iraq Reconstruction and Support Group (<i>Jieitai iraku fukkō shiengun</i>) (2004-2008)	Iraq Special Measures Law (<i>Iraku tokusohō</i>) (2003-2009) First deployment of SDF abroad, required SDF to stay within “noncombat zones”
“Free and Open Indo-Pacific”	Operations endemic to the Special Strategic Partnership with Australia Malabar Exercises amongst Quad partners Various other joint exercises and activities with Japan’s ally, the US, and other security partners	US-Japan Alliance RAAs and various other security cooperation agreements between Japan and Australia Expanding security cooperation and agreements with other partners
Other PKOs	MFO assistance (SDF officers) (Gaimushō, April 2019)	Revision of the PKO Law (<i>Kokusai heiwa kyōryokuhō</i>) (Sept. 2015): non-UN peacekeeping operations now included.

outside UN auspices was conducted by the controversial Japan SDF Iraq Reconstruction and Support Group (*Jieitai iraku fukkō shiengun*), which was formed under the pretext of supporting the US's "War on Terror," the JIRSG's mission was legitimized by a temporary ad hoc legal measure (*Iraku tokusohō*) that expired in 2009 (Naikaku-kanbō, 2003). The PKO law, in contrast, remains a permanent feature as well as a prime example of Japan's recent salami slicing towards military normalization, along with the legalization of collective self-defense and the codification of PKO activities "centered on" UN PKOs (an ambiguous statement in Article 3 of the Self-Defense Forces Law that does not explicitly deny Japan the right of other military operations in the name of peacekeeping) (e-Gov Hōrei kensaku, n.d.).

This expansion in operational scope for the SDF is significant because of the gray line that currently exists between humanitarian operations and traditional war. Since the end of the Cold War, there have been an explosive increase of so-called "low intensity conflicts" (LICs) populating a so-called "Arc of Instability" as well as gray-zone crises endemic to the Indo-Pacific and especially to the strategic "island chains" surrounding the peripheries of China (all areas geographically conterminous with the arena of Japan's FOIP strategy). Given this changing nature of war and conflict, so-called "humanitarian intervention" and "peacekeeping" often takes the form of traditional war for geo-strategic goals, as evidenced by America's Middle Eastern wars undertaken under the pretext of Democratic Peace Theory and by the SDF's inability to solely perform "noncombat" roles in Iraq (Kato, 2018).

Several corollaries follow. First, what exactly comprises a legitimate operation for peacekeeping purposes is *terra incognita*, especially with the new Japan-Australia RAA noting an extremely vaguely defined "mutual commitment to the peaceful settlement of international disputes and to the maintenance of international peace and security" as a rationale for enhanced security cooperation efforts. Second, despite the multiplying global arenas for Japan's military, multilateralism is still a base condition for Japanese use of the SDF abroad, as Japan still cannot exercise military power abroad unilaterally. In this context, the multilateral, liberal internationalist vision of FOIP, provides Japan with crucial legitimacy for conducting operations outside the traditional purview of both the UN (e.g., UN PKOs) and the US-Japan Alliance (e.g., "War on Terror") and for establishing new security cooperation via the RAA framework.

Identifying FOIP as the doctrinal pretext for RAA agreements is not difficult, given the explicit rhetoric of the RAAs' main interlocutors. For example, in the "Australia-Japan Leaders' Meeting Joint Statement," which accompanied the signing of the Japan-Australia RAA, FOIP is explicitly mentioned as a central goal (Gaimushō, January 2022). FOIP is also explicitly connected to the Malabar Exercises and to Japan-Indian security cooperation in statements by the Ministry of Defense of the Japanese (Bōeishō, n.d.) and Indian (Press Information Bureau, 2020) governments. Of course, FOIP is also used as a legitimizing pretext for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, with the two most recent Quad statements published during the May 2023 Hiroshima summit both naming the maintenance of FOIP as the first of several key goals (Gaimushō, May 2023). Japan's new NSS as well as US foreign policy papers published by both the Trump (Trump White House - National Archives, 2021) and Biden (The White House, February 2022) administrations all invoke the strategy as a key if not a top priority. The marketability

of FOIP and its main goals has made it a mainstay in foreign policy rhetoric regarding the Indo-Pacific region amongst western and East Asian democracies (especially amongst the so-called “Anglosphere” and US allies). It now functions as a ubiquitous *idée fixe*, adding ideological legitimacy and a sense of multilateral consensus to a host of government literature from flagship foreign policy white papers down to even individual press releases over multilateral training exercises. It is clear from this documented evidence that Japan and its security partners are utilizing, of the various arenas for military operations abroad, the FOIP vision as the immediate doctrinal pretext for Japan’s pursuit of new RAA security cooperation with Indo-Pacific powers.

GEOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND AND INTEGRATED DETERRENCE

One question that is constantly being raised in the relevant literature is whether Japan’s new cooperative framework has geopolitical motivations to counterbalance China. Chinese sources are the most adamant in attributing this motive. Four years before the actual signing of the JA-RAA, after reports of movement towards the signing of a “visiting forces agreement” (VFA) between Japan and Australia, Chinese state media was quick to identify an anti-China motive behind military cooperation between the two Indo-Pacific powers, stating that “its focus is to contain China” (Liu, 2018). On the eve of the Japan-Australia RAA’s signing, the *Global Times* published the opinions of a panel of Chinese academics commenting on the agreement’s geopolitical significance. Regarding military cooperation, the RAA was described within this commentary as being part and parcel of the US effort to link its two major military alliances in the Indo-Pacific region (i.e., ANZUS and the US-Japan Alliance) producing the effect of another “NATO in the Asia-Pacific region” (Liu and Zhang, 2022). It was also noted by several academics that Japan-Australian cooperation was becoming more aggressive in ways that would leave a destabilizing effect on the region and that should “they touch China’s bottom line,” which was specified as foreign interference in Taiwan and “harm to China’s territory” (e.g., the US stance on the Permanent Court of Arbitration’s South China Sea ruling and Japanese administration of the Senkaku Islands), countermeasures by China would follow. The last barb displays the level of threat perception that China derives from the question of what constitutes the geopolitical subtext behind increased security cooperation and the JA-RAA.

The answer to this question, as made obvious by the documented evidence and comments of the main RAA signatories, can be strongly argued to be a clear yes. First, such an implication is evident in Japan’s choice of security interlocutors under the RAA framework. In keeping with its ideological justification of FOIP, the current existing (i.e., Australia and the UK) or prospective (i.e., France and the Philippines) signatory parties are all either situated in the Indo-Pacific region or possess key security interests in the region. France has colonial possessions in the Indo-Pacific that have remained under its control despite the previous century’s strides towards decolonization, while the UK is a signatory to the AUKUS pact signed immediately before the RAA signing between Australia and Japan. With perhaps the exception of France, both signatories

and most potential signatory parties have also recently had major foreign policy, trade, or territorial disputes with China. Australia, in particular, has seen a well-documented breakdown of relations in China, in which a golden age of relations marked by Sinophilic Australian PMs, a temporary withdrawal of Australia from the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, and organic increases in trade volume (between a natural resource rich Australia and a manufacturing hub in China) capped by the signing of the China-Australia FTA (ChAFTA) was deracinated by raw diplomatic spats, a scandal regarding Chinese political interference in Australia (which catalyzed the passing of the National Security Legislation Amendment Act of 2018), and a trade war.

Elsewhere in the Anglosphere, the UK, under the leadership of Rishi Sunak, has been seen to have taken a hardline against China, with Sunak having previously declared an end to a “golden era” of relations with China (Milliken, 2022). The Philippines of course has an ongoing spat with China over the South China Sea issue. Indeed, public perception of China across all major democracies have nosedived to a historic low following negative press regarding China’s revisionist nationalism, “wolf warrior diplomacy,” handling of the Hong Kong protests, belligerence in cross-strait relations, treatment of Uyghur minorities, and role in the coronavirus pandemic (Silver, Devlin, and Huang, 2021). Such global trends are significant in shifting the Overton window in terms of the political discourse surrounding China policy, especially amongst Japan’s security partners.

Past partner selection and political shifts, that the ideological goal of RAA agreements as embodied by a “free and open Indo-Pacific” is a vision that excludes China as an unstated *fait accompli* is also made evident throughout the negotiation process and its resultant documents. The Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, which was signed in October 2022 following the agreement of the RAA, explicitly states FOIP in its first article and again throughout most of the entire document. Most of these invocations either directly or indirectly represent grave geopolitical implications for China. Article 5 is particularly explicit in its invocation of geopolitics, stating that evolution of the strategic partnership must continue to “meet growing risks to our shared values and mutual strategic interests.” The parties then specify their key “mutual strategic interest” as a free and open Indo-Pacific underpinned by such values as a rules-based international order under international law, inclusive and transparent institutions, resilience against “aggression, coercion, disinformation, malicious cyber activity and other forms of interference,” as well as regional economic integration “underpinned by a rules-based and market-oriented trade and investment system.” Following their invocation of international law, both parties professed the FOIP aim to secure a “maritime domain underpinned by adherence to international law, particularly the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, in which States can exercise freedom of navigation and overflight and are not subject to coercive or destabilizing action,” a thinly veiled dig at China’s actions in the South China Sea (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022).

Indeed, the joint statement by PMs Kishida Fumio and Anthony Albanese disposed with the veiled references, and expressly mentioned “serious concerns about the situation in the South China Sea” in relation to UNCLOS. The statement went as far as to mention a common stance against China’s actions in the East China Sea, Taiwan

Strait, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and even Hong Kong (a hardline that was praised by President Biden in a statement that also mentioned the goal of trilateral security cooperation in defending FOIP) (The White House, January 2022). The bottom line is that the perception that Japan is increasing the purview of its security cooperation via FOIP, and that this vision is one that definitionally excludes China as a power outside the liberal international order is a rational observation given the evidence.

Central to this conclusion is the point of “definitional exclusion.” Several main facets of FOIP, identified under the banner of “promotion and establishment of fundamental principles” and including adherence to the “rule of law,” “freedom of navigation” (also used in connection with the phrase “free and open seas”), and “free trade” represent goals that are categorically irreconcilable with the political and foreign policy *modus operandi* of the current Chinese state. This is made explicit in the Japan’s 2022 NSS, which labels China as one of a handful of revisionist powers attempting to “unilaterally change the status quo by force in the maritime and air domains,” refusing to “participate in international frameworks in which other major official creditor nations take part in together,” and engaging in financial policies that “lack adequate transparency.” China is also described as increasingly aligning itself with other revisionist powers, strengthening its strategic ties with Russia in an attempt to “challenge the international order.”

Japan’s latest foreign policy rhetoric is almost a carbon copy of the US national security doctrine outlined by the Biden administration. Owing to a long political career in Washington’s foreign policy circles, Joe Biden made foreign policy a campaign issue in 2020, contributing a piece to *Foreign Affairs* in which he painted a binary picture of the world as divided between liberal democracies and illiberal autocrats (Biden, 2023). Such rhetoric was emphasized as Biden attempted to differentiate himself from the unpredictable and non-doctrinal foreign policy of the Trump administration. The 2022 US NSS stated more definitively that the unipolar “post-Cold War era is definitively over” and that major power competition was underway to “shape what comes next.” Within this order, China is described as constituting both “America’s most consequential geopolitical challenge” and the only global power that possesses both the intent and the power to “reshape the international order.” Japan’s newest foreign policy literature apes its US counterpart in its diagnosis of national security challenges (e.g., intensifying geopolitical competition and rising revisionist powers) and concomitant policy prescriptions (from multilateral security cooperation in achieving such goals as FOIP to prioritizing domestic economic prosperity as a means to improve foreign policy and security outcomes). The ideological consonance displayed by the security doctrines of the US and Japan increasingly situates FOIP within a larger post-Cold War contest waged by (using Biden’s own wording) “democrats” (i.e., states aligned with the US and its allies) and “autocrats.”

Such Japanese scholars as Yuichi Hosoya have previously argued that the FOIP strategy underwent ideological evolution since its inception in the “Arc of Prosperity” concept of the first Abe cabinet and subsequent formalization as “FOIP” during the TICAD VI conference in 2016 (Hosoya, 2019). Hosoya’s 2019 article argued that the early iterations of FOIP, which he labeled “FOIP 1.0,” subsumed a message of containment and isolation of China within a broader regional framework of the Indo-

Pacific. In contrast, he argued that the revamped version of the FOIP concept since the 2016 TICAD conference constituted a “FOIP 2.0,” which Hosoya argues “has been carefully avoiding the impression that Japan and the US are intending to contain China.” Definitional barriers to Chinese inclusion within or partnership with FOIP are underplayed in his piece. However, it is now evident that such an analysis was based on the foreign policy statements of the late second Abe cabinet, made during what Hosoya identified as a period of Japan-China *rapprochement* (following Xi Jinping’s conciliatory overtures to Tokyo during the confrontational Trump administration), which have little relevance vis-à-vis subsequent foreign policy doctrines outlined by Biden and Kishida. In light of Japan’s documented change in foreign policy rhetoric since 2019, it is now evident that irrespective of the previous inflective iterations of FOIP that may have existed, FOIP in its current form maintains a strong exclusive approach of doctrinal isolation and containment with regards to revisionist powers and especially China.

Another central facet of the geopolitical landscape of Japan’s security partnerships is the emerging rhetoric of “integrated deterrence” that is becoming a strategic keyword in the defense policy of the US and its partners. “Integrated deterrence” was proposed as a centerpiece concept of the US’s 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) published by the DoD. The concept is defined through the words of the NDS as “working seamlessly across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, all instruments of U.S. national power, and our network of Alliances and partnerships” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022). In short, this catchphrase strategy emphasizes unified coordination involving all theatres of warfare (including novel domains), all government agencies, and all alliance and security partnerships for the cause of seamless and integrated deterrence against so-called “competitors.” As with the Japan and US NSSs, China is presented as the main “competitor” as well as the explicit target of US deterrence policy (its “attacks” are listed with Russian, North Korean and Iranian attacks in a section on the US’s tailored deterrence approaches).

This strategy of integrated deterrence exists within a larger ecosystem of deterrence rhetoric that have emerged recent years amongst the US, Japan and aligned powers. Some Australian analysts have noted that deterrence policy was an organizing principle for the US security policy during the Cold War and that its present revival “reflects the reality of a return of great-power competition” (Shrimpton and MacGillivray, 2022). Invoking the US’s Cold War conceptualization of a “second island chain” and China’s “anti-access/area-denial strategy” to deny American access to the first and second island chains, their ASPI article goes on to note the geostrategic importance of Australia for the US and the high level of interoperability between their forces. Such focus on interoperability is mirrored by recent developments between the US and Japan, including Japan’s decision to establish a permanent joint HQ for the US-Japan alliance as well as expanded joint/shared use of facilities (as outlined in the January 2023 Joint Statement of the US-Japan SCC). In light of the various modes of threats present in the Indo-Pacific ranging from gray-zone hazards to information warfare, the SCC mentions a wide range of deterrence capabilities including, *inter alia*, the US nuclear umbrella, missile defense systems, extended deterrence commitments, counterstrike, anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, amphibious and airborne operations, intelligence and cyberwarfare (Gaimushō, January 2023). Even more recently, Japan has followed

the domain expansion model of its US ally by announcing plans to rename the JASDF (Japan Air Self-Defense Force) to the JASSDF (Japan Air and Space Self-Defense Force), mirroring the prior establishment of the USSF (United States Space Force) during the Trump administration (Robson and Kusumoto, 2023).

As will be seen below, in terms of cooperation and interoperability, the SSP between Japan and Australia have also made various strides vis-à-vis deterrence capabilities either on a bilateral basis or in conjunction with the US and other countries. In July 2023, following the JA-RAA, Japan fired a Type-12 anti-ship missile for the first time in Australia during a multinational military exercise, the Type-12 being the same missile system that Japan is seeking to upgrade, per its deterrence initiatives, into a system with shipborne and air-launched variants and with a maximum range of 1,500 km (Dominguez, July 2023). As seen by these developments and vast military reforms over various domains, Japan is honing both domestic resources and foreign security partnerships in a de facto exercise of internal and external balancing conducted under the strategic banner of integrated deterrence.

A NOVEL FRAMEWORK: RECIPROCAL ACCESS AGREEMENTS

Having thus established the main doctrinal pretext for RAA security cooperation as FOIP with a geopolitical subtext of integrated deterrence or counterbalancing against China, one must analyze the actual content and significance of this new cooperation between Japan and Australia. Does Japan's new security cooperation with its RAA partner Australia actually approximate a "military alliance" as feared by Chinese observers? The task of defining Japan's security cooperation with Australia, which both countries now formally refer to as a "Special Strategic Partnership," is further complicated by the fact that Japanese lawmakers, both of the ruling and opposition parties and including such prominent figures as Tarō Asō, have used the informal moniker of "quasi-alliance" or "quasi-ally" to describe Japan's relationship with Australia (Akimoto, 2022). Of course, to understand the meaning of this "quasi-alliance," one has to analyze Japan's new RAA security cooperation with Australia and how the main capabilities of the Japan-Australia partnership compare with those of the formalized US-Japan Alliance.

First, given the agreement's role as a model for equivalent security agreements going forward, it is important to examine the immediate context and content of the Japan-Australia RAA document itself. What exactly is an RAA? The previous century's globalization of war over the course of two world wars and the subsequent establishment of structures of alliance and peace presented nations with a new problem within the realm of international law, which itself constituted an emerging framework. In short, a new legal framework needed to be fashioned to deal with a new reality in which foreign armies were stationing forces in friendly countries on an increasingly frequent and often permanent basis. It has been noted that, with the notable exception of the UK, the so-called "law of the flag" was the most dominant arrangement during the First World War (Norman, 1996), with visiting forces usually refusing to subjugate themselves to the host

nation's sovereignty. During the earlier half of the century, like the legal phenomenon of extraterritoriality during the previous era of new imperialism, much seemed to depend on power relations and political will in determining jurisdiction over foreign armies.

The Brussels Pact of 1948 has been identified as the first precursor to a new breed of international agreements that more definitively determined the status of foreign forces in a host country (Gher, 2002). This framework was superseded by the signing of the NATO SOFA of 1951, which defined the status and jurisdiction (e.g., defining which criminal cases regarding foreign forces will be subject to exclusive jurisdiction of one country or concurrent jurisdiction of both sending and receiving countries) of NATO forces deployed in fellow member states. Of course, the immediate geopolitical extremity constituting the background of this arrangement was the US's need, during the Cold War, to counterbalance and contain the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. The NATO arrangement was unique in that it was both a reciprocal and a multilateral SOFA, signed as part of a multilateral collective defense arrangement and meant to be mutually applicable to all NATO member states.

However, as shown in Table 2 below, which outlines notable American, Australian, and Japanese variants of SOFA that have emerged since the early example of the NATO SOFA, the norm set by a hegemonic US, with its unique and unprecedented global presence of approximately 750 bases worldwide (McBrien, 2023), was to engage in bilateral, non-reciprocal SOFA agreements with individual countries. In other words, through the more than 100 SOFA-like agreements that it has concluded on a bilateral basis, the US usually only established the legal basis for American deployments in other countries, while avoiding providing SOFA protections to foreign military personnel in the United States. Indeed, it has been claimed in international legal scholarship that the NATO SOFA constitutes the only reciprocal SOFA to which the United States is a party (Norman, 1996). At present, however, per the increasing willingness of states to resist one-sided US hegemony, there have actually been several "counterpart agreements" that provides for at least some legal basis for troops of certain partner countries visiting the United States, a prominent example being the "Agreement Regarding the Treatment of Republic of Philippines Personnel Visiting the United States of America" (1998). Indeed, with the end of a unipolar world order dominated by the security umbrella of the United States, the International Security Advisory Board (ISAB) of the US Department of State has recommended that the US proffer SOFA partners some form of reciprocity via the "counterpart" agreement approach demonstrated by the US's legal arrangements with the Philippines and Israel (International Security Advisory Board, 2015).

Such trends towards sovereignty and reciprocity have led to the usage of another legal and terminological variant on the SOFA model: the "Visiting Forces Agreement." The main reference here is the US-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement. In 1991, nationalistic opposition to US deployments led the Philippine Senate to vote against the renewal of a mutual basing agreement, leading to the closure of Naval Base Subic Bay and the de-facto withdrawal of all US troops from the islands (Yeo, 2020). In 1998, the US responded by negotiating a "Visiting Forces Agreement," which granted it extensive strategic access to military facilities in the Philippines. The US was able to placate erstwhile Filipino nationalists via the VFA's titular emphasis on the "visiting" and "temporary" status of future US deployment in the Philippines, which did not conflict

Table 2. Typology of SOFA-like Legal Frameworks

Legal Framework	Notable Cases	Notes
“Status of Forces Agreement” (SOFA)	NATO Status of Forces Agreement (1951) US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (1960) US-Australia SOFA (1963) US has become a party to more than 100 agreements that may be considered SOFAs (Mason, 2012)	Associated with US treaty alliances during the post-World War II or Cold War era. Reciprocal SOFA: NATO SOFA Non-Reciprocal SOFA: most US SOFAs Multilateral SOFA: NATO SOFA Bilateral SOFA: the US’s other SOFAs
“Visiting Forces Agreement” (VFA)	US-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement (1998)	Emphasis on establishing a legal basis for the temporary hosting/stationing of “visiting forces” in contrast to the permanent troop deployments provided by numerous US SOFAs.
“Status of Visiting Forces Agreement” (SOFVA)	Australia-Philippines SOFVA (2007)	Australia’s legal terminology for a VFA with the Philippines. Bilateral and reciprocal VFA.
“Reciprocal Access Agreement” (RAA)	Japan-Australia RAA (2022) Japan-UK RAA (2023)	Japan’s novel framework for deployment of the SDF abroad. Bilateral and reciprocal VFA with an emphasis on “reciprocal access” to military facilities in each signatory.

with the 1991 Filipino decision to abolish US bases in the archipelago. The US also used the resumption of economic and military aid as an inducement (Park, 2011), while also signing a counterpart agreement (i.e., the “Agreement Regarding the Treatment of Republic of Philippines Personnel Visiting the United States of America”) to provide an added sense of reciprocity. Thus, the VFA framework differed from traditional SOFA agreements in its focus on providing a legal basis for non-permanent “visiting forces” deployed to countries with a more ambiguous partnership commitment with the US when compared with such US allies as Japan or South Korea, where SOFA agreements govern the permanent stationing of US forces.

Australia has also used the SOFA and VFA frameworks for similar agreements with the Philippines, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, and the US. In particular, it has aped the terminology of the VFA to conclude a “Status of Visiting Forces Agreement” (SOVFA) with the Philippines in 2007 (entered into force in 2012 after five years of deliberations by the Philippine Senate). The SOVFA constitutes a bilateral

and reciprocal VFA, with its emphasis on temporary deployments of forces in either signatory country as well as the provision of equivalent obligations for both parties. (Australian Embassy in the Philippines, 2012).

Japan's formulation of the "Reciprocal Access Agreement," its first attempt at a version of a SOFA/VFA framework, can be categorized according to the above precedents as Japan's version of a bilateral, reciprocal VFA. Two RAAs have been signed thus far, with the seminal RAA being the Japan-Australia RAA signed in 2022. Similar to both SOFAs and VFAs, RAAs serve to define the status of forces operating within the territory of the other signatory country. Like the existing VFA precedents, the RAA provides the legal and procedural basis for cooperative activities conducted by defense forces temporarily "visiting" the territory of the other signatory. It has been noted in Japanese literature that the title of the new agreement was originally intended to include the "visiting forces agreement" (*hōmon butai chii kyōtei*) terminology but was ultimately titled as a "reciprocal access agreement" (*enkatsuka kyōtei*) out of fear that the former term of VFA would sound too militant (Kozuka, 2022). Despite the rhetorical differences, the basal legal framework is still based thoroughly on the VFA model.

Of course, one can easily understand the monumental significance of Japan following the example of the United States and others in signing its own reciprocal variant of a SOFA/VFA agreement. By signing RAAs, Japan is tacitly proclaiming the complete "normalization" of its defense and sovereignty so long restricted by the mandates of the peace constitution and "one nation pacifism." Also, per Abe and FOIP's vision of a "proactive pacifism" requiring the services of a globally active SDF, what was previously an institution strictly reserved for the defense of the homeland and subjected to debates over its very existence has now been transformed into a tool for "peacekeeping," "regional stability," and whatever underlying geopolitical intentions that may be tacitly implied by these stated motives. As seen above, the doctrinal background of FOIP as well as the geopolitical background of a rising China serve as the milieu from which a novel framework of security cooperation like Japan's new RAAs has emerged.

Having thus examined the identity of RAAs and its SOFA precedents within international law, one should ask the following questions: what is provided for in the RAA and what are the main legal contents of the document itself? First, the RAA's preamble alludes to FOIP as the main ideological aim, stating that both recognize "their shared interests in regional and global peace and stability," while making it clear that the intended consequence of the agreement was to "deepen the security and defense relationship" between Japan and Australia. Article 1 identifies the forces to be engaging in what is vaguely worded as "cooperative activities" (or "mutually beneficial defense cooperation" in Article 2) to be the Self Defense Forces (SDF) for Japan and the Australian Defense Forces (ADF) for Australia. From the first article, a theme of semantic ambiguity can be identified within the legalese of the RAA document. In short, very few legalistic *hadome* are present to specify or limit the sort of "cooperative activities" that would be conducted. This is confirmed by the *Shūgiin* research report which makes it clear that exactly what falls under the scope of "cooperative activities" within the RAA framework would be decided by Japan and Australia (or Japan and the UK), emphasizing the outsized discretionary leeway given to the signatories. Other Japanese sources often describe the activities involved in vague or mundane terms, with

a column for the JMSDF Staff College forecasting the type of cooperation provided by the RAA to be simply such cooperative activities as “joint training or natural disaster preparation” (Ishihara, 2022). However, as seen below, the cooperative capabilities provided by the new framework, both in terms of activities and assets (i.e., weapons and facilities involved) are far broader than this innocuously simple description.

Article 5 obligates both signatories to the expeditious granting (given prior notification) of “clearance to the Sending State for access by the vessels or aircraft of the Visiting Force to ports or airports of the Receiving State,” making it clear that, in the case of Japan, all branches of the SDF, including the JMSDF and JASDF, will be able to station in Australia for the purposes of joint defensive operations. Inter-base movement and movement between facilities are also allowed in the same Article 5. Even before the RAA, Japanese ground forces have already participated in trilateral ground forces exercises via Exercise Southern Jackaroo, which has utilized the vast and remote territory of Northern Australia as a major training ground. The latest US-Australia AUSMIN joint statement linked the infrastructure buildup in such areas as Northern Australia and US operability in these same areas via its Force Posture Agreement (FPA) with the Japanese SDF by stating the alliance’s intention to “invite Japan to increase its participation in Force Posture Initiatives in Australia” (U.S. Department of State, 2022). The portions of the RAA pertaining to facility access and maintenance demonstrate how a legal framework for visiting forces developed *ex post facto*, after piecemeal salami slicing vis-à-vis joint activities hosting the SDF had already taken place over the past few years.

The RAA’s explicit references to Japan’s navy and air force are important as post-Abe Japan is accelerating a shift in its weapons and military capabilities away from the former consensus of “exclusively defense-oriented policy” (*senshubōei*) and such attendant concepts as “basic defense force” or “basic defense capability” (*kibanteki bōeiryoku*), “Three Principles on Arms Exports” (*Buki yushutsu sangensoku*), and “Three Non-Nuclear Principles” (*Hikaku sangensoku*) and towards enhanced capabilities following the principles of “dynamic defense force” or “dynamic defense capability” (*dōteki bōeiryoku*), liberalized arms imports under the new legal code of “Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology” (*Bōei sōbi iten sangensoku*) (Gaimushō, April 2014), and possible hosting of US nuclear weapons in Japan (Johnson, 2022). As a consequence of these upgrades, Japan, citing FOIP cooperation, have been sending its new helicopter carriers, which approximate the capabilities of aircraft carriers (a key military “strategic asset”) (Toropin, 2021) into the South China Sea and Indian Ocean (Johnson, 2018) (with joint military exercises with the US also increasingly featuring strategic assets). This enhanced aerial capability was facilitated by the procurement and utilization of STOVL (short take-off and vertical landing) capable F-35Bs and conversion work on the JMSDF’s Izumo class vessels. With the RAA’s legal basis for mutual facility access, the JASDF has planned for late August 2023 an inaugural foreign deployment of Japan’s F-35As to RAAF Bases Tindal and Darwin as well as the US’s Andersen Air Force Base (Dominguez, August 2023), in what is a practice that is intended, in the words of the JASDF, to enhance “future rotational deployment to Australia and overseas joint exercises” (thus foreshadowing extensive trilateral interoperability amongst Japanese, Australian, and America air bases) (Air Staff Office, 2023).

One interesting feature is Article 4's specification that the "settlement of claims" provisions pertaining to "cooperative activities" to be conducted by the SDF and ADF are to also "apply to cooperative activities conducted in waters and superjacent air space beyond the territory of any State where the presence of the Forces therein is incidental to the conduct of cooperative activities in the Receiving State." Thus, the document indirectly confirms that "cooperative activities" between the SDF and ADF will be conducted in extraterritorial waters and airspace, opening the possibility of defense cooperation in international waters in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Thus, Chinese academic Song Zhongping's argument that following the signing of the RAA "as both (Japan and Australia) have a large number of antisubmarine patrol aircraft, they could conduct activities from the Malacca Strait to the Miyako Strait in the Indo-Pacific" (the former area being under multinational maintenance but mostly under the influence of Singapore, a former Malabar Exercise participant, and the latter consisting of international waters), seems to actually be a logical interpretation of the new RAA framework (Liu and Zhang, 2022). As seen above, this is especially salient as there is a glaring lack of specification (read limitation) on what military assets either side can bring into the territory of the other in the name of defense cooperation.

The other portions of the RAA are dedicated to ironing out logistical and legalistic details, proffering visa-free entry and special status to both military persons and their attendant "Civilian Components." What is notable throughout the RAA is the facilitatory and minimalistic nature of the access process, which focuses on fast communication and entry. Most articles, as well as much of the accompanying implementation laws passed by the National Diet, deal with the issues of jurisdiction, punishment (e.g., Japan's death penalty ultimately prevented Australia from achieving blanket immunity from capital punishment for visiting personnel despite Australia's 2018 "Strategy for Abolition of the Death Penalty"), claim settlements, facilitatory legal exemptions for vehicular transport, and other legal minutiae. All articles of the JA-RAA and their respective topics are summarized in Table A in the Appendix. Overall, the RAA is significant in that, by its signing, Australia became only the second country to be legally authorized to station its military personnel on Japanese soil. It certainly also represents a facilitatory upgrade for the JA-SSP as a whole, but how do these cooperative capabilities of a strengthened "quasi alliance" actually compare with those of the formalized Japan-US Alliance?

OUTLINING THE "QUASI-ALLIANCE": A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In light of the conflation of the JA-SSP with a formal military alliance by highly-critical Chinese observers or the colloquial use of such suggestive rhetoric as "quasi-alliance" to describe security partnership between Japan and Australia, a structural comparison between the JA-SSP and the US-Japan Alliance is very much in order. Such analysis is especially pertinent for two reasons. First, the US-Japan Alliance constitutes Japan's heretofore only military alliance, a bona fide alliance arrangement not just in terms of rhetoric but also as a matter of international law. Second, the various agreements and

instruments furnishing cooperative capabilities to the US-Japan alliance have recently been mirrored by similar counterpart agreements and instruments endemic to the security cooperation of the JA-SSP, as shown below.

Below is a chart (Table 3) comparing the some of the main cooperative security capabilities provided by the US-Japan Alliance with their counterparts (if any) available to the so-called “Special Strategic Partnership” between Australia and Japan (i.e., the JA-SSP). First, one should note that the JA-SSP is constitutionally unlike traditional military alliances like the US-Japan and US-South Korea alliances, in that a legal clause specifying mutual defense obligations (i.e., the codified obligation of mutual defense with a specified *casus foederis*) is missing (Wilkins, 2022). Meanwhile, a mutual defense clause is represented in the US-Japan Alliance via Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty, with “an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan” (Gaimushō, January 1960) constituting a *casus foederis* for mutual defense.

However, regarding other key aspects of security cooperation (i.e., right of access and use of facilities, dialogue mechanism for coordinating defense and foreign policy, intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, logistical support, defense equipment transfers and the arms trade), one can find that the JA-SSP is increasingly obtaining capabilities that approximate what is possible under the US-Japan Alliance framework. First, pertaining to right of access and use of facilities between partner countries, one can define the RAA as being the Japan-Australian VFA equivalent of the Japan-US SOFA, which governs the stationing of US military assets and personnel in Japan according to the precedent set by Article VI of the US-Japan Security Treaty. As seen above, despite similarities between the two documents, one key advantage of the RAA framework for Japan is the aspect of reciprocity; whereas the US’s SOFA model, forged in 1960 under the historical background of complete US hegemony over Japan, only specifies the status of “members of the United States armed forces” and the “use of facilities and areas in Japan,” the RAA model exemplifies an equal and “reciprocal” security relationship enjoyed by a “normalized” Japan (Gaimushō, January 1960).

Allies require close dialogue mechanisms in coordinating defense and foreign policy decisions. One of the most relevant channels of bilateral communication pertaining to high-level officials of the US and Japan is the “2+2 Ministerial Dialogue” setup that the United States currently shares with such partners as Japan and India. The US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC), the official name of this ministerial dialogue, was conducted on a near annual basis via the “2+2” format (involving the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense for the United States and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense for Japan) since 2000 (Gaimushō, n.d.). On October 22, 2022, the JA-SSP had gained a similar provision for annual ministerial dialogue via the signing of the Australia-Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. Article 6 of the declaration states the partners’ plan to hold “annual reciprocal leaders’ meetings, foreign and defense minister meetings, dialogues between senior officials, and intelligence cooperation.” The “foreign and defense minister meetings” in particular refer directly to the “2+2” precedent of the US-Japan Alliance. However, the US-Japan Alliance does appear to feature more closely knit planning and policy coordination, with the 2015 “Guidelines on US-Japan Defense Cooperation” establishing an upgraded

Table 3. Security Capabilities of the US-Japan Alliance and the JA-SSP

Capability	US-Japan Alliance	Japan-Australia Special Strategic Partnership
Mutual Defense Obligation	Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty: obligates mutual military assistance only “in the territories under the administration of Japan”. Thus, the obligation is de-facto non-reciprocal.	No de jure specification of mutual defense obligation. Also, no specification of a <i>casus foederis</i> for mutual defense. RAA only facilitates “mutually beneficial defense cooperation”.
Use of facilities (De-facto right to station military personnel in the other country)	Only stationing of US troops in Japan is possible. Non-reciprocal right of access codified by the US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and Article VI of the US-Japan Security Treaty.	“Reciprocal Access,” in contrast to the US-Japan SOFA’s specification of only a single party in Japanese territory, has been codified since 2022 via the Japan-Australia RAA.
Dialogue Mechanism for Coordinating Defense and Foreign Policy	Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (Japan-US “2+2” Ministerial Dialogue) Bilateral Planning Mechanism Alliance Coordinating Mechanism (ACM) recently buttressed by Japan’s decision to establish a permanent joint headquarters.	Article 6 of the Australia-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation obligates Japan and Australia to “annual reciprocal leaders’ meetings, foreign and defense ministers’ meetings.” (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022) “Leaders” refer to Kishida and Albanese, while the “foreign and defense minister meetings” are clearly modeled on the “2+2” Ministerial Dialogues.
Intelligence Sharing Mechanism	Intelligence sharing specified in the “Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation” (Updated April 27, 2015). Agreement on Information Security (August 2007) (Gaimushō, May 2012)	Australia became Japan’s fourth ISA (Information Security Agreement) partner in 2012.
Joint Military Exercises	Various bilateral and multilateral exercises conducted.	Bilateral (Exercise Nichi-gou Trident), trilateral (Exercise Southern Jackaroo), and multilateral (Malabar Exercises, Exercise Talisman Sabre, Exercise Pacific Vanguard, ARC21, and La Perouse) exercises, <i>inter alia</i> , are being conducted involving the SDF and ADF. RAAF deployment for Exercise Bushido Guardian in Japan and Australia’s full participation in the US-Japan Exercise Yama Sakura both occurred after the RAA.

Capability	US-Japan Alliance	Japan-Australia Special Strategic Partnership
Logistical Support	Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)	Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)
Defense Equipment/ Technology Transfers and Arms Trade	Active Japan liberalized arms exports per the new 2014 legal code of <i>Bōei sōbi iten sangensoku</i> “Defense Equipment and Technology Transfer Agreement”	Active Japan liberalized arms exports per the new 2014 legal code of <i>Bōei sōbi iten sangensoku</i> “Defense Equipment and Technology Transfer Agreement”

“Bilateral Planning Mechanism” alongside the Security Consultative Committee (2+2) framework, with the latter dealing with broader policy directives (Gaimushō, April 2015). As already mentioned, Japan has also decided to establish a permanent joint headquarters to buttress alliance coordination with the US.

While obligating security dialogue at the highest levels, Article 6 of the Australia-Japan Joint Declaration also mentions a shared commitment to “intelligence cooperation.” In the case of the US-Japan Alliance, such information sharing capabilities are specified in the 2015 defense cooperation guidelines, which states that the US and Japan “will share and protect information and intelligence” and will jointly conduct bilateral “ISR” (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) activities. The exact procedures that constitute this information/intelligence sharing mechanism have been governed by Information Security Agreements (ISAs) that Japan have signed not just with the US but also with NATO and France. As for the JA-SSP, an Information Security Agreement had been signed in 2012, making Australia the fourth partner with which Japan had concluded an agreement on information security (Gaimushō, May 2012b). This ISA document reads like the new RAA agreement, except that its purpose is to specify reciprocal use of information data instead of reciprocal use of facilities. The ISA framework defines the nature of the information to be shared as “Classified Information” which “may be in any form, including oral, visual, electronic, magnetic, or documentary forms, or equipment or technology, and may also include any reproduction or translations” (Gaimushō, May 2012a). Thus, a wide range of information exchange between Japan and Australia for security purposes is specified.

Regarding joint exercises, the JA-RAA, as seen above, facilitates “cooperative activities” conducted by the SDF and ADF in the Indo-Pacific, even hinting at such exercises in extraterritorial waters. In the case of established defense partners like the US-Japan Alliance, military exercises regularly take the form of both multilateral and purely bilateral exercises. With regards to Japan’s RAA partner Australia, the most prominent example of the former (i.e., multilateral exercises) would of course be the Malabar Exercises jointly conducted by the Quad powers. However, since 2009, Japan and Australia have been jointly conducting their own purely bilateral military exercises in the form of Exercise Nichigou Trident (Australian Government Department of Defence, 2021). Per increasing regional cooperation under the banner of FOIP, there

have also been an array of lesser-known multilateral exercises involving both the SDF and ADF: Exercise Talisman Sabre (Australian Government Department of Defence, n.d.), Exercise Pacific Vanguard (Gonzalez, 2022), Exercise Jeanne D'Arc 21 or ARC-21 (Abke, 2021), and Exercise La Perouse (U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs, 2021). Following the RAA, groundbreaking deployment of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) was made for Exercise Bushido Guardian in Japan. Australia also gained full participation in a command post exercise previously reserved for the US-Japan alliance (Exercise Yama Sakura).

Finally, regarding logistical transfers and arms sales, the governing legal body for both the United States and Australia's cooperation with Japan regarding logistical support is the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which formalizes the exchange of "supplies and services in the field of logistic support" in the form of "food, water, billeting, transportation (including airlift), petroleum, oils, and lubricants, clothing, communications, medical services, base support, storage, use of facilities, training services, spare parts and components, repair and maintenance, and airport and seaport services" (Gaimushō, May 2010). Conspicuously missing from this list are weapons, but this does not mean that arms transfers or sales have not been occurring between Japan and Australia. Indeed, Japan made purchases of Australian weapons in the form of troop transport vehicles in 2014 (Lamont, 2017). Regarding exports, erstwhile legal barriers have been removed after the 2014 revised legal code of "Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology" (*Bōei sōbi iten sangensoku*) liberalized Japan's heretofore self-imposed ban on weapons exports. Thus, in light of the common legal structure of ACSA, which Japan and Australia signed in 2010, as well as the legal liberalization of the arms trade, there is little structural difference between the capabilities of the US-Japan alliance and the JA-SSP vis-à-vis logistical support, defense equipment and technology transfers, and the arms trade.

CONCLUSION: THE OUTLOOK FOR JAPAN'S EXPANDED SECURITY COOPERATION

This paper analyzed the expanding capabilities of Japan's foreign security cooperation through the case studies of the Japan-Australia RAA and SSP, discussing their ideological and geopolitical backgrounds while also examining the contents and significance of both. So, what is the final verdict regarding the capabilities of the new Japan-Australia RAA and of the "quasi-alliance"? First, the conflation of the SSP or "quasi-alliance" between Japan and Australia with a military alliance or the RAA with a "defense pact" is technically an incorrect one, given the lack of a mutual defense clause as seen above. Calling the partnership an Asian NATO is also legally incorrect due to this lack of *casus foederis*, which is codified in Article 5 of NATO's North Atlantic Treaty. However, in other areas spanning the more basic capabilities of mutual access to facilities, the right to station military personnel in a partner country, a dialogue mechanism for coordinating defense and foreign policy, intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, logistical support, equipment and technology exchanges, and the arms trade, the strategic partnership between Japan and Australia is fast obtaining key capabilities that

are endemic to an alliance partnership like that of the US-Japan Alliance. The above analysis is by no means exhaustive, having focused on the main legal instruments of the US-Japan Alliance and the JA-SSP. However, the trend towards greater comparability between the two is evident even within more mundane operations and minor legal minutiae. For example, Japan's foreign asset protection clause (Article 95-2 of the SDF Act) has been used as the legal basis for escort missions of US military vessels by the JMSDF. In 2021, per this legal device, the JMSDF escorted an Australian frigate, which represented the first time that Japanese forces have protected a non-US warship via such an operation (Kobara, 2021).

The JA-SSP appears to be a case study of alignment in international relations in contrast to outright alliance. Regarding this partnership, former Australian Ambassador to Japan Bruce Miller is quoted to have said that although both Australia and Japan have not officially expressed such a status (i.e., an alliance status), the "quasi-alliance" is a case of putting "action before words" (*fugen jikko*) (Akimoto, 2022). In light of everything discussed above, this may be a very apt description of the significance of Japan's emerging security cooperation with its RAA partner Australia. Moreover, with a legal basis now in place for mutual deployments and activities, the salami slicing towards greater interoperability and deterrence capabilities between Japan and its partners will only increase in the future with each successive novel deployment or exercise conducted under the title of "cooperative activities."

More importantly for global politics, Japan, having now successfully reached a milestone in its foreign policy by inking its first bilateral, reciprocal VFAs, has established a legal framework that could be quickly replicated and introduced for its other security partnerships with aligned powers. Following the signing of the Japan-UK RAA, Japan has been working on equivalent agreements with France and the Philippines. In addition, regarding other legal mainstays of the Japan-Australia SSP, Japan is seeking to complete an ACSA with Germany, having already signed ACSA agreements with such partners as the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and India. Thus far in 2023, Japan concluded agreements on "defense equipment and technology transfer" with Singapore and the UAE, having already concluded equivalent agreements with 13 other countries. In addition, Japan has been increasing the scope of its agreements regarding information security with many of its security interlocutors through various frameworks (e.g., ISAs and the GSOMIA information sharing pact with South Korea). Japan is also active in numerous maritime security projects with such Indo-Pacific nations as Vietnam and the Philippines, both of course being involved in gray zone conflicts within the South China Sea. Mirroring the important role of the US as a partner and intermediary for the Japan-Australia SSP, there has even recently been talk of a JAPHUS (Japan-Philippines-US) framework that could emerge as another AUKUS-like security triad within the geographical arena of FOIP (Heydarian, 2023). Ultimately, in light of all these developments and the analysis of this paper, it is clear that Japan has made major strides in the "normalization" of its security policy as a matter not only of domestic legal fiat but also of foreign partnership, rapidly expanding in the process the horizons of its security cooperation on a global scale and especially with such strategic partners as Australia in the Indo-Pacific region.

APPENDIX

Table A. The JA-RAA (2022)

JA-RAA Article	Topic
Article 1	Definition of terms (e.g., “civilian component,” “force(s),” “visiting force,” “member,” “official vehicle,” “receiving state,” “sending state”)
Article 2	Purpose of the RAA (i.e., facilitating mutually beneficial defense cooperation)
Article 3	Duties of Visiting Forces and the Civilian Component (i.e., respect for host country’s laws and the spirit of the RAA)
Article 4	RAA applies to “mutually determined cooperative activities”; RAA does not apply to the ADF when acting as United Nations forces
Article 5	Granting of access to vessels and aircraft of the Visiting Force; Supremacy of Receiving State in determining routes, taxes and fees, and compulsory pilotage
Article 6	Duties and handling of members of Visiting Forces and their Civilian Component (e.g., visa-free entry, document possession, reporting on identity of persons, etc.)
Article 7	Imports, duties, and customs; other stipulations on personal items and vehicles
Article 8	Sending state may submit requests for access to facilities, areas, and related services
Article 9	Use of utilities (i.e., telecommunication and information systems)
Article 10	Handling of vehicles
Article 11	Handling of professionals, technicians, and medical professionals
Article 12	Possession and carrying of weapons and ammunition allowed in authorized situations and activities
Article 13	Permission given to Visiting Forces to wear their uniforms and defense services insignia while performing their official duties
Article 14	Transport, storage, handling, and import of weapons, ammunition, explosives, and dangerous goods for the conducting of cooperative activities
Article 15	Protection of personal information and classified information
Article 16	Medical and dental fitness and treatment (the latter provided for Visiting Forces on a full cost-recovery basis)
Article 17	Acquisition or use of materials, supplies, equipment, and services in the Receiving State
Article 18	Costs of cooperative activities (each state responsible for its own costs or proportional sharing of costs)

JA-RAA Article	Topic
Article 19	Jurisdiction over foreign exchange, taxes, and duties
Article 20	Protection of the environment, cultural heritage, and human health and safety
Article 21	Jurisdiction, criminal/disciplinary jurisdiction, arrests, and trials
Article 22	Security of facilities/areas and military police
Article 23	Claims and settlements
Article 24	Procedures for accidents and incidents
Article 25	Procedures for deaths and mortuary affairs
Article 26	Mutual commitment to prevent abuse of privileges and to ensure discharge of obligations
Article 27	Joint Committee established as a means for mutual consultation regarding implementation of the RAA
Article 28	Dispute negotiation regarding interpretation or implementation of the RAA
Article 29	Date of signing and effect; Amendment and termination process; Binding obligations

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