



RSIS Policy Brief

Japan's Perspectives of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus



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December 2012

Policy Brief:
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ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting
(ADMM)-Plus

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DECEMBER 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Defence diplomacy has become an important tool of foreign policy practice for most, if not all, states. The rise in profile of defence diplomacy was facilitated by the addition of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus to the regional security architecture. This meeting offers defence officials from ASEAN and its dialogue partner countries the opportunity to strengthen security and defence cooperation and work towards the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. This policy brief focuses on Japan's perspectives of this meeting, focusing mainly on its expectations and how Japan could contribute to the process. The main points discussed in this policy brief are: (1) Japan regards defence diplomacy as an important element of its foreign policy practice; (2) Japan values its relations with ASEAN and supports ASEAN's centrality in the regional security architecture; (3) Japan fully supports the ADMM-Plus meeting and views this as a positive development for the regional security architecture; (4) Despite its strong support, Japan is fully aware of the limits of the ADMM-Plus meeting in addressing the key security challenges facing the region.

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief is based on findings from a 3-month research fellowship at the National Institute of Defense Studies (NIDS), Japan, during the period 1 September-30 November 2012. NIDS is the research arm of the Japan's Ministry of Defence. This policy brief focuses on Japan's perspectives and expectations of the ADMM-Plus meeting/process. The points discussed here are based on 30 interviews conducted during the fellowship that included officials from the Japan's Ministry of Defense (MOD), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), former officials from MOD and MOFA, and academics from the think-tanks and universities.

The main questions posed to the interviewees were: (1) what are Japan's expectations of the ADMM-Plus meeting/process?; and (2) how can Japan contribute to this process? The reasons for asking these questions or focusing on the ADMM-Plus were as follows. Firstly, defence diplomacy and security regionalism is an important research theme of the Multilateralism and Regionalism Programme (MRP) at RSIS. Secondly, the ADMM-Plus meeting is a new addition to the East Asian regional security architecture. This is the first meeting that is exclusively meant for defence ministers/officials to meet and discuss the key security challenges facing the region and beyond. The defence ministers have only met once since its inception in October 2010, and the next meeting is scheduled for August 2013. Thirdly, due to its 'new' nature, the understanding of the Northeast Asian states' (China, Japan and South Korea) expectations or perspectives of this meeting is scant. This policy brief intends to address this by offering the view from Japan.

The main points that emerged from the interviews were as follows:

(1) Defence Diplomacy is important

Japan has embraced defence diplomacy as one of the main dimensions in its foreign and security policy practice. The main impetus for this change came after the 1995 Kobe Earthquake, which led to the deployment of Japan's Self-Defence Forces (SDF) for relief efforts for the first time. Following this deployment and the successful contribution of the SDF to the relief efforts, the perceptions held by the Japanese society towards the SDF became more positive. This resulted in the expansion of the roles and missions of the SDF, namely in the humanitarian and disaster relief areas. This development within Japan coincided with the widened importance of defence diplomacy efforts externally. This aspect of foreign policy practice began to contribute to regional affairs at both the bilateral and multilateral levels in a significant way, and humanitarian and disaster-relief duties were added as primary missions for all militaries during the post-Cold War period.

In Japan, the policy shift described above was first announced in the 1995 National Defence Programme Outline (NDPO)—a document that outlined Japan's defence policy and strategic objectives. Japan started organizing the Tokyo Defence Forum (also known as the Asia-Pacific Defence Forum) from 1996, which is an annual event that brings together senior military officers from the region. The upgrading of the Japan Defense Agency to a full-fledged ministry (Japan's Ministry of Defense) has facilitated a greater focus and resources to defence diplomacy practice.

(2) ASEAN is important

ASEAN is an important institution for Japan's foreign and security policy. This is due to ASEAN's success in fostering regional stability and being a lead institution for the various dialogue mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Plus Three, East Asian Summit, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting and others. Japan and ASEAN share common strategic interests, such as the maintenance of safe sea-lanes, common markets important for their economic growth and development, and with some countries, the same vision of political reforms for the region. Ensuring the safety and openness of sea-lanes around Southeast Asia is an important strategic objective for Japan as well.

Japan intends to show continued support to ASEAN. It intends to further strengthen its relations with the institution as a whole and bilaterally with its members. All interviewees agreed that ASEAN is an important source of stability in the region. To this end, Japan supports ASEAN's centrality in the regional architecture. It sees no alternative to this arrangement. The prospects of Northeast Asian regionalism involving Japan, South Korea and China remain weak.

The interviewees appreciated the point that Japan's presence and influence in Southeast Asia may have declined in relative terms to China and South Korea in recent years. In response to its perceived decline in Southeast Asia, Japan will work towards further developing its relations and interactions with ASEAN and its members. Japan intends to adopt a multi-prong approach. It includes various measures: to restore Japan's economic growth, which will allow Japan to resume its extensive Official Development Assistance (ODA) programme to Southeast Asian states; to promote technological transfer with ASEAN states; and also to promote capacity-building initiatives led by the Japan's Maritime SDF with certain ASEAN states so as to equip these countries with the appropriate capabilities, namely for humanitarian and disaster relief missions.

(3) ADMM-Plus is important

All interviewees recognized the ADMM-Plus meeting as a positive development in the East Asian regional architecture. Japan fully supports this meeting/process and hopes for the incremental rise in the meeting's profile in the near future.

There were many reasons expressed by the interviewees for the support of the ADMM-Plus meeting. The ADMM-Plus is and will be an important source of regional stability. It was widely recognized that the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Shangri-la Dialogue (SLD) have contributed positively in promoting regional security dialogue. However, ADMM-Plus meeting is special as it is a Track 1 meeting exclusively for defence officials. It is important that the defence officials (both civilian and uniformed officials) have their own forum that contributes to the discussions on regional stability. Moreover, as this meeting involves the participation of the militaries, including great and major powers, the ADMM-Plus offers the region the opportunity to augment military diplomacy efforts as well.

From a national interest perspective, the ADMM-Plus allows Japan:

- (i) To promote bilateral cooperation with other countries, especially in terms of strengthening defence exchanges;
- (ii) To allow Japan to contribute in the key issues areas affecting the region and contribute to discussions on regional stability;
- (iii) To further strengthen the already strong defence links with the ASEAN states;
- (iv) To strengthen confidence-building efforts between the participating countries, since it involves all the key states in the region. All interviewees recognized that the ADMM-Plus process is not the solution but one avenue to address the key strategic challenges the region is faced with;
- (v) To promote cooperation between participating militaries in the area of non-traditional security with a special focus on humanitarian and disaster-relief efforts. Japan's focus in these areas is deliberate as it promotes confidence and trust among the militaries. This could materialize in the form of joint-training between member states;
- (vi) To promote transparency and sharing of information between member states;

- (vii) To share Japan's knowledge and expertise in humanitarian issues, joint exercises and military medicine;
- (viii) To come up with, according to a former MOFA official, measures that could avoid conflicts/contingencies in the region. The ADMM-Plus process could lead to mutually agreed limits on how each military may maneuver in the air and sea domains. This is important to avoid misunderstandings.
- (ix) To ensure the strong engagement of the US in the regional security architecture. The ADMM-Plus meeting allows the region to further reinforce US presence in the region and engage the US officials from the defence establishment. This meeting could build trilateral security cooperation, such as the US-Japan-Australia and the US-Japan-South Korea;
- (x) At the same time, Japan is particularly interested in this meeting due to the involvement of the Chinese defence officials. Japan sees the involvement of and support shown by China as a strong point of the ADMM-Plus meeting. This is particularly important in the context of China's reservations towards the SLD. Having China participate in these meetings allows Japan to engage China in both bilateral and multilateral terms. Japan is concerned about China's economic and military rise, and more recently with its perceived 'aggressive' behavior in the domain of maritime security, namely in the East China Sea and South China Sea. In this context, Japan is looking for means to engage with China and understand its strategic objectives and intentions. In the context of China, the ADMM-Plus would allow Japan:
 - (a) To address concerns related to the rapid expansion of Chinese military modernization, and hopes the discussions at the meeting will reveal or clarify Chinese intentions;
 - (b) To use the ADMM-Plus platform to build military links and diplomatic channels with China;
 - (c) To build cooperation with law-abiding participating countries to ensure stability in the domain of maritime security. The objective of ensuring open and safe sea-lanes is important for Japan's strategic interests. This is specifically in reference to the South China Sea, East China Sea, Indian Ocean and the seas around Australia.

(4) Doubts about ADMM-Plus

Some interviewees raised the prospects of the ADMM-Plus mechanism to evolve into a cooperative security mechanism—a framework where all security challenges could be discussed so that negative perceptions can be ameliorated. However, there was also a clear recognition of the difficulty in achieving this objective. As one interviewee noted that the ADMM-Plus is not a 'magic wand' to resolve the key security challenges of the region.

Though there was strong support, the expectations expressed by the interviewees of the ADMM-Plus process were muted. The reasons for this were:

- (i) The ADMM-Plus process/meeting is new; hence it would be difficult for this meeting to address the key challenges facing the region.
- (ii) Some of the interviewees questioned whether the ADMM-Plus meeting is the right forum to discuss security cooperation. The reason is because these issues do not just affect the defence ministry but also the foreign ministry. Hence, the 2+2 framework and other meetings should complement this meeting.
- (iii) Some interviewees also questioned whether the ADMM-Plus meeting would be able to function effectively in the existing regional architecture. The concern here was related to the complementarity of this meeting with other more advanced Track 1 meetings involving ministers from other ministries.
- (iv) All interviewees were unsure if this meeting is able to achieve tangible results. Discussions have so far focused on the first stage, that is, humanitarian and disaster-relief missions. While recognizing the difficulty, the interviewees were looking forward to progress in the discussions beyond this first stage.
- (v) Some interviewees raised the challenge in keeping China interested in the meeting/process.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that Japan will show strong support to the ADMM-Plus meeting/process. Even though there are challenges, this meeting is regarded as an important and positive addition to the regional security architecture by the Japanese security policymaking elite for both Japan's national interests and regional stability. This meeting could serve as an important confidence-building measure in light of the rapid changes in the Asia-Pacific strategic environment between member states, as well as between Japan and China. For the meeting to succeed from the Japanese perspective, it is important that this Track 1 meeting receives strong support and participation from all members, and ASEAN's central role in this meeting is maintained.





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