



CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES

In Focus

New Delhi

CAPS InFocus: 51/2023

18 October 2023

Exercise Bushido Guardian 23: Evolving Japan-Australia Defence Cooperation

Simran Walia

Associate Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies

Keywords: Japan, Australia, Defence, Air force



Source: Australian Defence Magazine



Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS]

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution – Non-Commercial – No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

The Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) recently conducted the exercise Bushido Guardian in September 2023 in Japan.¹ The RAAF's F-35A Lightning IIs travelled to Japan for the first time as a part of their biennial exercise.² Exercise Bushido Guardian is a part of the evolving defence cooperation between the two nations. This bilateral air defence exercise is also the first-ever implementation of the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) between Japan and Australia.

Bilateral defence cooperation between the two nations has steadily strengthened since the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2007. The Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) used the 2015 security legislation, which allows certain types of collective self-defence to protect Australia's military equipment during a joint drill in November 2021.³ The SDF had never before operated in this manner for a nation other than the United States. The RAA has strengthened the claims of 'quasi-alliance' for the Japan-Australia security relationship.

Japan and Australia both are Quad members of which India is a part too. India has been conducting bilateral defence exercises with Japan, Australia and the US. India and Japan conducted their inaugural air-force exercise known as Veer Guardian in January 2023 and it conducted Exercise Pitch Black with Australia. India also conducts Air defence exercise with the US which is known as Exercise Cope. This implies how Quad member countries have been conducting bilateral defence exercises regularly to increase interoperability and further attempt to counter China's behaviour in the region. Quad Member countries also conducted navy exercises too, one such example being of Malabar Exercise.

The Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) between Japan and Australia came into effect in January 2022, and the deal possesses the potential to further multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴ The RAA allows the militaries of both Japan and Australia to work with each other on various defence and humanitarian operations. Japan is Australia's closest Asian partner, and both nations share an equal partnership based on mutual trust committed to the rule of law, free trade, and a free and open Indo-Pacific vision. Japan and Australia can improve their power projection capacities through the RAA. However, this accord would not significantly improve each side's military prowess.

Australia and Japan lack the military resources necessary to maintain a protracted mission abroad. The 'peace clause' in Article 9 of Japan's post-war constitution, which forbids the country from possessing offensive weapons, is one of the country's additional obstacles. Japan and Australia are likely to concentrate on bilateral cooperation, including humanitarian aid and disaster relief, as well as joint military training exercises in the region, by streamlining logistical processes

through the RAA. The agreement has made it easier for Japan and Australia to have access to the Indian Ocean, the Southwest Pacific, and Northeast Asia. In times of regional instability, such as in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, improving interoperability and access is essential for rapid power projection.

During exercise Bushido Guardian 23, the RAAF F-35As conducted training with the fourth and fifth-generation JASDF air capabilities, which also included Japan's F-35As.⁵ The exercise focused on enhancing RAAF's interoperability with the JASDF on the ground as well as in the air. Both nations attempted to come up with a mutual understanding of how to operate the F-35A, which would be vital for collective security in the Indo-Pacific region. The year 2019 saw the debut of Exercise Bushido Guardian in Japan, and this year's exercise builds on the mutually beneficial relationships established during Exercises Pitch Black and Cope North recently. Exercise Bushido Guardian 2023 follows a JASDF F-35A tour to RAAF Base Tindal, the first time Japan's F-35As have travelled outside. Cooperation through such bilateral defence exercises across the Indo-Pacific would also lead to working towards countering China's expansionist behaviour in the region. In this exercise, six RAAF F-35As of No. 75 Squadron were deployed to the Komatsu Air Base in Japan.

The main objective of the exercise was mixed-formation air combat training and familiarisation with the continually rising number of aircraft involved. Initial sorties comprised lone aircraft doing basic one-versus-one fighter manoeuvres. Still, as the exercise has progressed, complexity has slowly grown to encompass mock ten-versus-ten Beyond Visual Range (BVR) battles.

Furthermore, the RAA attempted to streamline effective cooperation and also enabled both Japan and Australia to increase the regularity of exercises and training. The RAA is seen by Canberra and Tokyo as both a symbol of the significant advancements made in the bilateral defence partnership and as a key enabler of upcoming kinds of collaboration.

Way Forward

Due to security threats emerging through the military build-up by China, North Korea's missile capability, and Russia, Japan has tried to reinvent itself in order to move away from a pacifist stance, which is evident in its revised national security strategy. The Japanese administration has embraced this and expressed its willingness to increase military cooperation with Australia to historic levels in the upcoming years in an exceptionally candid manner. Additionally, there is rising interest in adding new facets to the defence and security partnership, such as defence industry collaboration, essential

and emerging technology research and development, and collaboration in cybersecurity, energy security, and renewable energy.

Exercise Bushido Guardian is an example of both nations working together to bolster their defence cooperation and further ensure peace in the current security environment. The necessity to strengthen collaboration in order to ensure a peaceful and prosperous region is acknowledged by both Australia and Japan. The security environment is becoming more complicated. The paradigm shifts signalled in Australia's Defence Strategic Review in April and Japan's National Security Strategy, as well as the two nations' agreement on the necessity of stepping up defence cooperation with one another, are indicative of how drastically their respective strategic outlooks have changed.

There is considerable potential to strengthen Australia-Japan-US ties and create a multinational amphibious unit with a base in the Northern Territory, in addition to assisting the JSDF's training needs. This is a logical progression given the US Marines' entrenched presence in the Northern Territory. Coordinating with other regional partners and allies for amphibious training and initiatives like humanitarian aid and disaster response would also be advantageous. Both nations could perhaps explore creating a trilateral with India and focusing on defence exercises along with their already established trilateral mechanisms for supply-chain resilience and diversification. India should also try to make use of the F-35 Fighter jets by learning through these bilateral defence exercises. Nevertheless, such bilateral defence and military exercises should be conducted more often to see how they benefit cooperation among like-minded nations.

NOTES:

¹ "Exercise Bushido Guardian brings Japan and Australia together", *Australian Government Defence*, September 06, 2023, <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2023-09-06/exercise-bushido-guardian-brings-japan-and-australia-together>. Accessed on October 06, 2023.

² Daisuke Sato, "Australia deploys F-35A stealth fighter jets to Japan", *Defence Blog*, September 06, 2023, <https://defence-blog.com/australia-deploys-f-35a-stealth-fighter-jets-to-japan/>. Accessed on October 08, 2023.

³ Kei Koga, "Japan and Australia step up defence cooperation", *East Asia Forum*, March 08, 2022, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2022/03/08/japan-and-australia-step-up-defence-cooperation/>. Accessed on October 10, 2023.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Andrew Salerno-Garthwaite, "Japan's F-35A's make first international deployment", *Air Force Technology*, September 07, 2023, <https://www.airforce-technology.com/news/japans-f-35a-make-first-international-deployment/>. Accessed on October 11, 2023.