

Tobias Kollakowski [Ed.]

# The Heirs of Jacob Meckel

21<sup>st</sup> Century German-Japanese Defence Relations





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GIDS German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies  
Bundeswehr Command and Staff College  
Manteuffelstraße 20 · 22587 Hamburg, Germany  
Tel.: +49 (0)40 8667 6801  
[buero@gids-hamburg.de](mailto:buero@gids-hamburg.de) · [www.gids-hamburg.de](http://www.gids-hamburg.de)

Umio Otsuka

## Preface



**Fig:** Rear Admiral (lower half) Jürgen Mannhardt and Rear Admiral Umio Otsuka at the Japan Self-Defense Fleet Headquarters in Yokosuka in April 2015 © Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

I am delighted to celebrate the publication of this volume on the evolving defence cooperation between Japan and Germany.

Since Prime Minister Abe proposed the concept of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” in 2016, the importance of this region has been increasingly recognized in Europe. In response, Germany published its “Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific” in 2020.

In Europe, Russia has since revealed its ambitions through its war with Ukraine. Meanwhile, in the Indo-Pacific – an epicentre of global economic activity – China’s hegemonic behaviour continues to exacerbate regional instability.

この度、日本とドイツの防衛協力に関する本書が出版されることをお慶び申し上げます。

2016年に安倍首相が「自由で開かれたインド太平洋」を提唱して以来、この地域の重要性は欧州でも認識され、ドイツも2020年に「インド太平洋ガイドライン」を発刊しました。欧州では、ロシアがウクライナとの戦争でその野心を顕在化させています。世界経済の重心であるインド太平洋地域では、中国が覇権主義的行動で域内の不安程度を増しています。

Now is the time for like-minded nations to join hands in pursuit of peace in the international community. It is only natural that Japan and Germany, as major powers in Asia and Europe respectively, should deepen their strategic relationship. I greatly welcome the fact that this has moved beyond mere diplomatic rhetoric, with concrete commitments discussed between the two governments and joint training exercises conducted between their armed forces.

During my 40 years of service as a naval officer, I had numerous opportunities to engage with Germany in various capacities. While serving for three years as Japan's Ambassador to Djibouti, I was pleased to strengthen ties with the German Navy, which was stationed there conducting operations under the EU flag. Now, having left government service, I find myself in the religious sphere as Chief Priest of the Yasukuni Jinja Shinto Shrine, a central institution for commemorating and honouring Japan's war dead in the modern era.

And once more, I am happy to have discovered a connection with Germany.

In 1965, when the training ship Deutschland visited Japan, the ship's captain and midshipmen, along with the German Ambassador to Japan, paid a visit to Yasukuni Jinja and offered flowers. The then Chief Priest of the Shrine presented them with a ginkgo sapling, which was later planted at the Kiel Naval Memorial. During the tree-planting ceremony, a memorial service was held for 54 sailors of the Imperial Japanese Navy who died in 1944 when the German submarine U-1224, which had been transferred into Japanese service and renamed Ro-501, was sunk in the Atlantic while en route to Japan.

今こそ同志国は将来の国際社会の平和に向けて手を携えなければなりません。アジアと欧州の大国である日独が戦略的関係を深化させることは理にかなっており、具体的なコミットメントが議論され、また、部隊間で訓練が実施されるなど、単なる外交辞令に止まらずアクションが起こされていることは大いに歓迎されることです。

私は自衛官としての40年間、様々な場面でドイツとの交流に携わりました。また、3年間の駐ジブチ大使勤務で、ジブチに駐留していたドイツ海軍との関係強化にも努めました。今は、近代日本における戦歿者の慰霊と顕彰の中心施設である靖國神社の宮司として宗教の世界にいますが、ドイツとの関係に係わりがあります。

1965年、練習艦ドイッチュランツの訪日時、艦長、候補生は駐日大使とともに靖國神社を参拝して献花しました。当時の宮司は神社の銀杏の苗木を贈りましたが、その銀杏はラーボエ海軍記念碑に植えられました。植樹の式典では、1944年、ドイツ海軍から日本帝国海軍に譲渡されたU-1224潜水艦を日本に回航中、大西洋で撃沈され戦死した54柱の日本海軍軍人の追悼式も行われました。

In 1970, the Chief of the West German Air Force also visited the Yasukuni Shrine and, as a return gift, bestowed three German oak saplings to the Shrine, which were planted on the grounds. Though these trees eventually died about a decade ago, remarkably, three new saplings grew from their acorns and continue to thrive within the Yasukuni precinct to this day. Even after leaving government service, I feel deeply honoured to still play a small role in maintaining the bond between the Japanese and German armed forces across time.

I sincerely hope that the defence relationship between our two countries will continue to grow and flourish and that Japan and Germany will work together to build and sustain peace in the world.

1970年には返礼として西独空軍総監が来日時に靖國神社を参拝し、ドイツ櫟の苗木3本を植樹しました。その木々は今も境内で息づいています。個人的には、政府を離れても、時を超えて日独両軍の絆の一端を担うことができ大変名誉に思っています。

今後とも両国の防衛関係がさらに強化されることを願って止みません。

Tokyo/Hamburg, August 2025

大塚海夫

Umio Otsuka



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## Introduction

Over the past decade, defence relations between Germany and Japan have greatly expanded. At first sight, one would not immediately expect these two powers to intensify security cooperation. Given the large geographical distance separating the two countries and the fact that both the German military (henceforth: the Bundeswehr) and the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) are military/self-defence organisations designed for regional, national and collective defence and not optimised for global power projection, closer defence relations between Japan and Germany may even appear irreconcilable with both countries' security needs. Along similar lines, one could refer to the serious security issues in their respective regions which direct Japan's and Germany's attention to local hotspots and might prevent the Bundeswehr and the JSDF from establishing an intercontinental relationship.

However, taking a closer look at the two countries' political situation and the defence relations between them, this claim does not hold true. Firstly, the Prussian, and later German, military has had an intense relationship with the armed forces of Imperial Japan and post-war Japan for almost one and a half centuries. Since the travels of Prince Yamagata Aritomo and Prince Ōyama Iwao, two founders of the Imperial Japanese Army, to Prussia and other European nations in 1869-1870 and 1883, respectively, the 1871-1873 Iwakura mission and the secondment of Major Klemens Wilhelm Jacob Meckel as military advisor to the Impe-

rial Japanese Army and lecturer to its Army War College from 1885 to 1888, the militaries of Japan and Germany have interacted on various occasions – sometimes as allies and sometimes as enemies.

Geographic distance did not preclude the development of strong military-to-military ties in the 1800s – the era of steam-powered railways and ships. One and a half centuries later, the claim that geographic distance could be an insurmountable obstacle to interaction and cooperation appears even less convincing as long as there is a certain degree of willingness of the political leadership to take a cooperative defence policy approach. Equally wrong is the assumption that a deteriorating security situation on either continent prevents cooperation between Germany and Japan. If Germany's and Japan's security needs are understood in a global context, the deteriorating security situation in Europe and Asia is not an obstacle to cooperation but rather a driving force that compels Berlin and Tokyo to strengthen security relations.

The Russian government has been contesting the very foundation of the international order by waging its war of aggression against Ukraine since 2014. By acting in violation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in the South China Sea and rejecting the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the People's Republic of China is challenging the legal dimension of the rules-based order.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, North Korea's nuclear tests and its missile programme have raised significant regional tensions, have been undermining the global non-proliferation regime and have led to the establishment of an international sanctions regime and prompted the United Nations to determine that North Korea's actions constitute 'a clear threat to international peace and security.'<sup>1</sup> In addition, January 2025 witnessed the Second Cabinet of Donald Trump assuming office in the United States. Since then, the Trump administration has been openly questioning the territorial integrity of European allies of the United States and has taken proactive steps to deconstructing the economic dimension of the liberal order.

These trends in the contemporary security environment create concern for stakeholders who share an interest in maintaining the liberal, rules-based international order. This is particularly true for Japan and Germany – two ardent supporters of this very order that has allowed them first to rebuild their countries, then gain substantial political and economic benefits during the post-WWII era and ultimately achieve security without resorting to a logic of self-help. This multi-author volume reflects these concerns, as these larger policy considerations affect nearly every topic dealt with in this book to varying degrees. The contributors explore the nature of German-Japanese defence relations from numerous perspectives, thereby touching on various academic debates. Given that the authors focus exclusively on their respec-

tive topics, which are mostly associated with narrower subject matters, this introductory chapter provides a concise overview of relevant discussions to demonstrate how this book relates to the existing body of literature.

## The 'Normalization' of Japan

Following Japan's defeat in WWII, Japan adopted a new pacifist constitution under the influence of U.S. occupation. Named after Japan's longstanding Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, Japan, under the Yoshida Doctrine, focused on rebuilding its economy and pursuing a high-profile foreign economic policy while relying heavily on the security alliance with the United States.

The political circumstances for the Yoshida Doctrine, which is often interpreted as Japan's post-war grand strategy,<sup>2</sup> were also shaped by the signing of the 1951 *Security Treaty between the United States and Japan* and the 1960 *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America*, the latter committing the United States to Japan's security. Shielded by the U.S. security umbrella, it was, in the words of Richard Samuels, 'eminently rational for Japan to acquire just enough "basic defense capabilities" to repel aggressors—but no more than that.'<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Japan's approach to security was shaped by critical domestic political developments which led, among others, to the Japanese govern-

<sup>1</sup> United Nations 2006: 1.

<sup>2</sup> Samuels 2008: 31ff; Maslow 2015: 743; Hughes 2017; Williams 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Samuels 2008: 2.

ment announcing the 1967 *Three Non-Nuclear Principles*, imposing severe restrictions on arms exports and adopting a policy that restricted defence spending to one percent of its GDP. The pacifist nature of Japan's post-war constitution and the many self-imposed restrictions, in combination with the prioritisation of economic relations and the great significance attached to supranational organisations and regimes, have led some scholars to apply the definition of a 'civilian power' to Japan.<sup>4</sup>

However, the 1970s and 1980s also witnessed significant qualitative improvements in the capabilities of the Japanese armed forces and, since the end of the Cold War, Japan has been gradually lifting its restraints on the JSDF. Thus, less restricted by the limitations established after WWII, the capabilities of Japan's military to project power have significantly expanded and – similarly to the Bundeswehr – the JSDF have also been deployed overseas on numerous missions in the context of international crisis management and humanitarian aid and disaster relief since the 1990s.<sup>5</sup>

These developments and the rationale behind these policy choices, namely that it was problematic for Japan to be perceived as a passive state, free-riding on U.S. security efforts and unable to contribute to regional security and the international order, have fuelled a debate on Japan's post-Cold War national security policy both within Japan and among international observers. Andrew Oros and Yoshihide Soeya, David Welch and Masayaki Tadokoro captured this debate in their

books titled *Normalizing Japan* and *Japan as a 'Normal Country'?*, which were published in 2008 and in 2011, respectively.<sup>6</sup> The debate itself, however, is even older. For decades scholars have written about Japan's organisational and policy changes with regard to security and about what Christopher Hughes in 2009 called 'Japan's propensity to shift incrementally towards remilitarisation'.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, as numerous authors have pointed out, during Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's long administration (2012-2020) the process accelerated, empowered by domestic political circumstances and the leadership of Abe and in accordance with structural realist predictions, such as balance of power considerations.<sup>8</sup> Far from being exhaustive, the list of measures taken by the Japanese government during the Abe era includes publishing Japan's first National Security Strategy, establishing a National Security Council, reinterpreting Japan's constitutional restrictions on the use of defence forces to exercise the right of collective self-defence under specific circumstances, liberalising the country's arms export policy and the gradual introduction of longer-range strike weapons, for example the 2018 acquisition of missiles for the F-35 and F-15 with ranges up to 1,900 kilometres.<sup>9</sup> As Sheila Smith points out,

<sup>4</sup> Maull, 1990; Funabashi 1991: 65, 74; Bacon et al. 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Smith 2019: 4, 11, 55-85; Ayson 2015: 117.

<sup>6</sup> Oros 2008; Soeya, Welch/Tadokoro 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes 2009: 27. See also Hoyt 1985; Hook 1988; Katzenstein/Okawara 1993; Tanter 2006; Hughes/Krauss 2007; Maslow 2015; Oros 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ayson 2015: 70; Maslow 2015: 739-765; Liff 2015: 79-99; Oros 2017; Mulgan, 2018; Matsuda 2020; Green 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Murano 2024.

closer to home, Japanese leaders began to face growing pressure on their nation's defenses as the military balance in Northeast Asia grew far more challenging. With increasing frequency, Japan's security planners were forced to reassess some of their most basic assumptions about how to defend their country and to remedy gaps in military planning that had largely gone unnoticed during the Cold War. The Japanese military had to increase its defense operations and add new missions and capabilities to keep pace with the growing military might of its neighbors.<sup>10</sup>

The year 2022 was another important milestone in Japan's military development. The same year that Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Japanese government released three major strategic documents – the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Buildup Program – and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (2021-2024) instructed the Japanese cabinet to raise defence spending to 2% of the country's GDP over the course of subsequent years.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, as Robert Ward elaborates, the fact that Japan responds to the challenges it is confronted with by deploying 'comprehensive national power,' including the country's capabilities across the entire spectrum of statecraft, is a testimony to Japan's strength, especially considering Japan's economic power.<sup>12</sup>

As regards Japanese-German defence relations, the changes in Japan's

approach to security that are often summarised as 'normalisation' or 're-militarisation' have profound effects. If, to quote Robert Ward, 'comprehensive national power should speak to Japan's strengths,'<sup>13</sup> then all aspects of national power should be taken into consideration. This includes demography. As numerous studies have shown, however, Japan's shrinking population poses a severe challenge to its national security.<sup>14</sup> Unfavourable demographics is not a problem that only affects Japan but a challenge faced by both Germany and Japan. Both countries need to develop strategies on how to deal with a shrinking number of men fit for military service and adjust their recruitment and posture accordingly.

As far as deployments and exercises are concerned, there is not only greater freedom for the JSDF to work with foreign militaries but actually an important policy imperative. Amid growing security concerns in Asia, Japan has also developed its relationships with many states in the Indo-Pacific. Particularly noteworthy examples include growing strategic ties with Australia, especially since the kick-off of a strategic dialogue in 2006, maritime capacity building with Vietnam and the Philippines, and the strengthening of military relations with India, which has been ongoing at least since the later 2000s.<sup>15</sup> As Robert Ayson argues, Japan faces the problem that, despite the fact that it has been expanding positive relations with countries in Southeast Asia as well as India and Australia, its growing security role is met with resistance by neighbouring countries such as the

<sup>10</sup> Smith 2019: 90.

<sup>11</sup> Nikkei Staff Writers 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Ward 2025: 35.

<sup>13</sup> Ward 2025: 35.

<sup>14</sup> Eldridge 2017: 27-30; Shibazaki 2020; Bravo 2022; Le 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Smith 2019: 85-86.

People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, North Korea and, at least since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation need to be added to the list. Furthermore, another stakeholder in the region – the Republic of China on Taiwan –, despite its very positive relationship with Japan, does not enjoy official diplomatic (and thus military) relations with Japan. Consequently, there are powerful drivers on the political level that motivate Japan to strengthen its defence ties with extra-regional powers such as Germany and other European powers.

## German Policy towards the Indo-Pacific in Support of the Liberal Order

A significant topic in Germany's interactions with Japan since the turn of the third decade of the 21st century has been the centrality of the liberal rules-based order in German policy-making. In this context, German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas (2018-2021) pointed out:

Our prosperity and our geopolitical influence in the coming decades will depend on how we work together with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region. That, more than anywhere else, is where the shape of the international rules-based order of tomorrow will be decided. We want to help shape that order – so that it is based on rules

and international cooperation, not on the law of the strong.<sup>17</sup>

As numerous scholars have observed, since the end of the 2010s, Germany has expanded its relations into the Indo-Pacific and diversified away from its focus on the People's Republic of China. Instead, Germany's increasing engagement in the region has focused on supporting the principles of the liberal order in cooperation with like-minded regional powers and – applying a whole-of-government approach – across various dimensions that include security, economics and human rights.<sup>18</sup> Felix Heiduk adds another significant observation to the debate as he analyses the notion of 'value-based partnerships' – the kind of partnerships Germany seeks to foster in the Indo-Pacific. Heiduk notes that, although the definition as to which values are considered fundamental to value-based partnerships is not clear, his analysis shows that

the majority of attributes used do not focus so much on normative aspects of governance, but rather on the expected international behaviour of those value-based partners – for example, regarding the preservation of rules-based international order.<sup>19</sup>

Not unlike Germany, Japan is a power deeply committed to maintaining the liberal, rules-based order. As numerous scholars argue, over many decades, Japan's policy course has been informed by a pragmatic liberalism that

<sup>16</sup> Ayson 2015: 70.

<sup>17</sup> Federal Foreign Office 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Stanzel 2022; Ulatowski 2022: 401; Sakaki 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Heiduk 2024: 6.

is adapted to the U.S.-led liberal global order and aims at maintaining the rule of law.<sup>20</sup> Japan's interest in upholding this order spans across various dimensions of statecraft ranging from policy actions to maintain a liberal trade order to efforts associated with preserving the rules-based order.<sup>21</sup>

While most pillars of this policy approach are associated with civilian topics, some are also related to security and military matters and thus of potential importance as far as cooperation between the JSDF and the Bundeswehr is concerned. These include Japanese policy and military actions to contribute to upholding freedom of navigation and the protection of sea lines of communication in the western Pacific – one of the principal objectives of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. Japan pursues these objectives through a multilateral approach to security and provides security assistance with regard to traditional security threats and non-conventional challenges such as piracy.<sup>22</sup> In fact, John Bradford goes as far as to argue that Japan, having increasingly contributed to multilateral cooperation in the western Pacific over the course of several decades, has arisen as the region's most important maritime leader and as the most significant partner of choice for extra-regional powers that are attracted by Japan's vision of a Free and

Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).<sup>23</sup> Beyond the regional context, Japan's contributions to collective security and UN peace-keeping operations, which the country has undertaken since the 1990s, underpin the country's willingness to contribute proactively to maintaining the international rules-based order. In the words of Sheila Smith, 'it was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) that saw the benefits of SDF participation in international military coalitions and argued that this was a necessary demonstration of Japan's contribution to global security.'<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Germany's and Japan's visions of the regional and global order share much common ground. They are also compatible with regard to the emphasis both countries place on multilateral approaches to security. Ultimately, as Alexandra Sakaki argues, both Germany and Japan are united in their concern about forces that seek to undermine this very order:

On a broader level, both countries share concern about the erosion of the existing rules-based liberal international order that is supported by multilateral cooperation. German-Japanese cooperation takes on new urgency, given the growing challenges to that order by China and Russia as well as lingering concern stemming from the years of Donald Trump about the reliability of the US as a leader and guardian of the existing order.<sup>25</sup>

Against this background, cooperation between the Bundeswehr and JSDF can

<sup>20</sup> Berger 2007; Tamaki 2020; Funabashi/Ikenberry 2020; Nakano 2023; Yoshimatsu 2024; Lind 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Solí 2017: 128ff.; Yoshimatsu 2024; Subba 2024; Davis 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Woolley 2000: 70-75; Li 2008: 108, 116; Patalano 2016: 103, 111; Reuters 2017; Smith 2019: 49; Kawai, Thuzar/Hayton 2016: 4.

<sup>23</sup> Bradford 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Smith 2019: 56.

<sup>25</sup> Sakaki 2021.

serve as a powerful expression of commitment to the liberal international order and as a symbol to allies and adversaries alike. The question, however, as to who constitutes an ‘adversary’ is answered differently in the two countries’ policies. This circumstance leads to the next relevant point for discussion.

## Resurgence of China

Another great academic debate that influences the way in which both Japan and Germany craft and implement their policies towards the Indo-Pacific region and thus also determines how they choose to utilise their military assets in the Indo-Pacific, is the question of how to interpret the rise of the People’s Republic of China or, historically speaking, the resurgence of China as one of the world’s great powers. As Ayson argues, ‘how and to what extent China’s growing military capabilities are able to undermine America’s predominant position in Asia rates among one of the most important trends that the rest of the region is watching very closely.’<sup>26</sup>

Against this background, for consecutive years, Japan’s White Paper *Defense of Japan* has defined China’s ‘current external stance, military activities, and other activities [...] an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan and the peace and stability of the international community.’<sup>27</sup> Thus, for Japan, addressing the challenge of a rising People’s Republic of China goes hand in hand with the

question of how the country’s military capabilities and force posture should be developed and which reactions to Chinese activities – especially in the East China Sea, but also in a broader sense – should be taken by government bodies.<sup>28</sup> In fact, over the course of the previous three decades, Japan has taken various measures to address this challenge. On the military level, Japan has repositioned its forces and adapted its geostrategic position from a posture directed against a Soviet threat during the Cold War to a threat direction further to the south. Japan has also, among others, increased the mobility of its land forces and their proficiency in island defence, expanded naval capabilities and expanded the JASDF’s air defence and stand-off missile capabilities ‘to support the GSDF in countering land and sea forces attempting to seize remote islands’ – critical capabilities when dealing with a wartime scenario involving the Chinese People’s Liberation Army.<sup>29</sup> On the policy level, Japan has responded by strengthening bilateral relations with regional powers, such as India, and supporting the so-called ‘new convergence’ to balance China’s rise.<sup>30</sup> Robert Ward elaborates:

During the Biden presidency, given the potency of the challenge to regional stability from China and others, the US shifted from the ‘hub and spokes’ system of bilateral alliances that prevailed in the Cold War to a networked system of allies and partners, in which these have greater agency. At the 2024 IISS

<sup>26</sup> Ayson 2015: 2; see also Goh 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2024: 62.

<sup>28</sup> Ayson 2015: 62; Smith 2019: 3.

<sup>29</sup> Hughes 2022: 33; see also Samuels 2008: 168; Patalano 2008; Smith 2019: 16; Klingner 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Samuels 2008: 169; Ward 2025: 37.

Shangri-La Dialogue, then US defense secretary Lloyd Austin described this strategic shift as a ‘new convergence’ that would strengthen and make more resilient the United States’ ‘network of partnerships’. Importantly, it also allows the US to amplify its increasingly stretched resources in the region. Examples of this new convergence include the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, known as the Quad [...], and the AUKUS information- and technology-sharing partnership [...]. Japan’s active defence diplomacy has embraced this new convergence and will find itself shouldering an increasing deterrence and response burden in the region as a result.<sup>31</sup>

Germany’s interpretation of the People’s Republic of China differs from that of its Japanese partner. While Germany’s national security strategy identifies the Russian Federation as a direct security threat to Germany, NATO and the European Union, Germany does not view the People’s Republic as a principal military threat. Certain activities that are pursued by the People’s Republic of China and its state agencies, for example espionage and cyber-attacks, pose a real threat to the German government, economy and society.<sup>32</sup> Still, at the policy level, Germany takes a more nuanced view of China, defining it simultaneously as a partner, competitor and systemic rival. As already addressed above, for Germany, the principal issues concerning the People’s Republic are about China’s attitude towards the international order

and less about military capabilities. In accordance with this perception, Germany’s national security strategy states that ‘China is trying in various ways to remould the existing rules-based international order, is asserting a regionally dominant position with ever more vigour, acting time and again counter to our interests and values.’<sup>33</sup>

For German-Japanese relations this aspect matters because it affects the compatibility of both countries’ strategies and approaches to regional security. This concerns both strategic documents but also practical policy implementation. If Germany’s security policy approach towards the Indo-Pacific is about fostering partnerships with countries with shared values to uphold the international order rather than to balance against another power, would the German government ever choose to participate in a military exercise format which may be perceived as balancing or containing China, even if it involves the very same allies? This question is especially relevant when thinking about exercises conducted in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) format or Germany’s perception of AUKUS.

## A Common Ally – The Role of the United States

While the rise of China, Beijing’s activities and their perception in the policies of Japan and Germany have an influence on Japanese-German defence relations, this is even more true with regard to the United States – the principal military ally of both Germany and Japan.

<sup>31</sup> Ward 2025: 37.

<sup>32</sup> Welt TV 2024; Biermann 2024; Bundesministerium des Innern 2024.

<sup>33</sup> The Federal Government 2023: 23.

In the post-WWII era, both Germany and Japan have possessed limited military capabilities, relying instead on their alliance with the United States to satisfy their security needs, most importantly with a view to deterrence based on strategic capabilities.<sup>34</sup> While Germany at least benefits from the fact that two other European powers and members of NATO – the United Kingdom and France – are also in possession of nuclear weapons, Japan's dependence on the U.S. security umbrella is absolute as far as these capabilities are concerned. Moreover, as Sheila Smith argues, this strategic dependence on the United States has deepened in case of Japan, with North Korea's advancing missile and nuclear programme and China's growing military assertiveness.<sup>35</sup>

However, at least since the first Trump Administration (2017–2021), there has been growing uncertainty over the U.S. role in Europe and Asia. Abandonment by the United States or at least doubts about the U.S. leadership's reliability when it comes to the fulfilment of alliance obligations and/or the consideration of allies' interests and the global order more generally has thus been a major concern for Japan and Germany alike.<sup>36</sup> As

Alexandra Sakaki, Hanns Maull, Kerstin Lukner, Ellis Krauss and Thomas Berger correctly assert, irrespective of the prospects for and the degree of U.S. strategic retrenchment, Germany's and Japan's 'policies will have a profound bearing on the evolution of their respective regional security orders, which, in turn, continue to be of strategic importance for the future of global order.'<sup>37</sup>

As far as the content of this book is concerned, the alliance of the United States with Japan and Germany shines through Japanese-German relations in various chapters. Historically, considerations about the United States, U.S. capabilities and the U.S. role in international relations were an important factor for Germany and Japan when these two countries were still great powers. For example, during WWII, the great military potential of the United States was one of the principal reasons motivating the Empire of Japan, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to sign the Tripartite Pact in order to deter the U.S. from entering the war.<sup>38</sup> In the contemporary era, the role of the United States for both Japan and Germany is

<sup>34</sup> Smith 2019: 2, 175, 205.

<sup>35</sup> Smith 2019: 175, 205, 235.

<sup>36</sup> Sloan 2018; Smith 2019: 4, 175, 205, 218, 235; Sakaki et al. 2020: 6ff; O'Shea/Maslow 2021; Manulak 2024; Lind 2018. Jennifer Lind's chapter, which was published in 2018, also discusses the implications of the first Trump Administration on Japan, but concludes that at the time Japanese concern was not warranted and both countries had 'settled back into business as usual.' However, Lind's chapter was published very early in the time period under consideration and

the author does not reflect on important policy divergences between Abe and Trump, such as Trump's North Korea policy, likely due to the date of publication of the book *Chaos in the Liberal Order*. Furthermore, as Sheila Smith points out, despite later assurances by Trump, Japan's confidence in the reliability of the U.S. leadership has deteriorated in comparison with the pre-Trump era. Therefore, Lind's chapter does not contradict the overall argument presented in this chapter.

<sup>37</sup> Sakaki et alii 2020: 8.

<sup>38</sup> Rahn 1990: 204; Martin 1976: 466–467; Yellen 2016: 556; Hedinger 2021: 315; Goeschel 2024: 417–419.

also highly significant – now as an ally. The United States military, with which both the JSDF and the Bundeswehr maintain very close relations, serves as another ‘connection kit’ between these two militaries, for example, when conducting or planning military exercises. Furthermore, U.S. policy also impacts bilateral defence industrial relations between Germany and Japan because alliance considerations matter when both countries make their decisions on procurement and cooperation on arms development. Ultimately, the declining willingness on behalf of the United States to assume the responsibility of an overseas security provider serves as another catalyst for countries like Germany and Japan to diversify their security relations.

## German-Japanese relations

All in all, defence relations make up just one dimension of the bilateral German-Japanese relationship. Following the end of the Cold War, scholars drew attention to the fact that Germany’s relations with Japan and, more generally, Asia were given only low priority.<sup>39</sup> Scholars note that Japan played only a minor role in German foreign policy, owing largely to the German leadership’s Eurocentric outlook and the need to deal with the unification of the European continent, but also to mutual misperceptions.<sup>40</sup> One possible exception was the economic sphere. Following both Japan’s and Germany’s economic miracle after WWII, bilateral trade, scientific and technological relations significantly expanded from the

1960s onwards, and both countries developed a significant network of institutionalised dialogue and cooperation platforms.<sup>41</sup> Still, security policy remained at the margins of Berlin’s and Tokyo’s policy interaction.

Recently, however, scholars have elaborated on the growing importance of bilateral relations, including in the political dimension. As Germany and Japan have established new formats in their bilateral relationship, such as the ‘two-plus-two’ format (a security dialogue involving both countries’ foreign and defence ministers) and government consultations, Sakaki argues that these new intergovernmental platforms demonstrate ‘Berlin’s resolve to enact its proclaimed policy of diversification and deepening’ and that relations between Berlin and Tokyo have expanded beyond traditional topics, such as economics, social policies or climate change, to include security and geopolitical issues.<sup>42</sup> In 2021, the Rand Corporation published a major study focused on the defence ties between Japan and its European partners that was sponsored by the government of Japan. Among others, the study outlines that Japan welcomes the growing interest of European powers in the region, that various ways of cooperation exist that do not require the physical deployment of forces to the Indo-Pacific and mentions cybersecurity, space, the use of the electromagnetic spectrum, 5G telecommunications, data security, artificial intelligence, and other topics providing ample space for cooperation and discussion between Ger-

<sup>39</sup> Stille 1989; Brockdorff 1994; Rohde 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Rohde 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Kreft 1998: 262-266; Rohde 2002; Nabers 2004: 239-243.

<sup>42</sup> Sakaki 2021.

many and Japan.<sup>43</sup>

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent publication of the new Japanese national security strategy, Sakaki stresses the fact that the war in Ukraine emphasises the security connections between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions and that Japan and Germany face similar security challenges as far energy security and economic resilience are concerned as well as the necessity to share information and to determine how to deal with the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. According to Sakaki, the permanent stationing of a German liaison officer at the Enforcement Coordination Cell in Yokosuka and bilateral defence industrial cooperation might offer great potential for Japan and Germany, and Japan will likely continue to aim at developing stronger security policy ties with Europe.<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, numerous authors have analysed the extensive modifications to Germany's and Japan's defence policies following Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine to examine whether Germany and Japan still fit the conceptual models associated with civilian power, taking both domestic developments but also the international political environment into consideration.<sup>45</sup> Complementing these studies on politics and policy, in the economic sphere, recent publications have also focused on German-Japanese

economic relations, their potential and differences in corporate governance.<sup>46</sup>

As far as German-Japanese defence relations – the very topic of this book – are concerned, there is a substantial body of literature on military history. A prominent topic among military historians is the relationship between Imperial Germany and the Prussian military, on the one hand, and the Empire of Japan and the Imperial Japanese Army, on the other hand.<sup>47</sup>

Academics have also examined German-Japanese military relations during WW1 when the Empire of Japan fought on the side of the Entente powers and attacked Germany's colony *Kiautschou* on the Shandong peninsula, taking several thousand German prisoners of war.<sup>48</sup>

Most prominently, much of the relevant literature is devoted to the study of German-Japanese military relations during the WWII era and the years leading up to it. Strategy debates, flaws in the Axis powers' military alliance and German-Japanese cooperation on the U-boat campaign in the Indian Ocean are among the many topics covered by scholars focusing on this time period.<sup>49</sup>

Compared to these historical developments, relatively little has been written about recent German-Japanese military affairs. Commenting on the return of the frigate *Bayern* to Germany following its Indo-Pacific Deployment 2021, Sakaki and Göran Swistek argue that the bilateral visits

<sup>43</sup> Sakaki 2022; Tsuruoka 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Sakaki 2023a; Sakaki 2023b.

<sup>45</sup> Sakaki et alii 2025.

<sup>46</sup> Kudo 2018; Wiesheu 2019; Waldenberger 2024.

<sup>47</sup> Presseisen 1965; Kerst 1970; Krebs 2002; Saaler 2006: 23ff.

<sup>48</sup> Kreiner 1986; Saaler 2014; Barkhof 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Rahn 1993; Krebs 1999; Paterson 2017; Krug et alii 2001; Krebs 2009.

with regional counterparts, including in Japan, clearly demonstrated a ‘sign of appreciation and attachment’, but simultaneously critically question ‘to what extent the *Bayern*’s mission did justice to Germany’s aspiration of contributing to the maintenance of the rules-based order, upholding international law and preserving security in the region.’<sup>50</sup> Two years later, Helena Legarda comes to the opposite conclusion, arguing that (repeated) Bundeswehr deployments to the Indo-Pacific have demonstrated the German government’s willingness to ‘take action and [to be] more comfortable confronting Beijing’s potential reactions’ by carrying out ‘naval and air deployments to the region [that] have the clear objective of protecting stability and the rules-based international order.’<sup>51</sup>

Beyond the question of whether the Bundeswehr deployments have been fulfilling set policy objectives or not, this multi-author book aims to make a substantial contribution to the academic debate on German-Japanese defence relations by closing some of the gaps that exist in the respective literature so far. The authors thus take a broad approach to both countries’ military relations ranging from military exercises and defence industrial relations to strategic communication and legal issues. This volume also aims to provide a comprehensive overview for policymakers and practitioners who wish to obtain a quick overview of the current state of affairs in Japanese-German defence relations.

## The Structure of the Volume

Part one of the volume addresses the overall political environment in which cooperation between the Bundeswehr and the JSDF takes place and the historical record of German-Japanese defence relations and collaboration. **Johannes Berthold Sander** explores the historical dimension of both countries’ defence relations. The chapter points out that Japan and Germany – although geographically far apart – share long-lasting military-to-military relations that have evolved through times of peace and war. **Karsten Kiesewetter**’s paper examines the changing security and foreign policy environment in the Indo-Pacific that is forcing Japan to adapt its national security interests and to set more ambitious military objectives for the JSDF to attain. As Kiesewetter shows, Japan aims to strengthen its defence relations with various partners, especially like-minded nations that support the liberal, rules-based order, such as Germany, to address security issues worldwide, in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific region. **Natsumi Shiino**’s chapter similarly picks up on the debate on norms and values, arguing that Germany’s strategic communication messaging and Japan’s vision of the FOIP share very strong similarities because both countries’ policies stem from the desire to maintain the international rules-based order. Consequently, as Shiino points out, Japan strongly welcomes an increasing German military presence in the region.

The second part of the volume goes into greater detail on specific policy fields and their potential for cooperation. In the past, both government representatives and economic actors from Germany and Japan have expressed

<sup>50</sup> Sakaki/Swistek 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Legarda 2024.

their ambitions to foster defence industrial cooperation – but the successful implementation of arms cooperation projects has so far been lagging behind. **Tobias Kollakowski** elaborates on numerous military and industrial domains which may offer potential for closer collaboration in the future. **Wolfgang Müller**'s chapter addresses an economic topic of great security relevance: the recruitment of IT specialists. Müller comments on the problematic quantitative and qualitative gap between demand and supply concerning IT personnel in the armed forces and explores innovative recruitment measures beyond the conventional paths often pursued by military organisations.

**Christian Richter** adds a legal dimension to the debate by analysing the first passage of a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force ship through the Taiwan Strait in the history of modern Japan. Notwithstanding criticism from Beijing, the crossing is unproblematic from an international law perspective. In fact, it strengthens the right to freedom of navigation and thus international law as a whole. **Yuichi Aizawa**'s chapter presents a critical reflection of the author's time as a participant of the 2024 International General/Admiral Staff Officer Course at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College. Aizawa's chapter stresses the importance of measures designed to increase the opportunities for deepening defence relations between Japan and Germany and identifies space for further development in leadership education both in the Bundeswehr and the JSDF.

The third section concludes this volume by examining recent military exercises carried out by the Bundeswehr and the JSDF. This section establishes both the difficulties related to

carrying out deployments to the Indo-Pacific and coordinating and conducting military exercises outside of a NATO environment over great distances, but also the German and Japanese militaries' shared commitment to intensify their strategic partnership. The chapter by **Frank Gräfe** elaborates on the *Luftwaffe*'s [German Air Force] contribution to the Indo-Pacific deployment (IPD) 2024. The author summarises *Luftwaffe* deployments to the Indo-Pacific in 2022 and 2024 and discusses challenges and benefits associated with interacting with their Japanese counterparts. Ultimately, the author emphasises that Japan will be part of future medium-term deployments to the Indo-Pacific in order to continue the tactical exchange between the *Luftwaffe* and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force.

Complementing the chapter on the air dimension of the IPD 2024, **Axel Schulz**' paper examines the interaction between the German Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in the course of Germany's IPD 2024 and considers the successful teamwork displayed during exercises such as RIMPAC 2024 and NOBLE RAVEN 24-3. Schulz reflects upon the high level of interoperability exhibited by the German and Japanese naval forces and argues that it will be essential to further increase this interoperability through various cooperation formats in the future.

Given the complexity of the defence relations between two global stakeholders such as Japan and Germany, this book cannot possibly exhaust the subject, but can only endeavour to open a door into it. As Japan and Germany need to take on more global responsibilities to uphold the liberal rules-based order in the face of de-

creasing efforts to do so – and, to a certain degree, even countervailing attempts – by the tier-one great powers, collaboration between both countries is expanding. Consequently, the Bundeswehr and the JSDF have set out to pursue additional fields of military cooperation, and this book has only scratched the surface of what may be possible if both countries' governments wish to deepen this value-based partnership. The authors of this book hope that this volume will be of value to academics, military practitioners, politicians, students, and to anyone concerned with the defence relations between Germany and Japan.

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## Politico-Military Contacts Between Germany and Japan: A Historical Cross-Section

This article intends to embed the politico-military contacts between Germany and Japan since Japan's 'opening' in the mid-19th century into a historical context. Only for the period after 1945 is the term 'defence policy' justified to describe these contacts. This contextualization is not intended to deliver a detailed report on all the latest findings of historical and security policy research. For this reason, the bibliography has been deliberately limited while documentation has been used to expand on key aspects.<sup>1</sup>

When U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry's 'Black Ships' appeared in Edo Bay in 1853, Shōgun Tokugawa Iesada, who was the head of the Shōgunate government (bakufu), had to find out that his forces were unable to effectively defend the city against any use of military force by Perry's squadron. Although Perry did not actually fire on the Japanese coastal forts, he managed to intimidate the Bakufu by demonstrating technical superiority and firepower in a successful pursuit of 'gun-boat diplomacy.' Accordingly, Perry returned with an even larger squadron the following year, imposing the conclusion of the Kanagawa Treaty under threat of force, and opening the door for Japan's integration into the system

of unequal treaties practiced by Western states in East Asia at that time.

This meant a revolutionary step for the country. It marked the end of the Shōgunate's nearly 220-year seclusion policy (sakoku) which had brought stability and a long period of peace on the one hand, but, on the other, resulted in a long-term modernisation and technology backlog, confronting the country with a completely new foreign policy situation: Integrated into the system of unequal treaties against its will, it sank to semi-colonial status and threatened to become the plaything of Western powers wielding technological and military superiority. The feudalistic state structure, comparable to European absolutism in its intention of concentrating as much power as possible in a single hand, was no longer able to maintain the reign of the Shōgunate and prevent foreign domination by Western powers.

The country's political elites did not achieve this latter goal until they entered into an alliance with the United Kingdom in 1902. It was a visible sign that these elites had succeeded in establishing the Empire as a recognised actor in the concert of the great powers.

However, the road to this goal was a rocky one. Before any principles regarding politico-military and other relations with foreign powers could even be formulated, it was necessary to de-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. list of abbreviations and bibliographic notes below.

termine who should be entitled to shape them in the future, and what procedures should be followed. This meant that after the end of Bakufu, a new political elite still had to develop and consolidate. This was not the case until the final defeat of the insurgents in the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877, following a series of civil war conflicts. After that until shortly after the end of World War I, the Empire was de facto governed by a group of nine 'Elder Statesmen' (Genrô) who coordinated important decisions. They were independent of the Meiji Constitution proclaimed in 1889 and effective in 1890, and its institutions. Almost all of them came from the former 'han' of Chôshû (today, Yamaguchi Prefecture at the western tip of the main island of Honshû) and Satsuma (today, Kagoshima Prefecture in the south of Kyûshû).

It was the Genrô who clearly recognised Japan's need for modernisation, defining and enforcing the Meiji Restoration agenda by abolishing the feudal system, establishing modern, central structures, rapid modernisation, and formally raising the status of the Emperor. The last of these aspects meant a continuation rather than a novelty: After all, the Tokugawa Shôgunate, which had just been overthrown, also exercised its rule 'in the name of' the Japanese Emperor (Tennô) without him wielding any substantial power. This did not change after the 'Restoration' named after the Meiji Tennô, which formally meant a 'return' of his rights to him. However, the Tennô could only take his own decisions if his advisors failed to reach an agreement.

This also applied to his successors Taishô-Tennô (from 1912) and Shôwa-Tennô (from 1926), and it did not change until 1945, when reigning emperor Hirohito could only make the de-

cision to surrender in the face of the irreconcilable disagreement between his advisors following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This means that, factually speaking, rule was exercised 'in the name of' the Emperor even after the Meiji Restoration. The difference was that rule under the Tokugawa Shôguns was characterized by more absolutist traits, while rule after the Meiji Restoration rather resembled an oligarchy. This should also be of decisive importance in future, particularly in the context of politico-military decisions. The nine Genrô occupied the key positions of the Empire's newly designed political system in changing configurations.

In particular, these included the positions of Prime Minister, Army Minister, Navy Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, and the Chief of the Army General Staff. Initially, the position of the Chief of the Navy General Staff was less significant. However, this changed with the increasing growth of the Navy, temporarily resulting in a lesser importance of the Army. The Anglo-Japanese alliance also was a clear sign of this growing maritime significance in foreign policy. The fact that the Japanese Navy 'caught up' in importance is also illustrated by the fact that the Chief of the Army General Staff enjoyed direct access to the Emperor and independence of civil institutions as soon as the Army General Staff Office (Sanbô Honbu) was established in 1878. A Navy General Staff (Gunreibu) was not established until 1883, also being granted direct access to the Emperor.

The Genrô were the architects of Japan's foreign and military policy, initiating the Iwakura mission designed to bring about a reorientation. It was composed of a group of 48 'official'

members (including some of the Genrô), joined by up to 60 other student participants. As the number of participants fluctuated during the mission, their total strength is likely to have amounted to up to 150 people. Between 1871 and 1873, the group travelled through the United States (for more than 6 months), the United Kingdom (for about 4 months), France (for about 3 months), and Prussia (for about a month), when Germany had just emerged as a new empire. They visited a few other European countries for a few weeks each. In addition to representing the 'new' Meiji Japan, the mission's objectives above all included an attempt to renegotiate the unequal treaties, which, unsurprisingly, was met with little sympathy. Much more successful and conducive to the further development of Japan, however, were the findings on state structures, as well as institutions and organisations in the fields of law, education, economics and industry, the military, culture, and the social sector. It seems that in France and Prussian Germany, the mission was especially interested in the military, not least because of the Franco-German war that had just recently ended.

Owing to the German victory, the mission apparently gained the impression that the Prusso-German model was superior, subsequently serving as a blueprint for the organisation of the Japanese army. This did not mean that contacts with the French side were given up. Japan seems to have taken great care to collect comprehensive information from all countries, and to establish networks with all of them so as not to become dependent on any one of them. It was not until 1885, after Japanese generals had completed another study tour, that Prussian Major

Jacob Meckel was assigned to Japan upon the initiative of Genrô Yamagata Aritomo, who was the Minister of the Army. Apparently, the Japanese Army officers had meticulously identified their consulting requirements in great detail. From then on, international study trips by Japanese officers, individually or in groups, became a regular routine cultivated by Japan's military services.

In addition to the immediate military intelligence collected by the Iwakura mission, the voyage also provided another insight, seemingly less relevant to military and naval matters, which would carry far-reaching implications in the future. There was a constitutional problem. While the Genrô were well aware of the government's reform needs, they were by no means willing to allow any form of democratic participation in actual power in a future constitution of the country. This is why they rejected the constitutional models studied the U.S., the United Kingdom, or France, instead determining Germany's model to be the most appropriate for their purposes.

Accordingly, Prussian constitutional legal experts (Hermann Roesler, Albert Mosse, but also the later Reich Chancellor Georg Michaelis) paved the way for the 1890 constitution (including parliamentary elections). In early 1889, the Meiji-Tennô announced the constitution as a gift to his people. In 1890, the constitution eventually took effect. The essential element was that, based on the German model, imperial command authority (Japanese 'Tô-suiken') was solely vested in the monarch. In other words, he was largely able to control the military without any influence or limitations by parliament, or government. In Prussian Germany, parliament was practically

reduced to rubber-stamping funds required by the military. As early as September 1862, Otto von Bismarck, who was Prussian Minister President at the time, to become Chancellor of the German Empire, declared to the budget commission of the Prussian State Parliament, unwilling to grant military funds, that rather than speeches and majority votes, 'blood and iron' would be the factors critical to respond to the 'great questions of our time.' During the Prussian constitutional conflict, his postulate was to simply allow the monarch and his government to at least continue, or carry over, the budget of the previous year. This is exactly what the Genrô noted while giving their consent so that the aforementioned Prussian legal experts later incorporated these stipulations into the Meiji Constitution. However, they failed to recognise the fundamental consequences for the military: By concentrating all essential military decision-making powers in the monarch alone while excluding major civilian authorities (e.g. foreign and finance ministries, civilian heads of government, and civilian advisory bodies in general, not to mention parliaments), competition arose not only between civilian and military actors, but also between the armed forces and a large number of directly subordinate agencies, all 'vertically' vying for the attention of the monarch as the sole decision-maker. The Emperor, however, turned out to be hopelessly overwhelmed by such a task. At the same time, the agencies refrained from urgently required 'horizontal' coordination, rather jealously guarding their respective privileges. The result was an exponentially increased inefficiency of political and strategic planning, not only preventing the development of an

integrated strategy taking account of all resources and objectives, but also deprived the countries stuck in complex scenarios of drawn-out industrial wars of the opportunity to coordinate coalition warfare, and thus, policy.

This fundamental weakness was a common denominator in Germany and Japan, especially from about 1923 onwards. In the German Empire, these effects were already evident in World War I. With Germany, Japan, and also Italy, joining each other as 'revisionists' of the international system in the interwar period, the above-mentioned effects should become very obvious for them. In the Japanese Empire, the consequences remained much weaker while the balancing rule of the Genrô, for whom the divide between civil society and the military was practically meaningless, was maintained. For them, the Meiji Constitution was their own instrument to exclude parliament and other domestic actors, and to consolidate their own informal rule. However, when the institution of the Genrô expired shortly after World War I, the architecture of the Meiji Constitution became dysfunctional because the succeeding actors no longer shared the common bond of informal power. Instead, the blatant contradictions inherent in the constitution erupted uncontrolled.

However, time was not ripe in 1890, and the Genrô managed to successfully implement their modernisation program. In the field of politico-military relations, this meant for the Army to follow the lines of the Prusso-German model, and for the Navy to follow the lines of the British Royal Navy, the leading maritime power of the late 19th century.

These modernisation efforts soon bore fruit that gradually turned Japan,

formally dominated by the Tennô, yet practically and informally ruled by the Genrô, from being an object of Western sovereignty restraints into a subject of its own imperial expansionism towards its neighbours Korea and China. The government attempted to become 'partners' and share this practice hitherto reserved for Western states involved in East Asia, but at the same time, it tried to compete with these Western powers. It was not long before Japan had to learn that it was a 'new-comer' in this field when some of the older powers, who had a long history of imperial land grabs, showed the country its place in this 'pecking order.' The Japanese armed forces were able to clearly defeat the Chinese adversary in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894/95, and Taiwan and other smaller islands were annexed in the peace of Shimonoseki. Yet, Russia, France, and Germany prevented the victor from taking possession of the Liaodong Peninsula with the strategically important port of Port Arthur (Lüshunkou). The Empire (still) had to give in to the threat disguised as a coordinated and identically worded 'friendly advice' not to disturb the 'peace in East Asia.' Soon, it had to learn that the three intervening countries pursued their own ambitions in the region. At the same time, however, Japan started opting out of the system of unequal treaties in 1894, when their discriminatory elements (such as unilateral consular privileges and restrictions on customs autonomy) were eliminated. Starting with Britain, treaties with all Western powers were revised by 1911.

Although still a 'junior partner,' the Empire was now increasingly able to reap the benefits of modernisation: It declared its own claims in the imperial competition in East Asia, and even be-

came a beneficiary of this very competition by finding an ally within this group of competing major powers. By establishing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, Japan was de facto recognised as an active actor in the concert of the great powers in the region. The alliance was mainly founded on Britain and Japan's shared interest in containing Russia's growing influence in northeastern China and Korea. A key provision of the Alliance was the mutual assistance clause stipulating that the partners provide military assistance to each other in the event that one of the two was involved in a war with more than one foreign power. Undoubtedly, such an alliance with the leading maritime power of the time was a very important advantage for an island nation like Japan.

And this advantage was soon to be exploited. Not only did an Asian power defeat one of the classical great (more or less) European powers for the first time during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904/1905. The war also attracted particular attention in Germany, more specifically in the Imperial Navy.

In 1897, future Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz became State Secretary and Chief of the Naval Office, holding a position equivalent to a navy minister in Japan. Tirpitz was an ardent Mahan supporter.<sup>2</sup> In simple terms, he be-

<sup>2</sup> In his work *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (published by Little, Brown & Co, New York, 1890), U.S. Navy officer Alfred Thayer Mahan stressed not only the meaning of sea power per se, but also highlighted the role of the 'capital ship,' i.e., of large naval units equipped with heavy artillery as the core of firepower critical to the outcome of the decisive battle fought against an adversary fleet. Tirpitz and Emperor William II were fer-

lieved in the crucial importance of ships of the line, i.e., large vessels carrying heavy artillery, and in employing these ships in naval battles to bring about victory in war at sea. Accordingly, he advocated arming the fleet until, eventually, it was equipped with more than 60 such ships, including numerous smaller units. Ultimately, this concept was aimed at following in Britain's footsteps as the world's largest naval power, soon leading to a foreseeable arms race between the German Empire and the United Kingdom. Although this concept had fundamental weaknesses also identified by other naval officers, the authoritarian Tirpitz enforced his concept in the Navy, neutralised dissidents, and benefited in particular from the naval enthusiasm of Emperor William II, who fully supported him. The above-mentioned dysfunction of the political system of imperial Germany, which had been exported to Japan by the Prussian 'co-founders' of the Meiji Constitution, came into full effect when the battle fleet concept spectacularly failed in World War I.

Meanwhile, the Russo-Japanese war provided an opportunity for German naval leaders to observe a conflict with a great likelihood of state-of-the-art naval forces (the high tech of the time), including heavy units, being deployed. The German party was eager not to miss this opportunity, sending observers to the theatre of war, and carefully analysing the lessons learned after the war. The lessons learned and reports gained drastically changed the

German image of its Japanese counterpart. Although Japanese attachés were accredited to Berlin as early as 1890, and German naval attachés were assigned to Tôkyô from 1899, the incumbent attaché at the time of the war, Commander (Navy) Trummler, was practically limited to reading official Japanese statements, and had access to very little information only. This may have been partly due to the fact that the German Empire, although officially neutral, provided logistic support to the Russian side by allowing German contractors to provide considerable logistic support to the Russian Baltic Fleet on its march to the Far East. Certainly, this was no reason for the Japanese to be particularly accommodating to Trummler.

However, with Russian consent, two officers, Lieutenant Commander Hopman and Lieutenant (Navy) Gilgenheimb, were sent to Port Arthur by the Admiral Staff. The two officers were the first foreign observers to arrive in March 1904, witnessing the siege of the city by Japanese land and sea forces at close range. Faced with the impending Japanese assault, they were ordered to leave the city in mid-August. Both of them obeyed the order, using separate Chinese junks. Tragically enough, Gilgenheimb was killed in a dispute with the crew of his vessel. Hopman's junk, however, was stopped by a Japanese torpedo boat that took him on board. A Japanese warship then brought him to the port of the German enclave of Tsingtao, from where he returned to Germany, reporting in detail his observations during the siege of Port Arthur and his contact with Japanese naval personnel in an actual oper-

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vent supporters of this concept. To make this quite clear, the Emperor commissioned a German translation of this work that he recommended his naval officers to read.

ating environment aboard Japanese ships and boats.

The changing tone in Hopman's reports is most revealing. While still on his way from Germany, he confirmed claims regarding the alleged poor quality of the Japanese forces,<sup>3</sup> sharing the optimism of Russian commanders about the superiority of their troops despite the recent loss of the Petropavlovsk battleship by mines and the resulting death of Admiral Makarov. He found the Russians expressing unbounded confidence in the skills and spirit of their troops, and emphasising their 'physical superiority over the Japanese,' which he considered 'probably not unjustified.'<sup>4</sup> He also praised Russian stoicism and indifference to the loss of their battleship in the first days after arriving at Port Arthur.<sup>5</sup>

But the picture should change. Just a few days later, he witnessed the third and most massive Japanese attempt to block the port entrance, writing, 'The cold-blooded and calm manner these ten steamers displayed to take on this truly hellish artillery fire cannot be extolled enough. Having seen this example of fanatic attack and initiative in contrast to the apathy and indifference of the Russians makes the future look very dark indeed. The morale of the Japanese Army is unlikely to be any different (from that of the Navy). ... No doubt their leaders know how to make better use of it than the Russians who

simply use their brutal, death-defying masses.' Later that same day, Hopman visited one of the batteries which had fired at the Japanese attackers, and met Grand Duke Boris Vladimirovich among the officers present, who explained to him in fluent German that the Russian prospects in this war were not very rosy. On the contrary. Vladimirovich went on to stress the energetic and self-confident advance of the Japanese, their 'excellent equipment and organization, their goal-oriented leadership, and their outstanding bravery.' Hopman concluded his report with the words, 'Let's hope that I am overestimating the Japanese, but they are real daredevils and deserve utmost respect.'<sup>6</sup>

When he left Port Arthur in August, it was time for Hopman to put aside further prejudices he held against the Japanese. After his small Chinese junk was stopped by a Japanese torpedo boat that took him on board, he was given the unexpected opportunity to witness what happened on board when the boat was cleared for action following a false alarm triggered by alleged Russian ships spotted in the sea area. This gave Hopman the unexpected but very welcome opportunity to experience a Japanese unit in real-life combat conditions—an opportunity that was denied to the naval attaché to Tōkyō, Trummeler, when he made exactly this request at the beginning of the war. In his report, Hopman mentioned the high level of professionalism displayed by the crew on this unique occasion.

His favourable impression was reinforced when he got into conversation with some of the officers aboard the

<sup>3</sup> BA-MA, RM 2/1768, *Bericht über Nachrichten auf der Reise von Tschifu nach Tientsin* [Reporting news on the trip from Chi-fu to Tientsin], 05 April 04.

<sup>4</sup> BA-MA, RM 3/v.19, *Bericht Nr. 4* [Report No. 4], 17 April 04.

<sup>5</sup> BA-MA, RM 3/v.19, *Bericht Nr. 5* [Report No. 5], 22 April 04.

<sup>6</sup> BA-MA, RM 3/v.19, *Exzerpt aus Hopmans Brief*, [Excerpt from Hopman's letter], 04 May 04.

cruiser the boat brought him to. He noted that they were ‘learned naval officers who perform their duties with high motivation and almost exaggerated earnestness.’

Eventually, he was brought to Tsingtao by another Japanese warship, suspecting that the Japanese wanted to use this innocuous opportunity to take a glimpse at the Russian ships that had found refuge there after the unsuccessful attempt to escape to Vladivostok from the port of Port Arthur. He had plenty of opportunity to talk to Japanese officers, many of whom spoke fluent German, including Vice Admiral Kataoka, and summed up his impressions as follows, ‘The impression ... exceeded my imagination and expectations in many ways. The outward appearance of the majority of these officers had little in common with the notion of the “typical Japanese” widely held among my countrymen. What is more, their behaviour and our conversations made me completely forget from time to time that I was not among Europeans. I was amazed that some of them, apart from talking about the navy and maritime issues, also addressed issues of philosophy, religion and the arts, and expressed perfectly reasonable, sound views. In everything they asked and talked about, there was a lively urge for perfection and cultivation, which seems to be based on great diligence and agility. Although I encountered great self-confidence, explained by success in war, I did not hear a single statement suggesting a foolish underestimation of the adversary. On the contrary, I heard of the opinion that the war would last a long time and require hard efforts and sacrifices of Japan. ... some officers showed a lively inner sympathy for Germany although

they had never been there ...’<sup>7</sup> This was how Hopman, who had travelled to East Asia convinced that the Russian side was superior and would win this war sooner or later, came to a fundamental reassessment of the Japanese side’s attitude and capabilities through the observations he made on both sides. His reports had considerable influence on the leading circles of the Navy of the German Empire, and were confirmed by detailed analyses carried out by both the Admiral Staff and Tirpitz’s Imperial Naval Office after the end of the war. The consensus in these analyses was that the Japanese, unlike their Russian adversary, demonstrated excellent performance in the education and ongoing training of their crews, were determined and skilful in operational and tactical leadership, and were able to deploy their modern fleet effectively and successfully.<sup>8</sup> Japanese forces and their capabilities were now considered and respected as modern and capable.

During World War I, the Japanese Empire took sides with the adversaries of Germany in accordance with the

<sup>7</sup> BA-MA, RM 3/6845, *Bericht Nr. 20* [Report No. 20], 26 September 04.

<sup>8</sup> His reports formed part of an overall collection of reports used by the Admiral Staff and the German Imperial Naval Office to analyse the war, pooling all the intelligence from all available sources after the war ended. Cf. *Admiralstab der Marine, Der Krieg zwischen Rußland und Japan 1904-05*, 3 volumes. Berlin 1906-09. The Naval Office had even compiled its own analyses in a report before the end of the war: BA-MA, RM 3/4314, *Dienstschrift der Kaiserlichen Marine Nr. LXII. Erfahrungen und Folgerungen aus dem russisch-japanischen Kriege für den Bau und die Armierung von Kriegsschiffen*, 22 March 1905. Both reports and papers were for Navy-internal use only (For official use only).

provisions of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. However, the intensity of combat contact between the forces of both countries remained low. The German enclave of Tsingtao was besieged and captured within a few months. In addition, some Japanese destroyers were stationed in Malta during the war. From there, they were involved in convoy protection in the Mediterranean. The Japanese, however, refused to participate in any further combat activities. This is why both the German public and the political and military elites perceived Japan much less as an enemy than France or the United Kingdom. Also, the treatment of German and Austrian prisoners of war taken after the conquest of Tsingtao was generally far better in Japanese POW camps than in other camps such as those run by the French or Russians. Of the approximately 5,000 prisoners of war, about 7 % decided to stay in Japan after the war ended.

However, the shifts of interest that began to emerge during the war should turn out to have a much stronger impact on the further development of German-Japanese military-political contacts. Even before World War I, the Japanese Empire had consolidated its position in East Asia by annexing Korea, pursuing its intention to expand this position massively in the wake of the war. In 1915, for example, the Chinese government was presented with twenty-one demands that would have made the country in effect a Japanese colony. Although not all of these demands were completely fulfilled, it was impossible to ignore the direction the Japanese Empire was headed. In addition to meeting with massive resistance from victim China, Japan's actions aroused the suspicion of the Western powers pursuing their own in-

terests in the area, especially the Anglo-Saxon powers eventually emerging victorious in World War I. Even though the alliance with Britain was crucial to Japan, it began to disintegrate. Ever since 1907, when the first Imperial Defence Policy governing the defence of the Empire was approved by the Tennô as binding for both Japanese services, the U.S. was regarded as a hypothetical adversary right behind Russia, and along with Germany and France. The plan was to facilitate an offensive defence strategy against them. To this end, a combat core of eight battleships and eight battlecruisers each, complemented by smaller vessels ('8-8 fleet'), should be established.<sup>9</sup> Another important concept was the '70 percent dogma' that emerged the same year from studies of the naval staff academy. It postulated that the strength of the Japanese naval forces should be 70 % of the U.S. Navy to stand a 50 % chance of victory in conflict.<sup>10</sup> It was not until World War I, however, that the USN threatened to become a truly serious adversary, setting out to replace the British Royal Navy as the world's largest navy in 1916. For the Japanese, this meant that in order to stick to the '70 % ratio,' they had to exceed the Eight-Eight Fleet Program even though this concept had already been recognised as being too costly given the country's financial situation.<sup>11</sup> As a re-

<sup>9</sup> Tahira, *Daihon' ei Kaigunbu, Rengô Kantai. Kaisen made*, p. 112ff and p. 118, as well as Nomura Minoru, *Rekishi no naka no Nihon Kaigun*, pp. 28 and 31.

<sup>10</sup> Tahira, loc. cit., p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> Sander-Nagashima, *Die deutsch-japanischen Marinebeziehungen 1919-1942*, PhD Thesis, Hamburg 1998, p. 40 (in the following *Marinebeziehungen*).

sult, Japan was faced with a serious dilemma.

Towards the end of World War I, these guidelines were revised to include China as a potential adversary, while Russia, Germany, and France were dropped, and only the U.S. remained. The second revision in 1923, which took place after the Washington Naval Conference, even identified the U.S. as the most likely adversary with whom ‘a confrontation was bound to happen sooner or later.’<sup>12</sup> This was even more remarkable as the previous naval treaty was still dominated by Japan’s willingness to make concessions. In 1923, Japanese maritime operational planners also started to focus on how to weaken heavy U.S. units approaching from the east through night combat with light forces (fast cruisers, submarines) before landing the decisive blow with heavy units striking in the West Pacific in the event of a conflict with the U.S. Navy. Since 1916, this development had been accompanied by a steady increase in the naval budget—reaching almost double the army budget by 1921—and by ongoing conflicts between the two services over the ‘narrative supremacy’ of the defence guidelines, i.e., the decisive definition of who really was the most important hypothetical adversary.<sup>13</sup> This dispute sharpened as existing mechanisms of informal rule eroded with the death of the last Genrô, giving subordinate agencies more freedom of action. As a result, the implementation of the Treaties of the Washington Naval Conference met with increasing internal resistance especially in the Japanese Navy, and Navy leadership began to split into the conservative ‘Treaty Fac-

tion’ (Jôyakuha) and the revisionist ‘Fleet Faction’ (Kantaiha), with the proponents of the latter becoming the leading force by the time the Washington treaties ended in 1936.

These aspects, coupled with the changes Germany faced due to its defeat in World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, had a huge impact on German-Japanese politico-military relations. However, the German military services, while being severely reduced in size and stripped of all modern and powerful weapon systems by the Treaty of Versailles, still had a lingering interest in accessing and testing state-of-the-art technology and weapon systems, which were acquired through illegal contacts with other countries. While the Reichswehr Army found a willing partner in the Soviet Union, the Reichsmarine (Navy) began to lean towards its Japanese counterpart. This all happened behind closed doors, of course, as the Navy leadership was fully aware of the fact that there could be no prospect for any revision of the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles without at least an apparent official interest in cooperating with the United Kingdom. The Japanese side was highly interested in rather maintaining clandestine contacts, hoping to gain access to Germany’s vast unused resources and know-how. During World War I, the Imperial German Navy was taken by surprise when the Royal Navy opted for an often-used blockade strategy instead of allowing themselves to be pulled into the expected decisive battle in the southern North Sea. Ironically, the Germans had just gained experience in areas rejected by Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz (cruiser and submarine warfare and, to a limited extent, naval air warfare with airships and aircraft), i.e., using emerging

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 41

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 40

weapon systems that seemed to have the potential to support the new Japanese concept of attrition warfare against large naval units, which sparked great interest on the Japanese side. At the same time, the willingness of the Royal Navy, a former ally, to provide support in these areas had notably waned. On the other hand, the Imperial Japanese Navy was testing new ground with a clear goal in mind: Construction of the world's first aircraft carrier began in 1919, and in 1922, the carrier was put to sea under the name of 'Hôshô'. Against this background, there was great mutual interest in what the other country had to offer in terms of technology and know-how relevant to naval warfare, resulting in a Japanese run on suitable technology and personnel well into the year 1924.

Much to the displeasure of the Reichsmarine leadership, most contacts were made directly with interested companies. While Japan was a signatory to the Treaties of Versailles, compliance was not only quite volatile but also conveniently circumvented as and when deemed beneficial. It appeared that the Japanese naval attaché, who knew about the travel plans of the Naval Inter-Allied Commission of Control (NIACC) in Germany, deliberately warned companies of impending visits.<sup>14</sup> The Reichsmarine, for its part, maintained contact through visits to Japan (Canaris, Behnke). Those visits

were watched with suspicion by the Foreign Office, which had stripped the military of all attaché positions. Admittedly, the Reichsmarine was constantly faced with the problem that it was nowhere near as important as its Japanese counterpart in the domestic arena, and that—unlike Japan—it never counted among the 'great' navies, neither in the interwar period nor in World War II, not even after becoming a war navy (Kriegsmarine) after 1933. This was illustrated by a statement made by its commander-in-chief Raeder at the beginning of the war, who said that, given the Navy's weakness, it could at best show that it knew 'how to die gallantly.' This also highlighted the fact that both Reichsmarine and Kriegsmarine were never considered a significant ally, not even by the Japanese Navy, which had the third largest fleet in the world after the Washington Naval Conference Treaties, but was left rather isolated following its decision to drop out of the treaty system. In 1935, Raeder deployed an inspection team in response to Japan's attempt to provide the German partner with 'development assistance' by offering to inspect a Japanese aircraft carrier and train German carrier squadrons. This did not have the effect the Japanese had hoped for, though. Last but not least, the constant competition with the Air Force, which had much closer ties with the Nazi leadership, and the stark contrast between the Navy's intentions and Hitler's objectives played a key role as well.

The Army was a much more powerful player in both domestic and foreign policy, however, in the end, neither service held much appeal for Japan to engage in genuine coalition warfare due to greatly differing political and strategic objectives. Instruments such as the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Die Heinkelmemoiren* [The Heinkel Memoirs]. Thorwald (ed.), *Ernst Heinkel. Stürmisches Leben*, Stuttgart 1953, p. 355. While German designs are said to have had a significant impact on the development of Japanese carrier aircraft, the German navies, from a Japanese perspective, did not outgrow their role as a source of technology and know-how until 1945.

Tripartite Pact or the January 1942 agreements on identifying operational zones and spheres of influence along longitude 70° east held little importance and were mostly propagandist given the realities of the overall situation.

Three moments during World War II led the German Naval Warfare Command (Seekriegsleitung) to hope that the German Navy could gain significant advantage from an alliance with, or at least friendly neutrality of, the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN).

The first moment occurred at the turn of the year 1939/40. At the time, the German Naval Warfare Command was keeping a close eye on the Japanese response to British attempts to gain control of neutral merchant shipping, and to reimplement the historically well-proven strategy of naval blockade. News of strong Japanese protest against the seizure of Japanese cargo headed for Germany, as well as British attempts to ease tensions by offering enormous compensatory payments was music to the ears of the Germans, especially as Japan was threatening to respond to these violations of international law by confiscating British cargo in East Asian waters in turn.<sup>15</sup> For a moment, it seemed that the popular weapon of blockade had become ineffective and that goods might continue to flow across neutral ports thanks to the friendly neutrality of Japan—the third strongest naval power in the world—, a fact that even the Royal Navy could not simply ignore. These hopes seemed to solidify when Japanese-British negotiations on generally unhindered transportation of German goods to Japan on

Japanese ships appeared to be on a successful track.<sup>16</sup> Hopes were instantly crushed, however, when, in the same month, a British cruiser stopped the Japanese ship ‘Asama Maru’ near Yokosuka Naval Base, dragging twenty-one Germans off board by force. It came as a huge disappointment to the German Naval Warfare Command that while the Japanese side voiced harsh criticism, retaliatory measures were merely hinted at. Rather, Japanese shipping companies were simply instructed to refrain from transporting Germans in the future.<sup>17</sup>

The second moment came on November 11, 1940, when a German merchant raider seized the steamship ‘Automedon’ in the Indian Ocean, most likely a success owed to the interception of British code by the Kriegsmarine.<sup>18</sup> This move produced British War Cabinet documents illustrating Britain’s weakness in defending Singapore in the event of a Japanese attack. The documents were immediately shipped on board of a prize to Japan where German Naval Attaché Admiral Wenneker received them on December 5 before telegraphing the information to the German Naval Warfare Command the day after. Admiral Wenneker requested, and received, permission to notify the Japanese, and eventually sent the documents by courier to Berlin where they arrived on December 30, 1940.<sup>19</sup> The Japanese authorities (the Japanese Attaché in Berlin and

<sup>15</sup> War Diary, German Naval Warfare Command, vol. 4, pp. 2 and 74, entries dated 01 Dec and 11 Dec 1939.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, p. 16, entry dated 03 Jan 1940.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 225, entry dated 27 Jan 1940, and p. 253, entry dated 31 Oct 1940.

<sup>18</sup> BA-MA (Federal Archives, Military Division), RM7 103, fol 154f, *Stand der englischen Entzifferung* [English deciphering status], 2458/40, 08 Oct 1940.

<sup>19</sup> *Marinebeziehungen*, p. 484.

Wenneker's point of contact, Admiral Kondô) were notified as early as December 12. It seems Erich Raeder was particularly inspired by the contents of the captured documents as they arrived at the German Naval Warfare Command at a time when the Command had a strong interest in engaging the Royal Navy in a more committed diversion strategy.<sup>20</sup> Add to this another two factors: On the one hand, the German Naval Warfare Command was not overly happy with Hitler's plans to conduct a war of extermination against the Soviet Union ('Operation Barbarossa') as they considered the United Kingdom to be the main opponent. On the other hand, Wenneker's predecessor, Navy Captain Lietzmann, had already envisioned a 'fateful' war to be expected between Japan and the United Kingdom in a memorandum composed during the Sudetenland crisis in late summer 1938. In this memorandum, the main topic—Japan's conquest of Singapore—was deemed a lost battle for the time being 'unless Japan was faced with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity because Britain's troops were committed elsewhere.'<sup>21</sup>

Erich Raeder, then commander-in-chief of the Navy, had received a personal copy of the memorandum, and he apparently thought that this moment had come. In his briefing to Hitler on December 27, 1940, Raeder made the case for clearly shifting the war effort to Britain as the main adversary,

and for strongly urging the Japanese to take Singapore, postponing Operation Barbarossa to when the British were defeated. However, Hitler could not be swayed, and both proposals met with thinly veiled rejection.<sup>22</sup> Raeder did not give up easily though, instructing Wenneker to champion his cause with the Japanese—albeit to no avail.<sup>23</sup> This setback put a spotlight on the two shortcomings of the German Naval Warfare Command: The Command was a lightweight in the internal 'balance of power' of the Nazi state, and did not have enough influence on Hitler to lure him away from one of his 'favourite pet projects'. Also, the Command had failed to clearly identify the priorities as set by the Japanese sister force, for which the U.S. was the main adversary. In contrast, the German Naval Warfare Command's focus was primarily on the United Kingdom. What is more, Germany completely misjudged the extent of the Imperial Japanese Navy's dependency on U.S. raw materials, especially with regard to scrap metal and oil. In addition to facing the Royal Navy as a new enemy, and even without the U.S. entering the war against Japan, it would have been easy to cut the Japanese off from these supplies in the event of an attack on Singapore—a risk the IJN was not prepared to take.

When the German side once again pushed for active intervention in the war in the context of the June 1942 invasion of the Soviet Union, the IJN clearly expressed its de facto rejection of any form of coalition warfare. While,

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 483.

<sup>21</sup> BA-MA (Federal Archives, Military Division), RM8/1601, fol 1 ff, *Betrachtungen zum Kriegsfall Japan-England bzw. Japan angelsächsische Mächte* [Considerations on the Case of War between Japan and Britain or Japan and the Anglo-Saxon Powers], Vol. No. 39/38, gKdos, 27 Aug 1938.

<sup>22</sup> Wagner, *Situation Briefings*, p. 173 f.

<sup>23</sup> BA-MA (Federal Archives, Military Division), RM7/253, fol 40ff, *Japans Beteiligung am europäischen Krieg* [Japan's Participation in the European War], 174/41, gKdos, 13 March 1941.

contrary to Hitler's instructions, the Japanese had apparently been informed about Operation Barbarossa as early as mid-April, it took the Japanese Navy Command more than a week after the campaign had started to inform its attaché in Berlin accordingly. This hesitant approach alone made it clear that Japan was not comfortable with the issue, and that a positive response could not be expected. The IJN leadership announced that participation in the war against the Soviet Union, or any military intervention in Singapore, was not possible at the time, stating that both sides should commit their respective capabilities in 'their own areas of responsibility' and that Japan would make its own decision on when and where to intervene. Both sides should pursue their own plans, and there should merely be 'loose' cooperation. Germany's real problem was its hasty attack on the Soviet Union, the statement continued. Even a total victory for the German Army would not solve the IJN's actual problem, i.e., the rivalry with Anglo-Saxon navies. Rather, the IJN would run the risk of facing the consequences of an aggravating situation alone.<sup>24</sup> Of course, Vice Admiral Nomura Naokuni, Chief of the Inspection Commission visiting Berlin, was overly polite when conveying this unpleasant news to Rear Admiral Groos at the beginning of August. However, numerous sarcastic notes handwritten by the Commander of the German Naval Warfare Command in response to

Groos's report provide ample testament to the Commander's bitter frustration.<sup>25</sup> In view of the Navy's obvious and, at least in the foreseeable future, persistent inability to provide a truly significant counterweight to the IJN-perceived threat posed by the Anglo-Saxon naval powers, there was virtually no practical basis for devising a joint diversion strategy, let alone for implementing actual measures.

Still, the German Naval Warfare Command had a hard time accepting the bitter truth when in spring 1942, a third—and final—moment of hope passed. Apparently inspired by the 'Military Agreement between Germany, Italy, and Japan' finalised in January, and in the wake of the Japanese attack of December 1941, dreams of global cooperation began to blossom.<sup>26</sup> These hopes did not pan out, however, as

<sup>24</sup> National Archives, RG 457/SRNA 113-115 and 117. Chief of the Military Affairs Department to Japanese Navy Attaché Berlin. 440, 26 July 1941. The document and accompanying correspondence have been published in the Annex to *Marinebeziehungen*, p. 607-613.

<sup>25</sup> BA-MA (Federal Archives, Military Division), RM 7/94, *Groos' Bericht über Unterredung mit Vizeadmiral Nomura am 6.8.1941* [Groos's report on the meeting with Vice Admiral Nomura on 06 Aug 1941]. fol 407-412. Also published in: *Marinebeziehungen*, pp. 614-622.

<sup>26</sup> 'Britain's current weakened position in the Middle East provides a great historical opportunity for us to commit only a few divisions to reach, before long, a position that, with the help of the Japanese, will lead to the total collapse of the British key position at the tri-continent area, and have a decisive impact on the war. The redeployment of a few divisions, coupled with favorable strategic implications, will more than compensate for the lack of military presence on the Eastern Front, not to mention the economic benefits to result from capturing the oil fields in Iraq and from gaining access to Asian raw materials. When Germany and Japan shake hands at the Indian Ocean, ultimate victory should not be far off.' BA-MA (Federal Archives, Military Division), RM 7/253, fol 208-

there was no interest on the part of those actors who were supposed to provide ‘the few divisions’ required to advance into Iraq and the troops needed to cut off sea lines of communication in the northeastern Indian Ocean in order to achieve the anticipated ‘historical’ and ‘war-winning’ effect.

Neither the Wehrmacht High Command, the Army High Command, or Hitler, nor the Imperial Japanese Navy, or even the Japanese Army—which would have had to cross Northern India to give this ‘handshake’—were interested, and all had their minds set on different priorities.

For the rest of the war, all that remained was a thin trickle of technology exchange by means of submarines and wireless traffic. Updates on intended plans, or timely and realistic statistics on war casualties were not exchanged, and the provision of a Japanese base in Malaya to be used by German submarines from autumn 1943 was a mere footnote.

While Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany found themselves in a completely changed international system after World War II, some common denominators still existed. While still impacted by the enemy state clause and limited in their sovereignty as part of a restructured international system after the founding of the United Nations, both nations soon were enabled to rearm their military and integrated into U.S.-led alliance systems in the mid-1950s in the shadow of the emerging Cold War. Until 2015, Japan even renounced its right of collective self-defence. However, both nations still exercise extreme military restraint because

of their historical experience, one example being a very cautious approach to supporting UN-mandated out-of-area operations even after the end of the Cold War. It was not until 1991 that both states opted to support mine clearing operations in the wake of the Second Gulf War.

While Japan has been a UN member since 1956, the two Germanies—still divided at the time—did not join until 1973. Soon after rearming their respective militaries, both nations began to exchange defence attachés. In the 21st century, regular exchanges were initiated, to include the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue between foreign and defence ministers, and, more recently, the ACSA logistics agreement (Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, 2024), as well as occasional joint sea and air exercises.

After their turbulent shared history, the common interest of both countries in fundamental values such as democracy, the rule of law, multilateralism, and a rule-based international order based on the UN Charter is a highly encouraging outcome.

## Abbreviations and Bibliographic Notes

- BA-MA Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg i. Br. (Federal Archives, Military Division)
- KT B Skl. Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung 1939 – 1945 [War Diary, German Naval Warfare Command]. Published by Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber in collaboration with Hansjoseph Maierhöfer (ed.), Herford and Berlin, 1988 ff.

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# A Turning Point in Japan's Security Policy

## 1 Security Environment

Japan's new National Security Strategy (NSS) speaks of a security environment that "is as severe and complex as it has ever been since the end of World War II". Japan finds itself simultaneously faced with three nuclear powers – China, North Korea and Russia – that have all been enhancing their military capabilities and, at the same time, significantly intensifying their military activities in the vicinity of Japan. The Russian aggression against Ukraine has increased Japan's fear of a similar development taking place in the Indo-Pacific region, or more specifically, of attempts to change the status quo by force in the East and South China Seas.

### 1.1 China

From Japan's point of view, China's increasingly aggressive and threatening behaviour will remain the key challenge in the medium and long term. Both Japan's White Paper (Defense of Japan 2024) and the NSS refer to China as "the greatest strategic challenge". This is in particular due to its increasingly offensive behaviour in the East and South China Seas and the enormous build-up of its military capabilities. It has been said, for example, that China may possess 1,500 nuclear warheads by 2035.

Although Tokyo and Beijing are talking to each other at the highest level again, this has obviously not eased the tensions yet. For the first time in three years, a Japanese foreign minister

travelled to China in mid-April 2023. In the end, however, the exchange between Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi (November 2021 to September 2023) and his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang (December 2022 to July 2023) yielded few conciliatory results: Japan expressed strong criticism of China's military drills in locations near Taiwan in mid-2022 which resulted in several Chinese missiles falling into Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) – only 80 km away from inhabited islands. Those Chinese missiles had been fired in response to a visit to Taipei by the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. In a face-to-face meeting, Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi reportedly said that China's behaviour was even more ruthless than the missile tests by Kim Jong-un.

### 1.2 North Korea

In addition to the above, the threat posed by North Korea through the Kim regime's continued pursuit of its missile and nuclear programme remains present in Japan. With more than 100 missile tests since 2022, during which a number of missiles crossed Japanese islands or landed in Japan's EEZ, North Korea has taken advantage of the ongoing gridlock in the UN Security Council. When it comes to Japan's defence policy, Japan must assume that North Korea is able to reach large parts of the country with nuclear missiles – presumably also by nuclear-capable un-

manned underwater drones – and that it has been working to penetrate the US-Japanese missile defence system. An atomic bomb test by North Korea expected for 2022 has still not been carried out, presumably due to Chinese influence. The NSS, therefore, describes North Korea as posing “an even more grave and imminent threat to Japan’s national security than ever before”.

### 1.3 Russia

Japan notes with deep concern that Russia, with its attack on Ukraine and the fact that it has “shaken the very foundation of the international order”, clearly shows “that it does not hesitate to resort to military forces to achieve its own security objectives”. Russia is “accelerating its military activities” with a massive military build-up in what Japan considers its Northern Territories. This is due to the fact that the Sea of Okhotsk is an extremely important area, given that this is where Russia’s strategic nuclear submarines are stationed. In the NSS, Japan differentiates between the security situation in Europe – where the threat posed by Russia is “significant and direct” – and the situation in the Indo-Pacific region, where Russia’s activities are “of strong security concern” for Tokyo. Japan is also concerned about Russia’s strategic cooperation with China, which takes place, for example, in the form of joint naval or air force exercises. Although Russia is not perceived as a direct threat, it raises major security concerns.

## 2 Strategic Orientation

In December 2022, in light of Japan’s increasingly fragile security environment, the Japanese Cabinet approved the three most important national security documents, which had been updated ahead of schedule: the new National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the medium-term Defense Buildup Program. Taken together, the contents of these documents represent the biggest turning point in Japan’s security policy since the end of World War II.

With the new NSS, Japan pursues a comprehensive security approach, which considers economic security as an integral element and takes into account factors “such as supply chain vulnerabilities [...] and leadership struggles over advanced technologies”.

Heralding a turning point in security policy, Japan in particular aims to:

- establish counterstrike capabilities to be able to defend against attacks by guided missiles and to hit the bases of those missiles as well as enemy command centres;
- increase its defence budget to around 2% of the country’s GDP within the next 5 years, making it the second largest item in the national budget;
- relax arms export guidelines;
- create an ‘active cyber defense’ with active capabilities against attackers, and
- establish a joint command for the stringent command and control of joint operations.

With these measures, the Japanese government has taken steps to implement necessary actions that stem from its

perception of a changed security threat situation in the region. At the same time, with the aforementioned publications, Japan also underlines its clear political orientation towards the United States and the West in general.

Japan pursues the following security objectives:

1. to create a security environment that does not tolerate unilateral changes to the status quo by force;
2. to deter unilateral changes to the status quo and any such attempts as well as to ensure immediate response capabilities in order to bring situations under control at an early stage, and
3. to disrupt and defeat invasions of Japan, primarily with Japan's own forces.

### 3 Military Objectives

In order for Japan to meet its security objectives and respond to the current threat situation, its military objectives comprise the following areas:

- the reinforcement of its defence capabilities and defence architecture. As determined in 2018, Japan is expanding its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in order to establish a 'Multi-Domain Defense Force' with the aim of being able to conduct 'cross-domain operations'. This will serve to integrate all capabilities of traditional services such as the army, air force and navy with those related to new fields such as the cyber, space and electromagnetic domains into one net-

work, ensuring efficient use of all capabilities by exploiting synergy effects;

- the strengthening of the cornerstone of its deterrence and defence – the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-U.S. Alliance: This includes planning and coordination capabilities as well as infrastructure and the stationing of US forces in Japan;
- the multinational cooperation with "like-minded" partners and others, in particular with Australia, India, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the Republic of Korea, Canada, New Zealand and the ASEAN countries: Recent White Papers released by Japan's Ministry of Defense, for example, attach particular importance to security cooperation with the international community of shared values and see this as an essential contribution to deterrence. According to these strategic documents, the Russian aggression in Ukraine cannot be considered in isolation from the Indo-Pacific area.

### 4 Strategic Partners

The most important **pillars of Japan's foreign and security policy** are its alliance with the **United States**, the strengthening of ties with strategic partners in the **Indo-Pacific region** and in Europe, and its active commitment to **multilateral cooperation** (for 2023 and 2024, for example, it has been elected member of the UN Security Council).

Cooperation with the partners of the so-called **Quad** – a partnership consisting of the US, Australia, India and Japan that has evolved from a security policy forum to a format for security and prosperity in the Indian Ocean – is, therefore, becoming increasingly important for Japan. Japan generally welcomes the AUKUS alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, which strengthens their position towards China.

Besides its defence cooperation with the **United States**, Japan has been developing its closest cooperative relationship with **Australia** in the frameworks of the “Special Strategic Partnership” in the Indo-Pacific region and the renewed “Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation”, which both serve to deepen consultations at all levels. In addition, the conclusion of the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) has created the prerequisites for conducting exercises and carrying out rotation deployments in Australia.

**India** is becoming an increasingly important partner. For one thing, because of its involvement in Quad, but above all owing to the fact that 2023 has seen both the Japanese G7 Presidency and the Indian G20 Presidency. At the same time, India’s continued “neutral” stance on the issue of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine makes it clear once again that there are still major differences on foreign policy between India and Japan.

Together with partners such as the **United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy**, Japan is aiming to strengthen overall commitment to addressing security issues worldwide, in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific region. To this end, Japan is intensifying its involvement in cooperation frameworks such as the

“2+2 Meetings”, the mutual deployment of ships and aircraft, bilateral/multilateral training, exercises, and defence equipment and technology cooperation. Japan is also aiming to strengthen its involvement in cooperation projects by jointly monitoring UN sanctions against North Korea and by participating in counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

Furthermore, Japan is intensifying its cooperation with **NATO** and the **EU** in order to maintain the rules-based international order and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

By clearly condemning the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Japan is more and more turning towards **NATO** and Western allies. The fact that Japan is strengthening its strategic security cooperation with NATO becomes particularly evident in new domains – especially in the cyber field – and maritime security.

During the visit of NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg in early February 2023, both sides agreed on the swift adoption of the Individually Tailored Partnership Program (ITPP), increased dialogue and cooperation (including the Japanese participation in the NATO summit in Vilnius) and the opening of a NATO liaison office in Tokyo. The latter, however, is still being blocked by one member of the Alliance.

The relations between Japan and the **EU** are clearly linked to Brussels’ attitude towards the entire region. For the EU, the Indo-Pacific is gaining in importance with regard to global demographic, economic, geopolitical and climate policy developments.

In light of the threat posed by North Korea, Japan aims to strengthen trilateral cooperation with **South Korea** and the United States when it comes to

missile defence capabilities and an early warning system. In April 2023, the three countries agreed to conduct regular exercises to improve missile defence and underwater warfare.

As regards **Canada** and **New Zealand**, the focus is on consultations taking place at all levels, bilateral/multilateral training and exercises.

From a Japanese point of view, the Association of **South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is of central importance to the concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The unity of the ASEAN countries is important for Japan in order to ensure that the Southeast Asian states are more resilient against too strong a Chinese influence. In many ASEAN countries, Japan continues to be the largest investor, an important trading partner and long-term partner.

## 5 Strengthening of Capabilities

In order to meet its security and military objectives and to be able to defend against and defeat an invasion primarily with its own forces, Japan seeks to strengthen the following capabilities as defined in the new Defense Buildup Program:

1. **Stand-Off Defense Capabilities:** Strengthening these capabilities includes increasing the range of the domestically produced Type-12 anti-ship missiles from 200 km to about 1,000 km by 2026 as well as developing Hyper Velocity Gliding Projectiles and hypersonic missiles. It also includes the procurement of stand-off missiles from abroad, among them approximately 500–700 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States.
2. **Integrated Air and Missile Defense Capabilities:** Secondly, Japan plans to upgrade its missile defence systems, in particular the Patriot and Aegis systems. By 2027, the missile shield is to be able to intercept hypersonic weapons and drones. And by 2032, the entire air and space defence is supposed to provide defence against highly developed drones.
3. **Unmanned Defense Capabilities:** Japan is planning on developing its own drone systems – e.g. for air/underwater surveillance – and also unmanned surface and underwater vehicles by 2032. This refers to both combat and reconnaissance systems.
4. **Cross-Domain Operation Capabilities:** This undertaking includes investments in new domains (cyber, space, electromagnetism) as well as in traditional areas, with the strengthening of space-based reconnaissance and communication being one of them. The planned renaming of Japan's Air Self-Defense Force to 'Air and Space Self-Defense Force' by 2025 highlights the significance of this undertaking.
5. **Command-and-Control/Intelligence-Related Functions:** The Japanese MOD intends to procure about 50 satellites in order to be able to detect ground targets as well as approaching missiles more quickly and comprehensively. This satellite network would enable Japan's Self-Defense Forces to detect, locate and eliminate hypersonic missiles in the event of an enemy attack; it is supposed to be oper-

ational by 2027.

6. **Mobile Deployment Capabilities/Civil Protection:** Japan plans both to procure transportation assets and to establish a logistic hub in its southwestern region to increase the deployability of its forces.
7. **Sustainability and Resiliency:** By 2027, Japan's production of ammunition is to be increased and storage facilities are to be expanded. Due to the extensive capability buildup in all its services, the Japanese MOD has stated that it expects an additional requirement of approx. 40% over the next five years. Furthermore, it plans to construct bunkers for important command centres.

## 6 Defence Budget

Japan's defence spending increased by 21% to 8.4 trillion yen in the fiscal year of 2023/2024." This significant increase is the result of the major shift in the country's security and defence policy decided by the Japanese government in December 2022. The budget is part of the new medium-term financial planning for 2023–2027 – called Defense Buildup Program –, which provides for a total of 43 trillion yen (approx. 298 billion euros) for defence and thus 2% of the GDP; this is approximately 1.6 times the value of the previous period of 2019–2023.

## 7 Security Cooperation with Germany

Japan has a strong interest in expanding its security cooperation with Germany, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and in an enhanced German commitment in the Indo-Pacific region, especially since the Russian attack on Ukraine has further increased the need to cooperate among partners who share the same values.

The fact that Germany is consolidating its commitment to security policy in this volatile security environment is illustrated by the following examples:

- IPD (Indo-Pacific Deployment) 2021: Deployment of the frigate *Bayern*, including a formal port call, joint exercises and training as well as participation in the monitoring of UN sanctions against North Korea in November 2021;
- IPD 2022: Deployment of German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) aircraft, among them three Eurofighter jets, to Japan during Rapid Pacific 2022 as well as joint exercises;
- IPD 2023: Participation of the *Bundeswehr* (army forces and naval infantry) in the multinational exercise Talisman Sabre 23 in Australia.
- IPD 2024: Participation of the *Luftwaffe* in the bilateral German-Japanese exercise Nippon Skies and deployment of the Baden-Württemberg-class frigate *Baden-Württemberg* and the Berlin-class replenishment ship *Frankfurt am Main* to the Indo-Pacific (see also the chapters by Frank Gräfe and Axel

Schulz in this multi-author volume)

In November 2022, 2+2 talks were held at ministerial level for the second time. During these talks, Germany and Japan agreed on deepening their armaments cooperation and creating a legal framework for mutual logistic support – referred to as Japan-Germany ACSA (Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement) – in the future.

## 8 Conclusion

Japan's security environment is becoming increasingly fragile: China is acting more and more aggressively in the East and South China Seas; North Korea is behaving unpredictably and thus posing a major threat, particularly because of its missile technology and nuclear weapons; and Russia is both leading a war in Ukraine and increasing its cooperation with China in Japan's vicinity.

In view of this threat situation, Japan's adoption of the three most important national security documents, updated ahead of schedule, in December 2022 marked a fundamental change in the country's security policy. This is the biggest transformation of Japan's security policy since the end of World War II and provides, among other things, for an approximate doubling of Japan's defence budget to about 2% of its GDP within the next 5 years as well as for counterstrike capabilities to hit the bases of enemy missiles and enemy command centres.

In the past, Japan's security policy, as defined in its post-war pacifist constitution, had been exclusively focused on defence. Now it has taken a com-

pletely new direction towards a more pragmatic and realistic foreign and security policy based on the principle of deterrence.

With Germany being part of the global community (of values), its increasing commitment to security policy in the Indo-Pacific region is, therefore, of great importance. Thus, the deployment of *Luftwaffe* aircraft, including Eurofighters, to Japan during Rapid Pacific 2022 – following the deployment of frigate *Bayern* in November 2021 – sent a clear signal of Germany's continued commitment and received an extremely positive response. It was further proof that Germany is a credible and reliable partner when it comes to security matters. The recent participation of German Army and naval infantry forces, together with the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, in Exercise Talisman Sabre as part of IPD 23 in Australia in July/August and *Bundeswehr* deployments of air and naval forces as part of IPD 24 have also sent a strong signal.

Therefore, especially in view of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the fact that the war in Eastern Europe cannot be considered in isolation from the fragile security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, it is crucial that Germany continues to consolidate its commitment in this region by purposefully deploying capabilities. Since forces are tied up on NATO's eastern flank, it would only be appropriate to coordinate with other partners (also outside NATO/EU) who share the same values in order to prepare a medium-term plan in the form of a "road map for the Indo-Pacific" in a timely manner.



# Germany's Regional Presence in the Indo-Pacific from a Strategic Communications Point of View

## A Japanese perspective on German Indo-Pacific deployments and their implications

### What does “military presence” mean?

Presence is a word that has long been used in security documents, but in practice, its definition has been left vague. The German Indo-Pacific Guidelines were issued in 2020, and one of the objectives stated therein is to expand the country's presence in the region. At a German Japanese Defense Ministers' forum co-hosted by Japan's National Institute for Defense Studies and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation that took place in December of the same year, the Japanese side also expressed strong expectations for an increased German presence in the Indo-Pacific region, but did not specify what presence means.<sup>1</sup> The word literally means “the fact that someone or something is in a place” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). But what does presence mean from a military perspective? For example, it is sometimes used to convey the idea of “being present in a certain place,” as in increased presence, while at other times it is used to indicate a peacetime deployment overseas, as in forward presence. Either way, it is often used as a vague concept, such as

“to be present and deterring” in peacetime. This paper looks at the meaning of military presence from the perspective of strategic communications, focusing particularly on two symbolic German deployments to Japan (the port call by the German frigate *Bayern* to Tokyo in 2021 and the fighter jet visit to Chitose Air Base in 2024). In addition, it will examine the implications for Germany's military presence in Japan, especially in relations to the wider Indo-Pacific region.

### Previous attempts to define military presence

Presence is a vague term that is understood differently on a case-by-case basis. In 1995 the U.S. Department of Defense report titled “Directions for Defense”, the DoD's Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces defined presence as “the ability of the U.S. military forces to exert influence abroad during peacetime due to their proximity, their capability to exert in-

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<sup>1</sup> JMOD 2020.

fluence abroad.”<sup>2</sup> However, this definition is 30 years old, and it is doubtful that this has been the common understanding of U.S. governments ever since.<sup>3</sup>

Other attempts at defining military presence include the one by the U.S. Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, an authoritative glossary of terms. In this glossary, the U.S. military forward presence is described as “Maintaining forward-deployed or stationed forces overseas to demonstrate national resolve, strengthen alliances, dissuade potential adversaries, and enhance the ability to respond quickly to contingencies.”<sup>4</sup> However, this exclusive definition does not state what constitutes presence, making it difficult to understand the concept when considering its impact. Other studies have argued that military presence refers to the sustained, peacetime stationing of a foreign state's armed forces on the sovereign territory of another state, as part of a broader political or security arrangement<sup>5</sup> with the consent of the host state.<sup>6</sup> These descriptions have in common that they refer to armed forces remaining in the territory of another state only during peacetime, but no link to national interests is suggested. In this regard, a report issued by RAND (2012)<sup>7</sup> says – without explicitly referring to presence – that in order to pursue U.S. national interests, it is necessary for the U.S. military to go to var-

ious parts of the world, including East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, to show its presence/posture.

Perhaps it should be noted that the meaning and implications of the term presence differ by country depending on their strategic interests and primary focus in the Indo-Pacific region. Indeed, even if they are deploying the same assets, the strategic message and emphasis on the Indo-Pacific may vary among them. For example, the U.S. presence in Japan often refers to the U.S. forces stationed in the country. It signifies a strategic presence based on the Japan-U.S. Alliance and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, which harshly denounces China. In the case of Germany, on the other hand, although their actual military presence is backed by the Indo-Pacific Guidelines, the aim is not the same. While the Guidelines acknowledge that the center of gravity in the world has shifted toward the Indo-Pacific, Germany takes a softer approach to sustaining the rules-based international order in the region. Professor Nakamura of Nagoya University also states that Germany's choice to put importance on the Indo-Pacific region was inevitable considering its increase in geopolitical importance.<sup>8</sup> Hence, it seems that the definition of (military) presence is more complicated than one might think as it relates to differing national interests.

## Military presence from a Strategic Communications viewpoint

Even with such an uncertain definition, the term presence is used frequently in security studies. In fact, the 2019 U.S.

<sup>2</sup> Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces 1995: Gloss 7.

<sup>3</sup> Seki 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense 2017: 96.

<sup>5</sup> Schmidt 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Machain/Morgan 2013: 102

<sup>7</sup> Davis et al. 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Nakamura 2021.

Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report contains 20 mentions of “presence”, and the German Indo-Pacific Guidelines also mention it three times. In order to get a deeper understanding of what “military presence” means, this paper will examine it from the perspective of StratCom and try to clarify the implications for the Indo-Pacific region.

As mentioned by Hallahan et al., StratCom is “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission, and identified key aspects of communication.”<sup>9</sup> It deploys narratives to construct reality by influencing how people perceive and understand certain issues. This influence through assets becomes critically important with regard to military presence.

According to Professor Aoi, a scholar in the field of StratCom in Japan, StratCom has the ability to create reality through the transmission of narratives.<sup>10</sup> In other words, based on StratCom philosophy, presence itself becomes a strategic message that can be signaled not only to the target audience but also to neighboring countries. Along the same lines, Fujii analyzes naval diplomacy from a StratCom perspective and argues that military port calls are one of the most impactful tools to convey a strategic message.<sup>11</sup> The Allied Joint Doctrine for Strategic Communications issued by the NATO Standardization Office also points out that all military assets such as vessels and aircraft potentially leave a strong psychological impact along with their strategic message, due to their grand

appearance.<sup>12</sup> For example, the U.S. military is stationed in Japan, South Korea and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region with its most advanced assets in an attempt to achieve its own objectives. Arguably, the strategic message through stationing is directed at those countries who are not in favor of the U.S. Thus, from a StratCom perspective, military presence can be understood as “strategic messaging” through physical assets in the targeted area.

## Germany's messaging through its military presence

Based on this logic, the deployment of German military assets to the Indo-Pacific region enables Germany to showcase that it is indeed fulfilling its own announced guidelines while also delivering a strategic message through the presence of these assets. What, then, is the message entrusted to the German assets? As mentioned above, the strategic message is likely to be closely related to the country's national interests. Judging from the Indo-Pacific Guidelines issued in 2020, it is clear that Germany is committed to a rules-based international order and has a regional interest in peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region under a multilateral approach. In this context, the fact that the German frigate *Bayern* made a port call to Japan (for the first time in 20 years), a partner upholding common values in the Indo-Pacific region, is significant in demonstrating Germany's interest in and commitment to the region. On the occasion of the *Bayern*'s

<sup>9</sup> Hallahan et al. 2007: 3.

<sup>10</sup> Aoi 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Fujii 2024.

<sup>12</sup> The Allied Joint Doctrine for Strategic Communications 2023.

port call in Tokyo, Vice Admiral Schönbach, the Chief of the German Navy (2021-2022), gave a statement during a press interview with Kyodo News on 6 November 2021 and described Germany's intention as follows:

First, I would like to thank our partners in the Japanese Navy for the wonderful welcome here in Tokyo. Germany, together with its allies, wants to demonstrate a greater presence in the Indo-Pacific. It's about flying the flag and demonstrating on the ground that Germany, alongside its international partners, stands for freedom of navigation and compliance with international law in the region. Key elements of our engagement in the Indo-Pacific are therefore security policy cooperation with our partners and our commitment to the rules-based international order.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Germany's vision echoes Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" initiative. FOIP is a vision proposed by Prime Minister Abe in 2016, which aims to "contribute to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region through the dissemination of universal values such as the rule of law [and] freedom of navigation."<sup>14</sup> Germany's increased military presence in Japan is considered to have a synergistic effect in demonstrating a bilateral cooperative stance in relation to Japan's FOIP. Thus, the strategic message of the German military delivered through its naval presence can be read as a willingness to further deepen its cooperation with countries that share common values, namely Japan.

However, the 9,048 km of geographical distance between Germany

and Japan may be a barrier to realizing frequent visits and joint training opportunities. It is necessary to recognize that this geographical distance between the two countries inevitably results in different military-strategic priorities. As the war between Russia and Ukraine continues, Germany needs to prioritize the stability of Europe over the Indo-Pacific region. In fact, Germany's first National Security Strategy, issued in 2023, identified Russia as the "greatest threat" and expressed Germany's determination to play a role in European and global peace and stability in the face of radical changes in the security environment.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the significance of actually dispatching assets to the Indo-Pacific remains profound. Apart from the effect of improved interoperability through joint training, the ability to materialize strategy through such exchanges is attracting attention, which explains the recent increase in the number of European countries deploying assets to Japan.<sup>16</sup> In fact, from Europe alone, naval vessels from Italy, France, the U.K., Germany, and the Netherlands made port calls throughout Japan in 2024. Rear Admiral Axel Schulz, commander of the German Navy's Task Force, led the Indo-Pacific Deployment 2024, which included a port call in Tokyo in August 2024. During the welcoming event for the German frigate *Baden-Württemberg*, he emphasized that "[o]ur mission is to strengthen ties with like-minded countries by making our involvement in the Indo-Pacific region visible and to prevent confrontation before it happens."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Schönbach 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2023: 2.

<sup>15</sup> Yomiuri 2023.

<sup>16</sup> NATO 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Sankei 2024.

As for fighter jets and aircraft, the Japanese-German bilateral exercise Nippon Skies took place in Chitose Air Base in July 2024, and multilateral drills attended by air forces from Japan, Germany and Spain were also held on the same occasion and for the very first time.<sup>18</sup> According to Japanese Defense Minister Kishi's announcement, the frequent port calls and flights from Europe that have taken place in recent years symbolise the strong bond between the European partners and embody the fact that the centre of gravity is shifting to the Indo-Pacific.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, the views of Japan and Germany on the Indo-Pacific do not coincide in everything. Germany's commitments in the Indo-Pacific are not primarily meant to counter the Chinese threat, but rather to engage in diversified issues such as environmental policy, climate change, economic cooperation, infrastructure investment and digitalisation of the region.<sup>20</sup> This ambivalent policy approach has also been reinforced in the German government's official China Strategy of the Federal Government, which identifies China simultaneously as an "a partner, competitor and a systemic rival."<sup>21</sup> Japan, on the other hand, labels Chinese assertive actions in the East and South China Sea as unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force.<sup>22</sup> Yet, despite minor differences in the way in which both countries perceive the People's Republic of China, the policies of both Germany and Japan have much in common in terms of principles, such as

the promotion of universal values, the spread of democracy, and freedom of navigation.

Indeed, the Japanese side is welcoming visits of European partners to the Indo-Pacific region to bolster and enforce the FOIP idea. Therefore, while each side is pursuing their national interests based on the respective views of the "Indo-Pacific," the German military's presence there makes an important contribution to peace and stability in the region and corresponds well with Japan's vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

## Conclusion

As the geopolitical importance of the Indo-Pacific is expected to increase in the future, it is in the interests of Germany and the other European powers to continue their military presence in the region. At the same time, Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the drastic deterioration of the security environment in Europe have shifted the focus of Europe's militaries, politicians and the public security discourse back to the defence of the European continent. Trying to balance their security efforts in Europe with the commitments that are necessary to sustain their military presence in the Indo-Pacific and to promote peace and stability in the region will very likely be a severe challenge for Germany and Japan's other European partners. From a Japanese perspective, an overall balance of interests that recognises the significance of the Indo-Pacific region would be very desirable indeed.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not those

<sup>18</sup> JASDF 2024.

<sup>19</sup> JMOD 2021a, 2021b.

<sup>20</sup> The Federal Government 2020.

<sup>21</sup> The Federal Government 2023: 10.

<sup>22</sup> JMOD 2024.

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# German-Japanese Cooperation on Arms Development and Procurement

## Strengthening defence policy ties between Germany and Japan

For approximately half a decade, German foreign and security policy has aimed to diversify Germany's bilateral relations, to expand relations with countries that are located in the Indo-Pacific region and to foster cooperation with so-called partners with shared values. In this context, strengthening 'security and defence cooperation with partners in the region' is one of the central objectives of the German Federal Government, as outlined in Germany's key policy document concerning this geographic region – the Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

Japan ranks among the principal partner states in this regard, as cooperating with Japan's military is a main focus of Germany's foreign and security policy approach to the Indo-Pacific. Importantly, bilateral cooperation between Tokyo and Berlin satisfies the normative provisions of German foreign and security policy.<sup>2</sup> In a keynote speech given in 2020, Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer underpinned the importance of pursuing 'closer cooperation on defence and security' which 'will bring to life the multilateralism that is so important to

us, strengthening the partnership with our friends in Australia, Japan, South Korea or Singapore.'<sup>3</sup> In light of Germany's interest to strengthen security and defence policy relations with Japan, numerous exercises have taken place involving both the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and the *Bundeswehr* (see, for example, the chapters by Frank Gräfe and Axel Schulz), and various bilateral agreements have been reached during the last decade. Many of these agreements have important implications for the specific aspect of bilateral relations covered in this chapter: cooperation on arms development and procurement.

Examples involve the signing of the 'Agreement concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology' (ATDET) in 2017,<sup>4</sup> the 'Agreement on the Security of Information' in March 2021, the first German-Japanese inter-governmental consultations in March 2023 and the signing of an 'Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement' (ACSA) in January 2024. The signing of the first-mentioned agreement was particularly significant because it es-

<sup>1</sup> The Federal Government 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Schönbach 2021; Heiduk 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2019: 440.

established a legal framework for the import and export of defence equipment and technology. Subsequently, the 'Agreement on the Security of Information' provided the basis for the exchange of classified information between government authorities and companies in Germany and Japan, thus enabling both countries to carry out in-depth discussions about sensitive technologies and to intensify cooperation on security matters.<sup>5</sup> The signing of this document thus laid a crucial foundation for any attempt to step up on defence industrial cooperation. The March 2023 government consultations were another important step because in their closing statement, both sides agreed to ease the legal framework for further German Indo-Pacific deployments and joint military projects and also discussed plans to deepen arms cooperation.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the signing of the ACSA with Germany aimed at promoting closer cooperation between the JSDF and the *Bundeswehr* and facilitated 'the smooth and prompt provision of supplies and services between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Germany'.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Germany joined the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, India and Canada in the group of principal defence cooperation partners with whom Japan has established such an agreement.<sup>8</sup> As these statements and agreements as well as the interviews conducted by the author of this text with representatives from the business world and economic associations

clearly demonstrate, there are substantial policy interests on behalf of the Japanese and German political leadership in strengthening defence cooperation, including arms development.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that cooperation with partner states in the Indo-Pacific region can be mutually beneficial, both for the governments and the industries of the involved countries, has already been proven by a significant collaboration between an important German defence company and another regional partner. *Rheinmetall Defence Australia*, subsidiary of the German Rheinmetall Group, has established a complex production chain for the construction of infantry fighting vehicles in Australia involving technology transfer to the benefit of Australia as well as scaling effects for the German defence company. With the production capacities in place, *Rheinmetall Defence Australia* has produced large numbers of Combat Reconnaissance Vehicles (Boxer CRVs) for the Australian military and has secured a contract with the *Bundeswehr* to supply the German army with large numbers of a derivative model (*schwerer Waffenträger Infanterie Boxer*). Furthermore, *Rheinmetall* has also entered into a joint venture with Australian-owned NIOA, the leading supplier of weapons and munitions to the Australian Defence Force.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of Japan and Germany, however, an examination of arms projects of the recent past reveals that policy ambitions have so far not been matched by practical project implementation – neither regarding collabo-

<sup>5</sup> Federal Foreign Office 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Bundesregierung 2023; Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Portugall 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 25 April 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Rheinmetall 2024; Bundeswehr 2023; Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 25 April 2025.



**Fig. 1:** During the late 2010s, Japan heavily advertised the Kawasaki P-1 for export. Among others, the P-1 was displayed at the ILA Berlin 2018. From left to right: German MoD Official; Alexander Maus (Armament Attaché in Tokyo since 2024); Captain Matthias Schmidt; Colonel Karsten Kiesewetter (Defence Attaché in Tokyo 2019-2023); Takeshi Yagi (Ambassador of Japan to Germany 2016 to 2020); Colonel Kazuhiro Kuwahara (Defence Attaché in Berlin); Colonel Mathias Reibold (Defence Attaché in Tokyo 2016-2019); additional guests at the ILA 2018 © German Embassy Tokyo.

ration on arms procurement involving the JSDF and the *Bundeswehr* nor regarding cooperation involving defence companies of the two countries. In line with this chapter's focus on the analysis of potential fields for cooperation in arms development, it would go far beyond its aim and scope to provide a comprehensive overview of all the projects involving German and Japanese stakeholders during the past decade. What the track record of the past ten years clearly shows, however, is the fact that the few successful arms deals – often involving systems of minor complexity, such as license production of Rheinmetall's 120mm smooth-bore technology, contributions by a

German company to Japanese aviation companies' supply chains or the use of Heckler and Koch small arms by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) – have been overshadowed by various high-profile projects that have not come to fruition. Examples involve Japan's decision not to participate in the European-led Future Combat Air System during the latter half of the 2010s, the lack of success in translating discussions about the introduction of Atlas Elektronik's anti-torpedo torpedo *SeaSpider* on the Japanese market into project realisation or Japan's ill-fated attempt to promote the Kawasaki P-1 maritime patrol aircraft to the *Bun-*



**Fig. 2:** Expansion of German – Japanese defence industrial relations is not only a national interest of Germany but expanding the relations between Japan and NATO member states is also an important alliance consideration. The photo shows the visit of NATO General Secretary Mark Rutte to Japan in April 2025. From left to right: General Secretary Mark Rutte, German Armament Attaché Alexander Maus and German Ambassador to Japan, Petra Sigmund © German Embassy Tokyo.

*deswehr*.<sup>11</sup>

It is important, however, to keep in mind that following decades of self-imposed de-facto isolation and a negative image associated with arms exports, Japan's defence sector is still in the beginning of its internationalisa-

tion process.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, despite some early setbacks both on the bilateral and international level,<sup>13</sup> Japan has also accomplished numerous achievements in the reform of its defence industry, and Germany and Japan have successfully established and improved

<sup>11</sup> Reibold, Mathias (Colonel (ret.)), defence attaché at the German embassy in Tokyo (2016-2019), interview with the author on 07 May 2025; Funke, Gerald (Lt. General): head of Division Planning I in the German MoD (2016-2021), interview with the author on 10 June 2025; interview with an anonymous trading company in Japan on 27 June 2025; Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 05 May 2025.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of Japan's export restrictions during the 1960s and 1970s and the Abe administration's efforts to reform the defence industry and to loosen restrictions, see for example, Oros 2008: 90-121; Sakaki/Maslow 2020; Ogi 2025.

<sup>13</sup> On the international level, Japan, among others, failed to secure the 2016 deal on the sale of conventional submarines with Australia or the sale of the Kawasaki P-1 maritime patrol aircraft to Great Britain (Soble 2015).

relations and dialogue formats involving economic and government stakeholders.<sup>14</sup> As far as Japan's domestic dimension is concerned, examples involve Japanese government agencies pro-actively facilitating defence industrial relations between Japan's defence sector and foreign companies and governments and Japanese government policies addressing issues such as the development of industrial norms in accordance with international standards and the need to foster companies specialised in the production of military equipment.<sup>15</sup> Years of effort on behalf of the Japanese government have not been without success. As regards the structures and processes of Japan's defence sector, obstacles impeding international collaboration are slowly being overcome, and the degree of internationalisation among Japanese companies involved in producing defence equipment has increased over the past years. Even more conservative corporations have opened up, and several companies have set up special departments designated for international business relations.<sup>16</sup> As far as concrete results of Japan's internationalisation strategy are concerned, important milestones involve the 2020 agreement

between the government of the Philippines and Mitsubishi Electric Corporation on the delivery of four air surveillance radar systems, which was the first case of an overseas transfer of finished equipment since the establishment of the *Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology* in 2014, and the announcement of the British-Japanese-Italian Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) in December 2022.<sup>17</sup> Japan may not have had much experience in international arms cooperation in the past but is making progress, especially with the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom, but also with other states.<sup>18</sup> As the political and economic environment is showing signs of positive change, the following sections will go on to discuss fields with significant potential for defence industrial cooperation between Germany and Japan.

## Potential for cooperation in arms procurement and development

For half a decade, interaction between Germany and Japan in the arms procurement and development sphere has been increasing slowly but steadily. As the Japanese government has taken measures to improve the opportunities for internationalisation of its defence sector, so has Germany with regard to Japan. Important examples involve policy makers encouraging companies from the defence sector to engage with Japan as a partner with shared values

<sup>14</sup> For example, in 2013, the German-Japanese Defence and Security Technology Forum – which has since greatly expanded and become an annual event – was held for the first time in Tokyo. During the early 2020s, the position of a defence armament counsellor was established at the defence attaché office at the German embassy in Tokyo (interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 05 May 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2023: 13; Japan Ministry of Defense 2024a: 457.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with authoritative, anonymous sources on 25 and 29 April 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2024a: 469, 476, 483–484.

<sup>18</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2024a: 479ff.

and the establishment of the position of an armament attaché as part of the defence attaché office at the German embassy in Tokyo in August 2024.<sup>19</sup> As both governments are actively taking measures to improve the environment in which defence industrial interaction is taking place, the question remains: which areas are of particular interest with regard to German-Japanese arms procurement and development and promise the greatest success in project implementation?

While there are many challenges that characterise interaction between foreign companies and Japan's large, conservative corporations – for example the fact that for many of these large corporations, production of defence equipment is just a side business – such limitations often do not apply to the same degree to smaller, younger companies. Some of these smaller companies and start-ups are heavily involved in high-tech fields such as electro-magnetism, cyber and space – areas of potential interest for cooperation between Germany and Japan.<sup>20</sup> For two liberal-minded democracies that aim to maintain the global rules-based order and that are committed to peaceful conflict resolution, the weaponisation of both space and cyberspace, as demonstrated by the attacks against the ViaSat's KA-SAT satellite network at the beginning of Russia's full-scale

invasion of Ukraine,<sup>21</sup> is a significant challenge that needs to be addressed. As a report by the European Parliamentary Research Service outlines,

a key concern is the potential for military confrontation among major powers, fuelled by the involvement of new space players, the increase in space objects and dual civil-military space services, and armed forces' growing reliance on space systems. The increasing counterspace capabilities and the presence of kinetic, non-kinetic, and electronic weapons, along with ever-growing cyber operations and the potential for nuclear activities in space, pose inherent security threats.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to major space powers, such as the U.S., China, Russia and, more recently, an increasingly invested India, which have developed numerous space and counterspace capabilities for military application, Germany and Japan lag significantly behind in various aspects of space-related security.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, both Germany – mainly through its contributions to European initiatives – and Japan are important civilian actors in space-faring. Both the European Space Agency and Japan are capable of launching to all Earth orbits, a capability that as of 2022 only six space powers possess.<sup>24</sup> With *Galileo* and *Kopernikus*, the EU operates navigation and earth observation pro-

<sup>19</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 05 May 2025.

<sup>20</sup> Kiesewetter, Karsten (Colonel), Defence Attaché at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany Tokyo (2019–2023), interview with the author on 23 November 2021; interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 25 April 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Kerttunen et al. 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Pataki 2025: 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Secure World Foundation 2025; Pataki 2025: 3, 7; Aliberti 2023.

<sup>24</sup> National Space Intelligence Center and the National Air and Space Intelligence Center 2023: 7.

grammes and is in the process of building secure satellite communication infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> Japan is a long-standing civilian space power that benefits from very specialised robotics technology relevant for space-faring and is in possession of some capabilities in outer space and significant space situational awareness capabilities.<sup>26</sup>

For the future, Japan's *Space Security Initiative*, which was released in June 2023, demands to strengthen Japan's space security efforts and its 'space industrial base and its competitiveness'.<sup>27</sup> The strategic document also explains Japan's 'objective for space security',

recognizing that outer space has become an arena for intensifying geopolitical competition over diplomacy, defense, economic, intelligence, science and technology, and innovation, we will strengthen cooperation with our ally, like-minded countries, and others while promoting unified efforts by our space-related ministries and agencies to ensure the above-mentioned two space security. Furthermore, we will strengthen domestic and international public-private partnerships to promptly incorporate achievements of the private sector's technological innovations and achievements in the space sector.<sup>28</sup>

Germany is equally expanding its space capabilities: the *Bundeswehr* estab-

lished its Space Situational Awareness Centre in July 2021 and, as pointed out by Anna Christmann, aerospace coordinator of the Federal Government during the Scholz administration, Berlin aims at strengthening its capabilities to reduce one-sided dependencies on foreign countries in the space dimension.<sup>29</sup> Given the strategic interests of both countries and Germany's objective to pursue a foreign and security policy that is values-based and interest-driven,<sup>30</sup> engaging a like-minded partner like Japan to cooperate on space and space security matters appears mutually beneficial.

In summary, the space dimension appears to be a very suitable field of cooperation for Germany and Japan as both countries aim to build up their respective capabilities. Such an undertaking could be very beneficial both for states as well as for individual companies, as Sabine von der Recke, member of the board of OHB, one of Germany's most significant space and technology groups, points out: 'There is still much potential to understand German space technologies as a strategic and transactional asset to position Germany geopolitically,' she said during a panel discussion in 2024.<sup>31</sup>

Closely related to space and defence is air defence, another topic with potential for Germany and Japan to join forces in arms procurement and development. In Europe, the war in Ukraine has demonstrated the severe air threat that units on the ground and critical infrastructure are confronted with. This includes not just cruise missiles, ballistic missiles and glide bombs but

<sup>25</sup> European Union Agency for the Space Programme (no date); Christmann 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Vijayakumar 2020; Samson/Cesari 2025.

<sup>27</sup> The Space Development Strategy Headquarters, Japan 2023: 2.

<sup>28</sup> The Space Development Strategy Headquarters, Japan 2023: 4.

<sup>29</sup> Prietzel 2022; Christmann 2024.

<sup>30</sup> The Federal Government 2023: 20.

<sup>31</sup> Recke 2024.

also large quantities of uncrewed aerial systems.<sup>32</sup> In East Asia, Japan faces not only Russia's military's arsenal but also that of the Chinese People's Liberation Army – which is in possession of the largest aviation force in the region and a significant missile force – and North Korea, which is continuously advancing its missile programme.<sup>33</sup>

Consequently, both Germany and Japan aim to strengthen their air defence capabilities. Germany claims a leadership role in the European Sky Shield Initiative which aims at improving Europe's defence against various air-based threats. As part of this initiative, short and medium range systems that are currently in use are to be replaced by modern systems such as IRIS-T.<sup>34</sup> Japan is also expanding its air defences. As the Japanese Ministry of Defence points out,

in recent years, along with the improvement of the capabilities of ballistic missiles, the emergence of hypersonic weapons has diversified, complicated, and advanced the airborne threat. To this end, Japan will fundamentally reinforce detecting, tracking, and intercepting capabilities, and also establish a system to enable unified and optimized operation of various sensors and shooters through networks (...) [...] To this end, [the] National Defense Strategy, etc. define [...] "Integrated Air and Missile Defense" as follows: Japan will intercept missile attacks using its missile defense network

which will have been reinforced both in quality and in quantity (...).<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, Japan's *National Defense Strategy* lists integrated air and missile defence as one of seven key functions and capabilities for national defence and thus a principal area to which Japan aims to dedicate research and development efforts according to the *Defense Technology Guideline 2023*.<sup>36</sup> In light of the current geostrategic situation and a similar threat environment, there may be a strong incentive for Berlin and Tokyo to look for opportunities to collaborate on the procurement or development of air defence systems.

In addition to air defence, Japanese strategic documents also identify stand-off defence capabilities as another of the seven key functions requiring further research and development efforts.<sup>37</sup> The reason why Japan is continuously more interested in deep-strike capabilities can be traced back, as in the above-mentioned case of air defence systems, to the deteriorating security environment and increasing missile threat posed by Japan's neighbours.<sup>38</sup> As the Japanese MoD points out,

in the area surrounding Japan, there have been significant advances in missile-related technologies, including hypersonic weapons, and practical skills for missile operations, such as saturation attack[s]. Looking ahead, if Japan continues to rely solely upon ballistic missile defenses, it will become increas-

<sup>32</sup> European Commission 2025; Bundeswehr 2025; Skiba 2024; Atalan and Jensen 2025.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of Defense 2024: 59, 63-65; Nikitin 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Arnold 2022; Trams 2024; Vieth 2025.

<sup>35</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2024b.

<sup>36</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2023: 7.

<sup>37</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2023: 7.

<sup>38</sup> Smith 2019: 124.

ingly difficult to fully address missile threats with the existing missile defense network alone. To this end, [the] National Defense Strategy, etc. define that Japan will acquire counterstrike capabilities to enable Japan to mount effective counterstrikes against the opponent's territory. Counterstrikes are done as a minimum necessary measure for self-defense.<sup>39</sup>

Once more, Japan and Europe face a similar threat environment as developments, such as the European Long Range Strike Approach, are ongoing to expand the European militaries' deep precision strike capabilities while facing authoritarian opponents who are not deterred by enormous loss of lives from pursuing their objectives by force.<sup>40</sup> Whereas the example of the Taurus missile shows that difficulties for market entry persist, air-, sea- and ground-based deep precision strike systems will remain a highly relevant subsector in the future and a promising field for bilateral military-industrial cooperation to expand the capabilities of Germany's and Japan's military industries in a sector that used to be nearly exclusively the domain of the great powers.

In this context, defence organisations in both countries should think out of the box. Faced with a significant anti-access/area denial threat and an opponent's long-distance, high-precision strike capabilities, stand-off defence capabilities need to be highly mobile, flexible and have to include fire-and-forget elements.<sup>41</sup> Going be-

yond U.S. sea-based systems, such as the Tomahawk missile family, and Germany's currently favoured air-based delivery systems, which may find it difficult to operate from functional air bases once hostilities initiate – particularly in the Indo-Pacific theatre –, ground-launched missile systems may be a useful addition to the arsenals of Japan and Germany. Given that both countries already have extensive knowledge in missile production, for example regarding the RBS15 or the Type 12 surface-to-surface missile, a bilateral project aimed at developing a GLCM might be an idea worth pursuing.

Fields such as air defence, space and missile technology are also characterised by another feature that makes them attractive for cooperation with Japan: they are already very international. In contrast, while various concrete collaboration projects concerning surface and subsurface technologies have been discussed in recent years between a leading German naval shipyard and relevant Japanese companies, so far not a single project has been carried out. Naval shipbuilding in general has turned out to be a particularly difficult field for defence industrial collaboration. Apart from other issues such as the fact that shipbuilding programmes in Japan and Germany are structurally organised in a very different manner, it is the circumstance that both countries are in possession of strong, autonomous naval shipbuilding industries where economic and political actors have an interest in maintaining a large degree of sovereignty that makes cooperation difficult.<sup>42</sup> In

<sup>39</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2024b.

<sup>40</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2024b.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 12 June 2025.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 05 May 2025.

industries that rely on international research and development and production chains, the potential for intercontinental cooperation can be expected to be significantly higher.

While naval shipbuilding may be a technological field less amenable to cooperation, underwater intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance may be an area that could offer great potential for collaboration. For Japan, establishing a recognised maritime picture – both above and under the surface – matters, not only because Japan is an island nation but because Japan's potential adversaries are capable of operating advanced submarines. Likewise, in the waters of northern Europe, there is a significant underwater threat.

Closely associated with this topic is the matter of protecting maritime critical infrastructure, which may be of great relevance for both countries.

In addition to kinetic and reconnaissance capabilities, military medicine may also be a field in which cooperation between Germany and Japan can provide substantial benefits for both parties. For many years, the Bundeswehr Institute of Radiobiology at the Bundeswehr Medical Academy and Japan's National Defense Medical College have been collaborating on research projects related to nuclear contamination.<sup>43</sup> Research on (CB)RN-related issues benefits from the fact that both Germany and Japan are part of the global West and both countries share their commitment to liberal, democratic values. In light of both countries' long-standing research cooperation in the (CB)RN field and the potential of modern technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), the question whether

technical solutions developed through bilateral cooperation may help to protect human beings merits an in-depth scientific discussion between the Bundeswehr Medical Service and its Japanese counterpart.<sup>44</sup>

## Potential for industrial cooperation with benefits for the defence sector

Apart from the potential that a more specifically military-focused cooperative approach may offer to both Japan and Germany, bilateral industrial cooperation involving dual-use technologies or what Japan's *Defense Technology Guideline 2023* calls 'important technology areas to implement functions and capabilities to gain superiority in each domain to defend our nation at all times' may also prove to be very beneficial for both countries and, implicitly, their defence sectors.<sup>45</sup> Production of dual-use goods is also of particular relevance for the Japanese industry, as many companies focused on dual-use technologies when Japan's strict arms export control policy was still in place, i.e. before its liberalisation during the era of Abe Shinzō, and when the Japanese government was still committed to the 1%-of-GDP ceiling on Japan's defence budget.<sup>46</sup> This is not to imply that the defence industries of each of the two countries should not take steps to ensure vital technological developments on their own. But a win-win cooperation can be achieved where the highly-developed industries of both

<sup>43</sup> Eder et alii 2020; Ito et alii 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Interviews with senior medical personnel in February 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2023: 24.

<sup>46</sup> Samuels 2008: 163.

countries can offer technological advantages that are complementary and may reduce development costs and time.<sup>47</sup>

The *Defense Technology Guideline* 2023 identifies ‘utilization of unused energy’ as one of twelve ‘important technology areas to defend our nation at all times’ and demands the development of technologies for energy generation, storage and projection.<sup>48</sup> Battery technology may indeed be one of these ‘functions and capabilities’ that are highly relevant for this defined ‘important technology area.’ Furthermore, it is an area where both countries are technologically advanced and may complement each other in a mutually beneficial way. Japan is one of the world’s leading countries in battery technology. From its early lead in lithium-ion batteries to nickel-manganese-cobalt oxide cells, solid state batteries, new-generation high-performance batteries and the recent exploration of sodium-ion battery technology, Japan is one of the global centres of battery innovation.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, as of 2022, approximately 97% of the global production of cathode materials and 99% of that of anode materials used in lithium-ion batteries is carried out in the People’s Republic of China, South Korea and Japan, with Sumitomo Corporation being one of the five principal producers.<sup>50</sup>

Germany, on the other hand, launched the ‘Battery Cell Production Germany’ initiative during the 2020s as

the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection (BMWK) aimed at consolidating battery activities in Germany and at ensuring the production of modern, high-performance and sustainably produced batteries. Among others, in order to foster investments, to strengthen the technological base for battery development and production and to achieve higher degrees of autonomy from imports in the battery field, the BMWK recognised battery cell production – both mobile and stationary energy – as a priority in the German government’s Climate and Transformation Fund.<sup>51</sup>

However, as experts point out, increasing the amount of lithium available in Europe will not be sufficient. It is also necessary to massively expand the capacities for refinement and production along the entire value chain.<sup>52</sup> In September 2024, for example, AMG Lithium opened Europe’s first lithium refinery in Bitterfeld-Wolfen, creating local capacities to refine battery-grade lithium hydroxide and, in turn, decreasing Germany’s and Europe’s dependence on extra-regional suppliers such as the People’s Republic of China and Australia.<sup>53</sup> The demand for further production of lithium in Europe is large as the European Union expects the EU-wide demand for lithium in 2050 to be 10-50 times higher than that of 2018. The EU also lists lithium as one of 22 critical raw materials for the EU defence industries.<sup>54</sup>

Li-ion battery technology is becoming a mature technology employed

<sup>47</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 25 April 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2023: 29.

<sup>49</sup> Batteries Europe 2023; Mineral Intelligence Limited 2023; TRENDS Research & Advisory 2025.

<sup>50</sup> Steiger, Hilgers and Kolb 2022: 11.

<sup>51</sup> Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz (no date).

<sup>52</sup> Steiger/Kolb 2022: 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> Damm 2024.

<sup>54</sup> Bobba et alii 2020: 68, 70.

a wide range of applications. It offers improved power and energy performance compared to the currently used lead-acid batteries. While Li-ion batteries are crucial for defence applications, their development and future uptake are primarily driven by the civilian demand for portable electronic devices, stationary energy storage and electric vehicles (EVs).<sup>55</sup>

As the European Union points out, lithium-ion technology can play a significant role in the defence sector. High-tech batteries are crucial elements in a wide range of security-relevant applications ranging from uncrewed systems to weapons and communications systems and space technologies.<sup>56</sup> For German (defence) industrial purposes, Japan's long-standing experience with (lithium-ion) battery technology may be particularly valuable as far as fire protection and the use in submarines is concerned.<sup>57</sup> Given that some companies in the German defence sector have already expressed interest in Japan's battery technology but cooperation has failed to emerge due to some of the reasons mentioned at the beginning of this chapter,<sup>58</sup> policymakers in Tokyo and Berlin should stress the importance and improve the reputation of exporting military and dual-use technologies among liberal-minded democracies to facilitate technological exchange. Germany, for its part, is particularly strong

in the field of hydrogen and fuel cell technology, its economic policies are driven by an extremely ambitious hydrogen strategy and, with its hydrogen fuel cell technology, it is one of the dominant countries in Europe's air independent propulsion market in advanced submarine technology.<sup>59</sup> Japan is likewise a global leader in hydrogen technology and has been a leading innovator in advancing the development of hydrogen-related technologies.<sup>60</sup> Currently, the German industry is still capable of offering a large selection of fuel cell modules that are highly efficient and could be potentially of interest to Japanese companies. A case-by-case analysis may reveal potential for cooperation.<sup>61</sup> To sum up, Germany's and Japan's respective expertise in lithium-ion and fuel cell technology could, in theory, be extremely beneficial for both countries.

Apart from battery and fuel cell technology, other areas of particular relevance in the civilian/dual-use field with potential implications for military use involve specific aspects of mechanical engineering and Cyber/IT. Both fields include technologies identified by Japan's Defense Technology Guideline 2023 as significant.<sup>62</sup> In mechanical engineering, this may involve metal additive manufacturing – a technological field in which German manufacturers are especially advanced. For Japan's industry and, by extension, Japan's defence sector, the German industry's ca-

<sup>55</sup> Bobba et alii 2020: 19.

<sup>56</sup> Marischka 2021; Dongguan Large Electronics Co., Ltd. 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 25 April 2025.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 24 April 2025.

<sup>59</sup> Huber 2021; Smutny 2023; Fuel Cells Works 2024; Garg 2024; Germany Trade & Invest (no date).

<sup>60</sup> Tochibayashi and Kutty 2024; Parkes 2024.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 25 April 2025.

<sup>62</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2023: 30ff.



**Fig. 3:** German armament attaché Alexander Maus is enjoying his visit to the DSEI Japan 2025 defence exhibition © German Embassy Tokyo.

pabilities in additive manufacturing may be an interesting alternative manufacturing option, especially as far as the low-volume production of very specific components is concerned.<sup>63</sup> As regards information technologies, Japan's economy has long been confronted with a struggling software development sector. Japanese software companies have significantly fallen behind international competitors and, as

Japan's software industry is not expected to recover, software solutions for Japanese clients largely have to be provided by foreign companies.<sup>64</sup> One of these software companies is the Walldorf-based, multinational software company SAP, which established its Japanese branch, SAP Japan Co. Ltd., in 1992; has since supplied Japanese clients with software solutions and contributed to globalising the Japanese

<sup>63</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 25 April 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Cole/Nakata 2014; Oxford Analytica 2019; Next Koding 2024.

economy and, in 2021, launched SAP.iO Foundry Tokyo as a global startup accelerator programme by SAP Japan.<sup>65</sup> In the future, IT and cyber technology from Germany may continue to provide Japanese clients with software solutions and, potentially, the information sector may offer some space for research cooperation to strengthen Japan's IT industry.

Ultimately, Japan's distinctive location and the *Galapagos Syndrome* that characterises certain parts of the Japanese economy have led to specialisations that may be of interest to the German industry on a case-by-case basis. As Hiroyuki Sugai points out,

Japan's geographic conditions have also contributed to the characteristics of Japanese industry. Japan has few natural resources, but does have a lot of natural disasters and is surrounded by the deep seas. These geographic conditions have motivated Japan to develop specific technologies such as energy-saving technologies, unmanned maritime vehicles, or remote sensing technologies.<sup>66</sup>

Given the German Navy's interest in uncrewed surface and subsurface systems, the German energy transition policy, which also affects the *Bundeswehr*, and the high relevance of sensor systems for military reconnaissance,<sup>67</sup> there may be many 'hidden' or at least not immediately obvious champions in Japan's industry whose technological expertise may be highly

valuable for any future industrial and technological cooperation with potential military implications.

## Japan and Germany: Potential for cooperation and concluding remarks

Despite the fact that up to now, German-Japanese defence industrial cooperation is still characterised by the lack of a major cooperation project, there are many signs that Japanese-German arms relations are making slow but gradual progress. In 2025, the Japan Association of Defense Industry (JADI) – an important player in research and facilitation of defence procurement, SJAC (The Society of Japanese Aerospace Companies) and 'The Shipbuilders' Association of Japan' (SAJ) will participate for the first time in the German-Japanese 'Defense and Security Technology Forum' in Tokyo.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, there is significant interest on behalf of government and economic stakeholders to continue the pursuit of bilateral cooperation.<sup>69</sup> As this chapter has shown, various technological fields could be of interest in this regard. Ideas about cooperation on air defence, deep precision strike weapons, space, cyber, drones and electromagnetism may have higher chances for success, while cooperation on highly complex systems that are affected by numerous military and civilian regulations, such as aircraft, is harder to realise. If Germany seeks to

<sup>65</sup> SAP News 2021; Deutsche Industrie- und Handelskammer in Japan (n.d.).

<sup>66</sup> Sugai 2016: 22.

<sup>67</sup> Bayer et al. 2022: 20-25; rpm 2022; Reim/Struck 2024; Mario W. 2024.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with an authoritative, anonymous source on 25 April 2025.

<sup>69</sup> Interviews with authoritative, anonymous sources on 24 April 2025, on 25 April 2025 and on 05 May 2025.

obtain Japan's participation in a multi-national, highly complex arms project, it would be recommendable to choose a project where key international partners already involved are countries with substantial prior cooperation experience in this regard, such as the United Kingdom.

Both Japan and Germany are countries with a capable industrial base. This has various implications. Except for few technological innovations in which cases the Japanese government may want to purchase specialised products that Japan's domestic industry cannot supply – as has been the case with Rheinmetall's autonomous unmanned ground vehicles –, Japan is not a market to which German defence companies can expect to export finished military hardware. While the success of every project has to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, the arms procurement and/or development projects that have been discussed in the main body of this text lead to the conclusion that under certain conditions the chances for success are much greater. Particularly, potential for German-Japanese arms cooperation involving the industries and the militaries of both countries may be found in

- the acquisition of niche products;
- the integration of new systems and cooperative use of existing systems;
- the purchase of systems of minor complexity, such as ammunition or gun barrels, and,
- most significantly, in the exchange of mutually complementary, highly advanced technologies and in the collaboration on the development of

such defence technologies. Bilateral defence industrial cooperation projects are much more likely to succeed if they target products that domestic industries in both countries have difficulty supplying on their own. At the same time, the respective technology must not be considered so essential that own domestic developments are prioritised over international cooperations.

Gaining technological benefits through complementary projects and cutting costs while closing technological gaps seems a promising approach to cooperation between these two industrial powers. Nevertheless, to secure a major arms cooperation project involving the defence industries of Japan and Germany – one that is comparable in size and complexity to the GCAP –, both political will and government facilitation will be essential. A project of such dimensions would have to be carried out top-down through processes which have to be coordinated by the state and directed by the leaderships of both countries.

For the immediate future, one of the above-mentioned fields of cooperation is of particular interest. Following a request by the government of Japan to be granted observer status in the OCCAR-managed MALE RPAS [medium-altitude, long-endurance remotely piloted air system] Programme (Eurodrone) in September 2023, Japan became an OCCAR Observer State later that year.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, the German defence industry has high hopes for future projects involving Japan and the

<sup>70</sup> OCCAR 2023; Hill 2024.

Eurodrone.<sup>71</sup> Japan and Europe cooperating on the acquisition, development and use of a principal reconnaissance and strike asset, such as the Eurodrone, would indeed be an important milestone in the development of an international defence industrial relation that has only just begun to unfold its potential.

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## Winning IT Specialists for the Armed Forces – Has Everything Been Tried?

The present paper is a follow-up from a GIDS/NIDS workshop held in January 2022 titled ‘German-Japanese Defense and Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and in Europe’. Although it mainly refers to the situation in Germany and Japan, the recommendations for action presented at the end of the paper are of a more general nature. This paper would like to provide food for thought, based mainly on plausibility instead of (empirical) proof.

As regards recruitment in any organisation, the demographic situation is of vital importance – especially in the military as alternative recruitment sources (like for example economic migration) are severely limited. The overall recruitment situation in both private and public organisations worldwide is currently extremely challenging. If we start to differentiate between organisations inside the public domain, we find more and more difficulties to fill not only existing vacancies, but to prepare for the retirement of the baby boomer generation at the same time. The armed forces are no exception to this development. For example, in the US, the Army only met 84.6%, the Navy 80.2% and the Air Force 89.7% of their respective recruiting goals in 2023.<sup>1</sup> In Germany and Japan the situation looks similar. In Germany, the average annual recruitment goal for the armed forces is around 20,000 to

21,000. Looking back at the past few years, one finds that 16,400 people were hired in 2020, 16,700 in 2021 and 18,800 in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Japan, too, has seen a continuing gap between authorised and actual personnel numbers (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned before, the demographic development, especially in Germany and Japan, will only worsen the situation (Fig. 2-5).

But demographics is not the only point to consider when it comes to recruiting. Looking at general trends in employment, the following main developments can be identified:

1. The labour market is shifting from an employer driven market towards a candidate driven market.<sup>4</sup> There is an increasing gap between people leaving the labour market due to retirement and the number of young people entering the labour market after school or university.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the supply side of the workforce is shrinking. For the moment, the measures that might compensate for the birth-related loss, such as creating more inclusive labour markets by mobilising the full potential

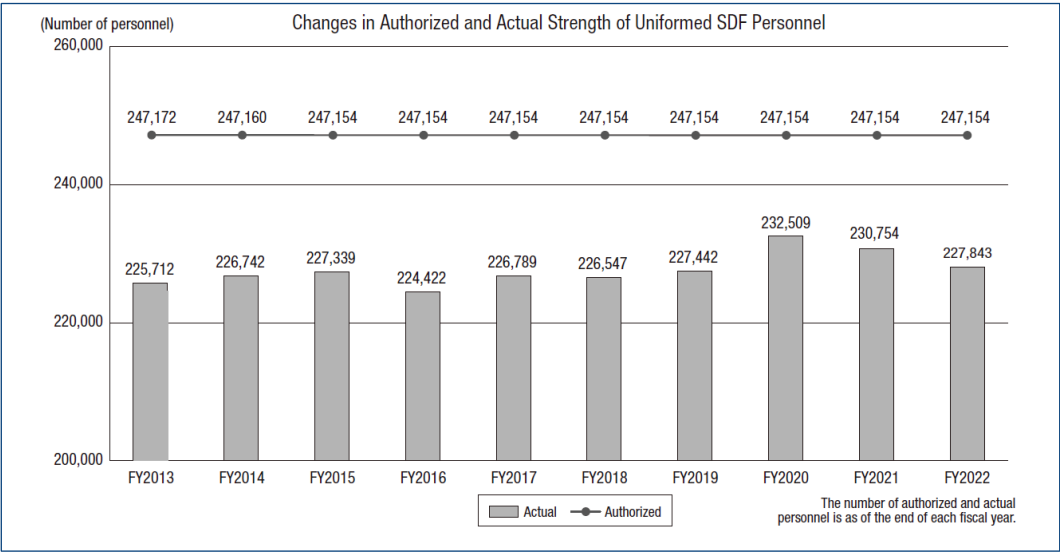
<sup>1</sup> Novelty et al. 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Bundesamt für das Personalmanagement der Bundeswehr 2023a.

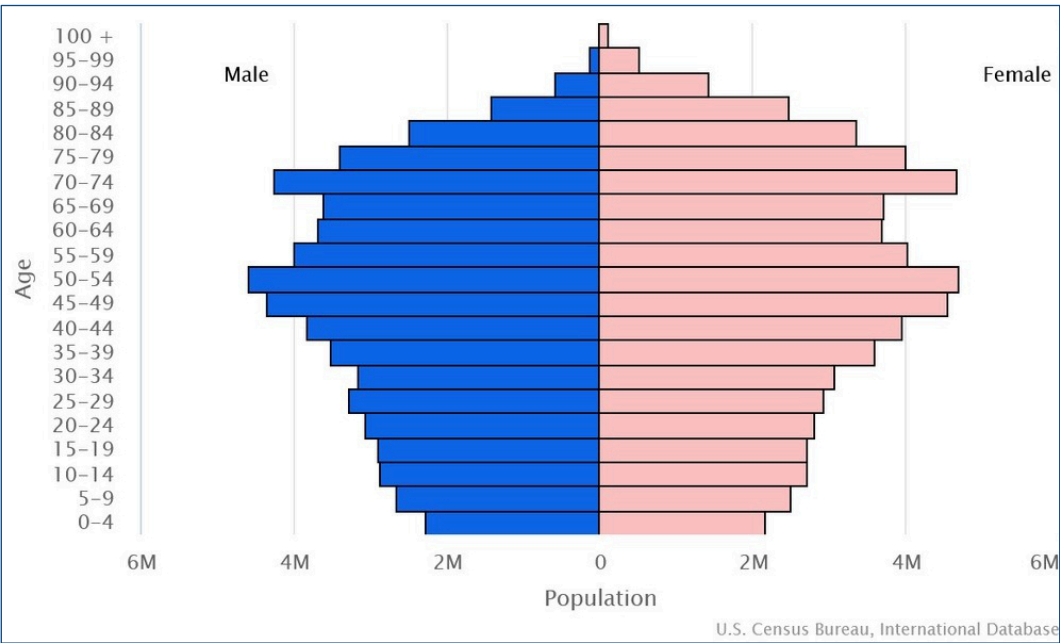
<sup>3</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense 2023: 238.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP 2021; Bloom et al. 2018.

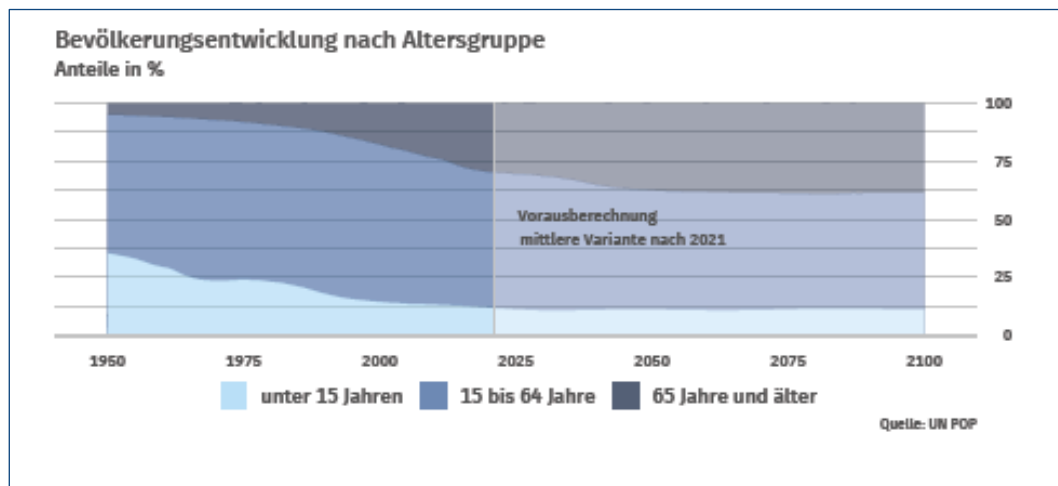
<sup>5</sup> Fuchs/Klinger 2020; Fuchs et al. 2017.



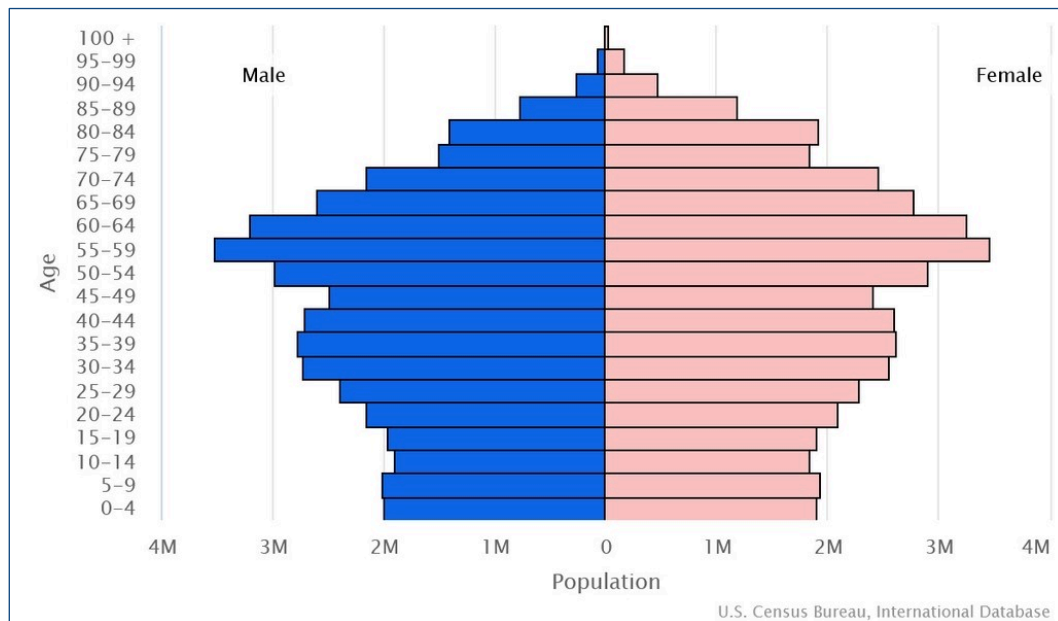
**Fig. 1:** Changes in Strength of the Japanese Self Defense Forces (Japan Ministry of Defense 2023: 238).



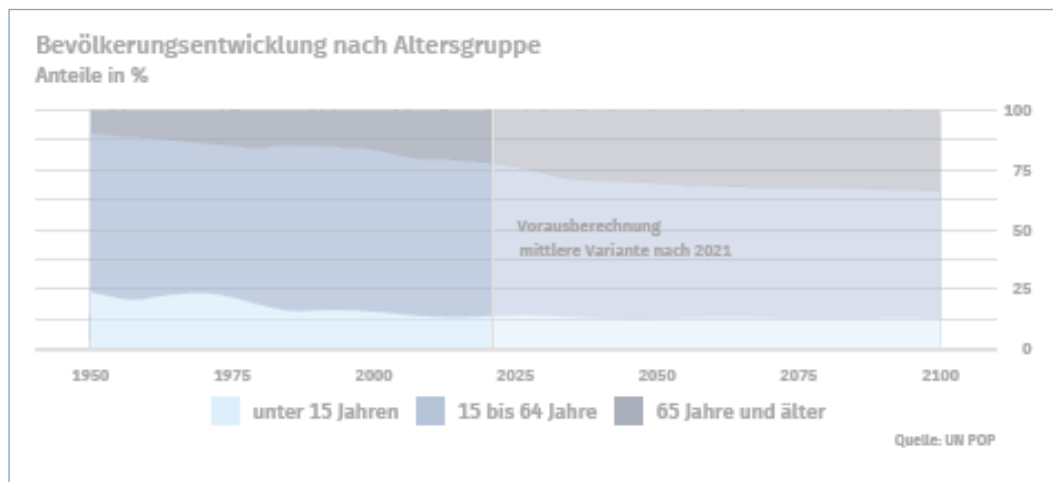
**Fig. 2:** Demographic situation in Japan (CIA World Factbook 2023a).



**Fig. 3:** Demographic development in Japan by age group, in percent (Statistisches Bundesamt 2023b).



**Fig. 4:** Demographic situation in Germany (CIA World Factbook 2023b).



**Fig. 5:** Demographic development by age group in Germany, in percent (Statistisches Bundesamt 2023a).

through inclusion of previously underrepresented groups and increasing productivity, either through economic reforms, upskilling or automisation/robotisation, are not sufficient to close the aforementioned gap.

2. There will be a need to increase the workforce's skill level in general, so that the existing spectrum of lower, medium and high-level skills will be shifting towards an overall higher level.<sup>6</sup>
3. The need to digitalise will also affect jobs that do not fall into the 'classical' IT landscape and therefore increase the competition for this kind of talented workforce.
4. As a result, the demand for people specialising in STEM, and more precisely automation, digitalisation and robotisation, to enter vocational educational training, universities, or directly the labour market, will also in-

crease dramatically.

5. The growing demand for those skills and trained personnel will lead to an increase in wages as the main extrinsic motivational factor to opt for a certain job or employer.

The IT sector in general is a creative environment, and the staff working in it can be characterised as having a somewhat experimental and playful mindset. Personal freedom, having opportunities to experiment, a culture allowing for mistakes and the quasi non-existence of rules and hierarchies are additional characteristics.<sup>7</sup> This is a far cry from the perception of the armed forces as a conservative, strictly hierarchical, traditional and rules-based organisation. Looking at the employer brand characteristics that make tech companies so interesting to job seekers, we can only find attributes that are usually not associated with public in-

<sup>6</sup> World Economic Forum 2023; World Bank 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Gerulat 2002; Ash et al. 2006; Syed/Tappin 2019; Prommegger et al. 2021; Paskenova et al. 2023.

stitutions in general and the armed forces in particular.<sup>8</sup> This applies not only to recruiting, but also to retaining employees.<sup>9</sup> The armed forces have their own benefits, of course: a well-defined hierarchical system regarding positions and their attached salary level, a transparent promotion system based on seniority and minimum standing time thresholds, a pre-defined retirement system relatively immune against changes, and lastly non-discriminatory and other incentives. However, if we draw a direct comparison between ‘cool employers’ (tech giants, hip start-ups, etc.) and the armed forces (safeguarding the country), it is fair to assume that more people would like to work for the employers representing the first group rather than for the armed forces, although there might be strong points like a sense of purpose, camaraderie and community that private companies might not be able to provide to a similar extent as the armed forces. On the other hand, cutting-edge developments like big data analysis, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, virtual/augmented reality, human-machine teaming, and of course AI are usually first used by private companies.

Having those more general starting points in mind, the ability for an organisation to recruit and retain their workforce depends largely on their reputation, i.e. on how attractive it is for people to work in and for that specific organisation. As for the military, this depends on the information ecosystem and narratives connected to the armed forces. Another factor influencing the

choice to join and continue to stay within the military is the perception among the population of being threatened by outside forces. Taking a look at those two aspects, the following conclusions can be drawn from an annual representative survey on trust in public institutions in Germany:

1. The armed forces in Germany enjoy a very good reputation and people do trust this institution. One can even see an increase in the number of people trusting them, possibly due to the war in Ukraine. Trust in public institutions (Fig. 6).<sup>10</sup>
2. People’s individual opinion about the armed forces has been overwhelmingly positive since the turn of the millennium (Fig. 7).<sup>11</sup>
3. The need for an increase in both funding and personnel is widely accepted, although there was a constant decline in approval numbers in the years prior to the war (Fig. 8).<sup>12</sup>
4. The percentage of people feeling insecure due to external threats has grown (Fig. 9).

Looking to Japan, there are similar trends to observe:

1. There is less scepticism to increase defence spending and to a proactive contribution to peace – in spite of the country’s traditionally passive self-defence posture (Fig. 10).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Barath/Nagesh 2018; Dabirian et al. 2019; Gibson 2021; Poindexter/Craig 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Sharma/Kamalanabhan 2014; Uruthirapathy/Grant 2015; Kane 2015; Tambe et al. 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Graf 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Graf 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Graf 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Hornung 2021; Sakaki 2023; Peters/Sakaki 2023.

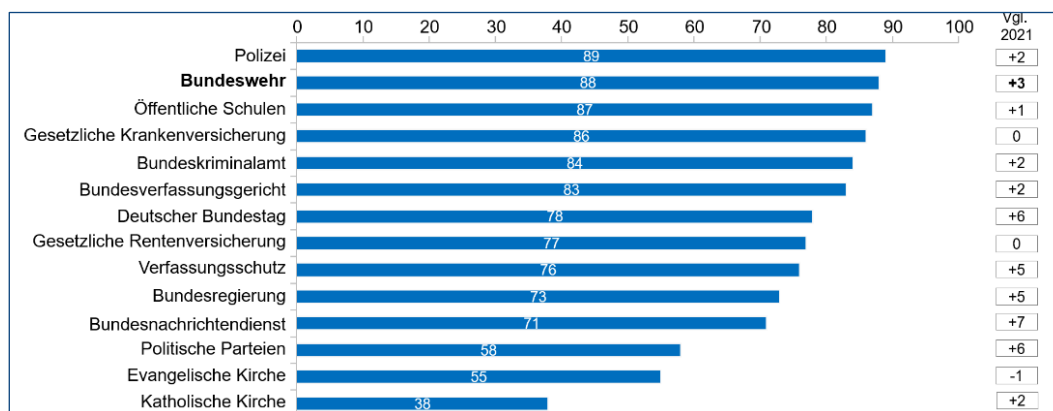


Fig. 6: Survey of trust in public institutions in Germany (Graf 2022).

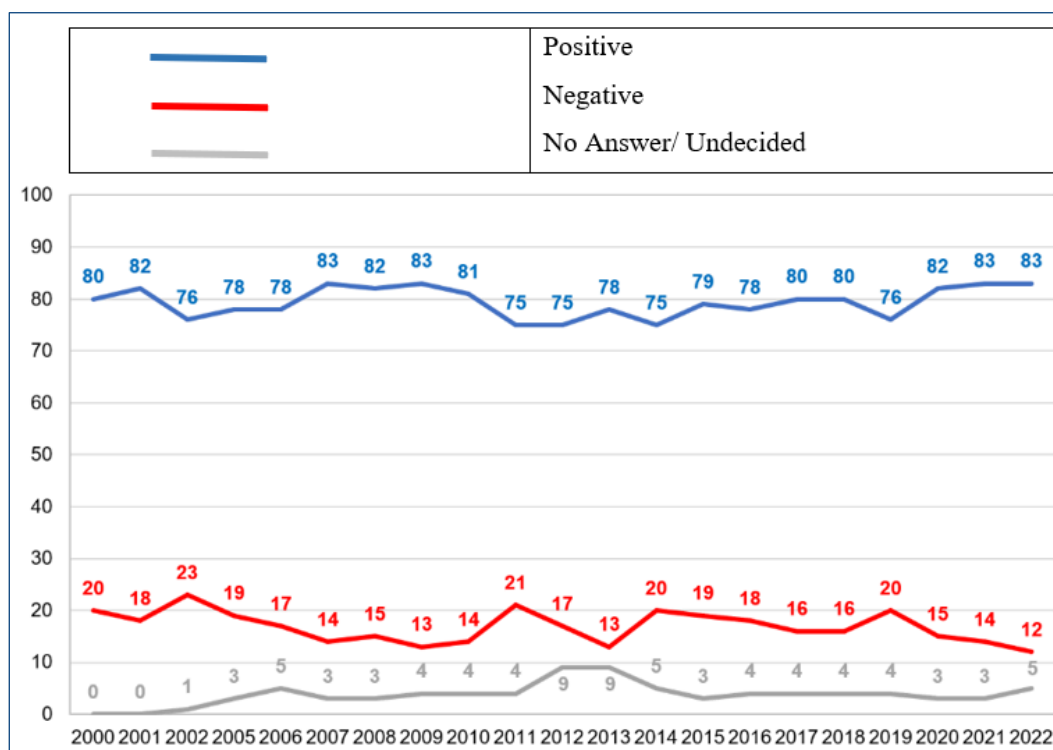
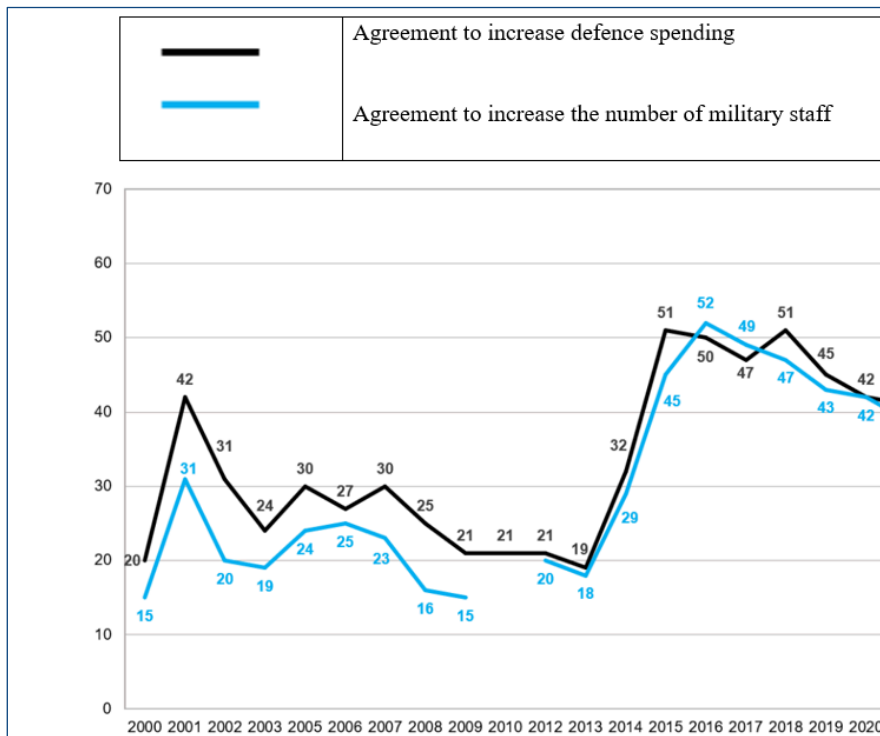
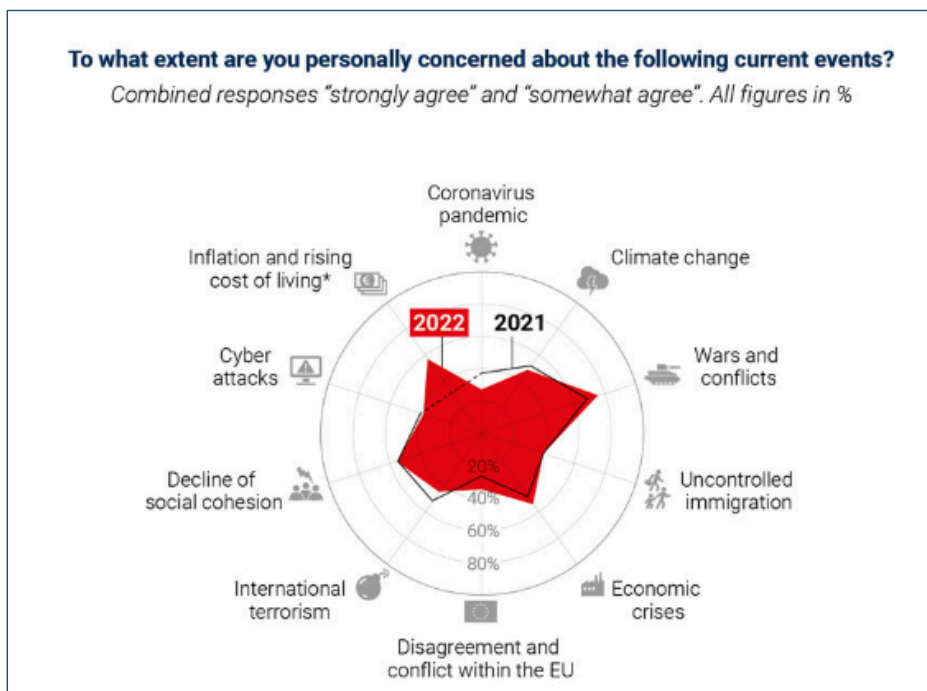


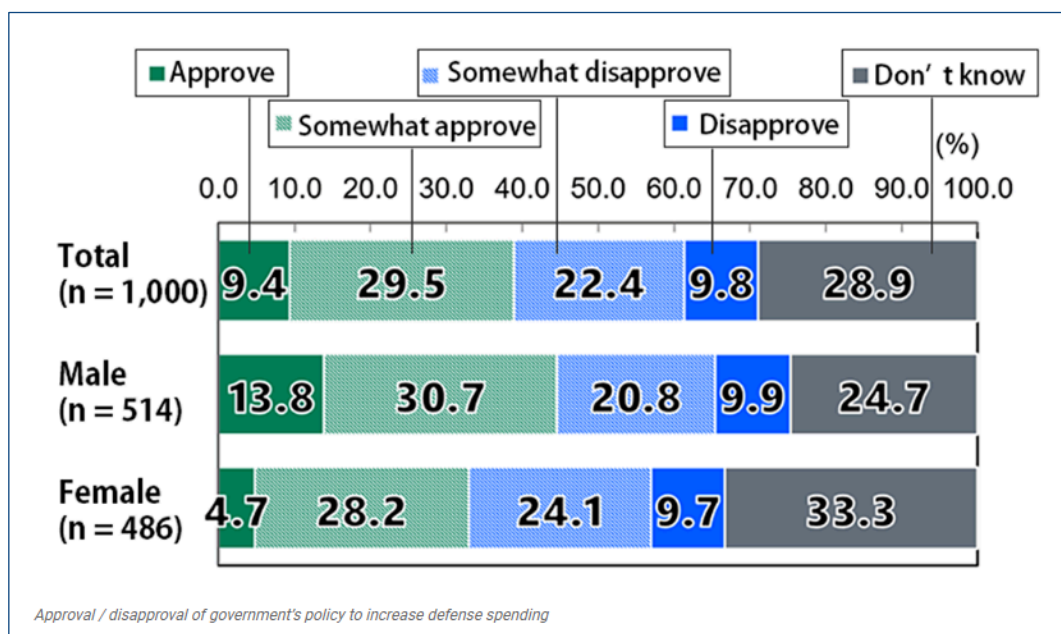
Fig. 7: Survey on trust in the German Armed Forces (Graf 2022).



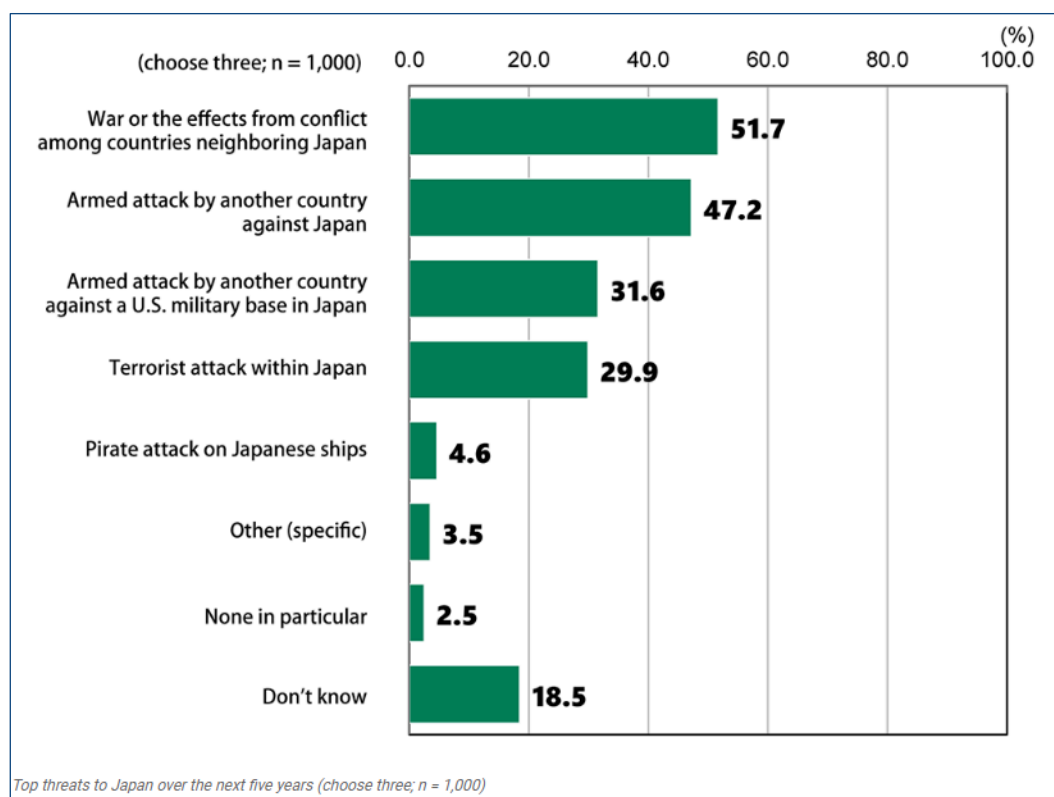
**Fig. 8:** Survey on the need to increase funding and staff numbers in the German Armed Forces (Graf 2022).



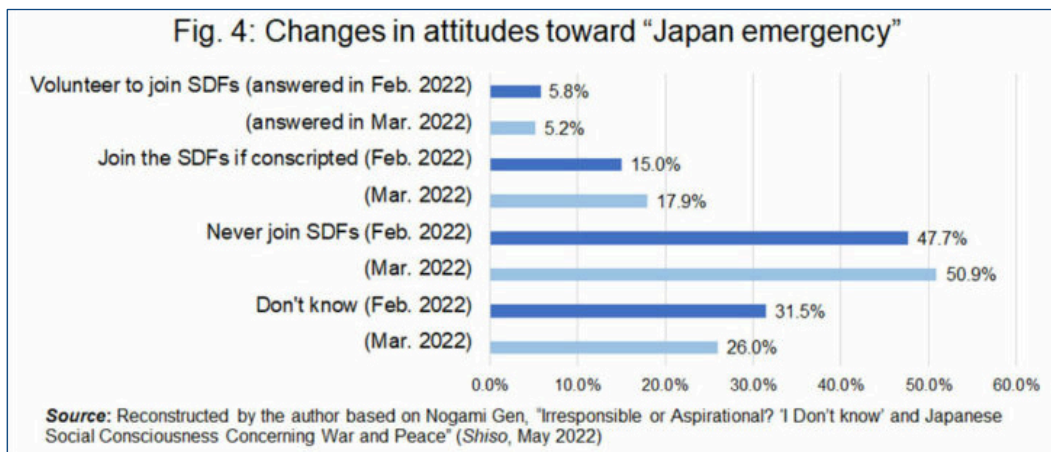
**Fig. 9:** Survey on feeling of insecurity and threat in Germany (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2023).



**Fig. 10:** Survey on increase of defense spending in Japan (The Nippon Foundation 2023).



**Fig. 11:** Survey on threat perception in Japan (The Nippon Foundation 2023).



**Fig. 12:** Survey on the willingness to join the Japanese Self Defense Forces (Yoshida 2023).

2. There is a steady upward trend regarding threat perception (Fig. 11).<sup>14</sup>
3. The willingness to join the Japanese Self-Defense Forces is increasing (Fig. 12).

Although this does specifically relate to the recruiting of IT specialists, it is important to hold the information advantage about the narratives surrounding the armed forces. Widely known disinformation campaigns (e.g. North Korea, Russia, China<sup>15</sup>) to manipulate the domestic information environment must be predicted, pre-empted and ultimately prevented to retain a positive opinion among potential recruits and their personal social environment regarding their cognitive and moral perception of the armed forces. Ensuring this would allow for an information advantage, wherein the decision dominance remains in the country itself without successful malign influence campaigns from the outside.

The last point to be taken into account would be the actual, predicted or just perceived threat theatre the armed forces are confronted with. Much has been written on new forms of warfare such as asymmetric or hybrid warfare and their implications for the strategic and tactical waging of war. In that understanding, modern warfare is not limited to known military weapon systems, but also targets the political, economic, governmental and civilian sphere, including belief systems. To counter that, whole-of-society cyber strategies are designed to combine lateral activities across all levels and structures of government and society in order to defend countries against this kind of new warfare. Not only does the term ‘defence’ take on a new and broader meaning, but the likelihood of the ‘average’ citizen being more and more personally affected or at least feeling more directly threatened is also increasing steeply. But it is not only the feeling of being threatened that has an influence on our topic; the nature of the threat also defines the future operating environment. In traditional warfare, people wearing uniforms were

<sup>14</sup> Watanabe 2015; Matsumura et al. 2023.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2020.

and are necessary as they enjoy combatant immunity, can be distinguished from unlawful targets (like civilians) and can be ordered to perform dangerous tasks. Cyber operations will, to some degree, be carried out by cyber personnel who are co-deployed with regular military units in order to achieve better synchronisation of cyber tasks with other battlefields actions. But, as we have already seen with the use of drones, the majority of tasks (in the planning as well as in the execution stage) can be fulfilled thousands of miles away from the theatre.

There are few restrictions in ordering civilians to fulfil military tasks, although non-compliance will be addressed differently. In doing so, they can be lawfully targeted as combatants – even though they do not necessarily wear a uniform.<sup>16</sup> These new realities for the threat theatre, the kind of warfare and the future operating environment might also lead to new recommendations regarding the recruitment of IT specialists.<sup>17</sup>

I have now described how demography and general trends in employment set the cornerstones for the military recruiting process and specifically for recruiting IT specialists. Further on, I have identified the main characteristics of IT staff and the factors that bring – and bind – them to organisations. Looking to the armed forces, two main aspects have been identified that are relevant for recruiting: threat perception and reputation. Finally, I have taken a look at the future operating environment to draw a picture of how the working/deployment conditions will

likely develop. Now I would like to delve deeper into the recruiting process as such.

Compared with their civilian counterparts, the armed forces are confronted with certain realities as regards recruiting:

1. A much stricter system of laws and regulations for wage structures and levels, promotions, HR development tools, retirement and pensions, non-monetary incentives, etc.
2. This strong foundation on laws and regulations leads to a lack of flexibility and speed when it comes to adapting to new realities or to implementing change within the organisation.
3. There is a very strong moral dimension (both positively and negatively) to working for – or never working for – the armed forces, even stronger than that to working in the public sector in general.
4. The recruitment of specialists from abroad (especially from outside Europe, for example India) is severely limited due to the nationality issue. Recruiting in Europe would be possible, but the supply is already exhausted in European countries, too.
5. Recruiting people with disabilities is a limited option due to the physical and psychological demands placed on personnel in the armed forces.
6. There are restrictions in using all existing recruitment channels – in Germany, for instance, the Bundeswehr is not allowed to do active recruiting in schools, only so-called youth officers ('Jugendoffiziere') are al-

<sup>16</sup> Dinstein/Dahl 2020; International Committee of the Red Cross 2023; Melzer 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Bracknell 2018.

lowed to inform (!) about current developments in security policy, and even this only upon invitation from a school or teacher.

If we aim to improve the efforts to recruit IT specialists for the armed forces, we must therefore identify the root causes of people not responding adequately to existing recruiting efforts. One approach could be to look at the use of traditional recruitment channels, and it could be worth discussing whether these efforts are enough, targeted at the right audience or used in the right mix. But this would merely be an add-on question. The first question has to be this: Even if we are able to make perfect use of existing recruitment tools, will the targeted audience find conditions attractive enough to join the armed forces? Even though we have determined that there may be a strong motivation to join (defending one's country, its people and constitution) regardless of the current political situation, it is also fair to assume that with a stronger direct threat, or at least a higher perceived individual threat, more people will feel the need to actively contribute to their own safety and that of those around them (family, friends, population). But there will always remain a large proportion of – especially young – persons who take a sceptical view towards the armed forces.

Apart from general working conditions, we have to look into the aspect of personal freedom, especially in the IT-related areas. As described above, a more adventurous, playful and creative mindset is beneficial for coping with upcoming IT challenges, also in the cyber-war domain. The armed forces – and their underlying mindset – thus

have the challenging task to not only create such a free, experimental space, but also to convince potential employees that such a space exists, against all the stories out there among the population about life in the armed forces.<sup>18</sup>

A survey examining what factors encourage cyber staff employed in the armed forces to stay with the military found that better opportunities to focus on their work and 'tinker' with their projects (including time for self-improvement activities) as well as more autonomy rank very highly, next to additional training opportunities, well set career development plans, and better recognition for their work.<sup>19</sup> This can go as far as establishing their own software factory to create a tailored workspace environment for a specific purpose<sup>20</sup> or at least involve creating physical possibilities for frontline staff to experiment and 'play' without ranks and on a first-name basis.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, the armed forces will have to accept that in order to retain highly skilled IT personnel it might be necessary to create a structure, behaviour and mindset that are different from the rest of the armed forces. Something like this does already exist, for example in the medical service.

So, in conclusion, the armed forces will have to create a new recruitment ecosystem with options outside the traditional recruitment measures to close the quantitative and qualitative gap between demand and supply regarding IT staff for the armed forces.

<sup>18</sup> Lythgoe 2019; Miranda 2022.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office 2022; LinkedIn 2022; Nelson/Frank 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Errico 2023; Carroll 2023; AFWERX 2023; KesselRun 2023; Tesseract 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Lamb/Buyer 2020.

Additionally, the new threat theatre demands a rebranding of and changes within the armed forces for them to become transformational and disruptive instead of traditional, hierarchical, bureaucratic and conservative. External recruitment therefore becomes not only a necessary quantitative solution, but is also one of strategic necessity, given that the fear of individuals to become outdated, irrelevant and redundant – to sum up – can over time become a collective organisational obstacle to transformation. This being said, it is of course also imperative to eliminate existing recruiting obstacles, like for example not being allowed to perform marketing, let alone recruiting, activities in schools, as it is currently the case in Germany. But these are still only the first steps.

In the long run, the following recommendations for action are given with a view to armed forces in general:

1. Design a more flexible, targeted HR law for the armed forces to implement allowances, alternative career tracks, different entry salary levels, potential adjustments to the retirement system, etc. There is already one such example in Germany: The Federal Employment Agency established its own HR law particularly designed for the needs of the organisation (for example to allow for add-on salary elements for very scarce personnel, the possibility of being promoted without the usual waiting time or even skipping promotion levels<sup>22</sup>). As of today, more and more families prefer

not to constantly move from place to place, so the frequent reassignments have to be reconsidered in this context. And even if this is necessary, a whole-of-family approach should be aimed for.<sup>23</sup>

2. Work more closely with external partners (chambers of commerce, universities, public employment services) in recruiting efforts, also by means of public-private partnerships.<sup>24</sup> This could even go beyond recruiting efforts alone, it could also encompass advertising and employer branding. As outlined before, there might be restrictions regarding the cooperation between the armed forces and the public employment service (e.g. concerning the appearance of military officers in schools<sup>25</sup>); in other countries this cooperation is still at the very beginning.<sup>26</sup> In Germany there is a strong, systematic and long-lasting cooperation between the Bundeswehr and the Federal Employment Agency,<sup>27</sup> although it is contested.<sup>28</sup> In this context, the so-called ‘civil clauses’<sup>29</sup> limiting the research

22 Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2006.

23 U.S. Congress 2018.

24 U.S. Government 2018; Cetark Cyber Defender 2022; Clark 2023.

25 For the discussion in Germany see for example Der Spiegel 2018, Högl 2023, Die Welt 2023, Deutscher Bundestag 2023.

26 Taiwan Ministry of Labor 2023.

27 Bundesamt für das Personalmanagement der Bundeswehr 2023b; Bundesministerium der Verteidigung/Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2010.

28 Deutscher Bundestag 2015.

29 Wikipedia 2023.

cooperation between universities and the military that exist both in Germany and Japan have to be reconsidered, although this is a voluntary restriction and was not established with a view to recruiting. Defence-related research and a stronger cooperation between universities and the armed forces might lead to a more fluent exchange of staff and the creation of attractive job opportunities for university graduates.

3. Lend IT knowledge and experience from industry. The industry is at the cutting edge of IT developments, the use of new and experimental technologies, the interconnection between a variety of fields and, most importantly, the development of feasible applications and reliable business models. A lot of IT specialists are also freelancers or work for temporary employment agencies. In this respect, there are certain similarities to reservist service. Reservists do not belong permanently to the staff of a military organisation/the armed forces; they are called only in times of need and based solely on their expertise gained in civilian life. This strategy has been established for example in the US,<sup>30</sup> Canada,<sup>31</sup> Australia<sup>32</sup> and also in the UK,<sup>33</sup> to name a few. Two examples

from the US illustrate this quite clearly: The U.S. Army Reserve's 75th Innovation Command leverages the unique skills, agility and private sector connectivity of America's Army Reserve. It combines the willingness to contribute, the disinterest to do so through active duty, and the frontrunning knowledge and innovation potential from industry.<sup>34</sup> The Defense Innovation Unit just named the Vice President of Apple as the new director<sup>35</sup> to serve as a focal point for new and emerging commercial technology for dual-use purposes.

4. Closely connected to the strategy outlined above, but a more permanent approach, would be the establishment of a workforce outside the military. This can be cyber proxies, for example (defined as groups to execute cyber operations tasked by national governments or at least in coordination with them<sup>36</sup>). Compared to actually employed personnel, they are less expensive, the political costs might be lower (as the public and the media may be paying less attention), they allow governments to camouflage their own capabilities, and access to skills and technology might be achieved which would be unavailable otherwise.<sup>37</sup> With a view to state responsibility, that would constitute a shift from state-pro-

<sup>30</sup> Kaloostian 2021, U.S. Coast Guard 2023, Giraldo 2023, Pomerleau 2023, U.S. Defense Innovation Unit 2023a.

<sup>31</sup> Canadian Cyber Auxiliary 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Austin 2016; Austin 2019.

<sup>33</sup> UK Government 2023.

<sup>34</sup> An 2023.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Defense Innovation Unit 2023b.

<sup>36</sup> See for example LinkedIn 2023; Security Operations Center 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Akoto 2021.

hibited cyber interventions to state-integrated operations using integrated third-party service providers.

5. Change the standards: the military still largely works in a decades-old personnel environment with iron-clad standards regarding medical conditions, age, nationality, etc. This needs to change. And this might also mean to think differently about the criteria for obtaining security clearances.<sup>38</sup> Nationality is of course an issue with a view to becoming a member of the armed forces, but the 2016 German White Paper already stated: ‘Last but not least, opening up the Bundeswehr to citizens of the EU would not only offer potential for wide-ranging integration and regeneration and thus strengthen the personnel base of the Bundeswehr, it would also send out a strong signal for a European approach.’<sup>39</sup> The legal basis is already in place, as the German Military Personnel Act allows for the employment of foreigners in the military based on individual case-by-case decisions.<sup>40</sup>
6. Look for talents outside the ‘usual’ groups, for example people with disabilities (having changed the standards, as mentioned above, as a precondition). Physical disabilities do not play such a strong part in the IT landscape. Having the changing

threat axis in mind, this could be a vector. Specifically, the pool of neurodivergent talent could be tapped into, as is done by numerous companies (SAP,<sup>41</sup> IBM,<sup>42</sup> Ernst & Young<sup>43</sup> and Google<sup>44</sup>). Using neurodivergent people could create better results in a range of areas: recognising patterns under distraction, analysing geospatial imagery, non-verbal testing methods, achieving the status of hyper focus and promoting ethical behaviour. Research has been conducted on this last aspect only recently.<sup>45</sup> A few militaries have designed special programmes to integrate neurodivergent people into the armed forces, like Israel,<sup>46</sup> the UK<sup>47</sup> and Australia.<sup>48</sup>

7. Enter more strongly, even ‘aggressively’ into the world of gaming/ e-sports for recruiting: The Japanese market – with companies like Nintendo, Sony Interactive Entertainment, Square Enix Holdings, SegaSammy Holdings, Konami Holding, Bandai Namco and Nexon, to name a few – is the third biggest market worldwide, after China and the US. Germany is Europe’s biggest market when it comes to gaming. A highly interesting survey conducted in Japan in 2021 asked

<sup>38</sup> Samluk et al. 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Federal Government of Germany 2016: 120.

<sup>40</sup> German Military Personnel Act 2023, § 37 (2).

<sup>41</sup> SAP n.d.

<sup>42</sup> IBM n.d.

<sup>43</sup> Tzul 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Google 2023.

<sup>45</sup> Weinbaum et al. 2023.

<sup>46</sup> N.N. Israel 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Wood 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Austin et al. 2017.

participants to name any ‘novels, mangas, anime, movies, or dramas that have greatly influenced [their] impressions and opinions about Japan’s defense system and the Self-Defense Forces (SDFs)’. The top-ranking answers referred to more abstract fictional works in settings close to civilian life that create a soft image of the military (anime, manga comics); works that actually depict SDF activities also in fictional settings (‘military simulations’) ranked lower.<sup>49</sup> Closely connected to gaming are events such as hackathons,<sup>50</sup> which might also be used as a recruiting opportunity. In Germany, the armed forces have already held their fifth ‘Data Analytics Hackathon’, although participation is limited to the military and staff of the BWI, the Bundeswehr’s IT service provider.<sup>51</sup> One could even start looking at schools, as have the United States with their CyberPatriot Competitions or Collegiate Cyber Defense Competitions.<sup>52</sup> The world of games is a starting point into the world of history and military. Unlike with linear media, the level of personal involvement and interaction is much higher. Of course, one could rightly argue that games like ego-shooters etc. create the wrong incentive and mindset, thus possibly attracting the wrong type of candidates. But

today’s games are becoming more and more complex and ask for much deeper engagement and visualisation than those stereotype games. And interestingly, it is not only the traditional sphere of gaming/cloud gaming that is growing, but also the area of so-called serious games, which are designed for educational purposes rather than pure entertainment (Office of the Director of National Intelligence 2023). Wargaming, a normal educational tool in the military, is becoming more popular outside the armed forces as well. The ‘Wargaming Experimentation Group’ Fight Club International is an excellent example: this global network connects various regional hubs, all playing games with the same objective (‘learning to fight across all domains of conflict and competition’) and under the same motto (Think – Fight – Learn – Repeat). There is a strong technological component, such as trying to experiment with emerging and disruptive technologies.<sup>53</sup> But the educational purpose is omnipresent, aiming to ‘grow adaptive thinkers’.<sup>54</sup> In here, military and civilian gamers join forces to create solutions for security challenges, which might be more imaginative than doing it each by themselves, a truly crowding of strategical insight. Interestingly, civilian gamers with no military train-

<sup>49</sup> Yoshida 2023.

<sup>50</sup> Hackathon.com 2023a + b.

<sup>51</sup> Ynside 2023.

<sup>52</sup> Warwick 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Foggo et al. 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Fight Club International 2023.

ing sometimes deliver a much higher performance than militarily trained personnel, who can be constrained in their imagination and speed of decision-making by years of training and doctrine.<sup>55</sup> Gaming might therefore be a tool to mitigate those cognitive limitations.<sup>56</sup> Still, so far there is only very little experience in using these events for recruiting purposes. In Germany, the armed forces have actually been present at the biggest Gaming Fair Gamescom since 2009.<sup>57</sup> This involvement is a challenging task, as critics are numerous.<sup>58</sup> Thus, more experimentation for a tailored approach to realise the full potential of this recruiting measure is necessary.<sup>59</sup>

8. Adapt recruiting strategies to a different IT talent pool: Apart from the people being strongly involved in gaming/e-sports/hackathons one could look to white-hat hackers, meme and social media content makers, or people working in technical support. A special group would be social media influencers, who can be targeted for recruitment, as described before, or with whom the armed forces might cooperate in recruiting activities.
9. Set up a mentor/mentee system

for recruiting: This is a system already used in the area of personnel development. Looking at the stages a recruitment process is going through, there is potential for extending this instrument. Especially the recruiting phase itself, the onboarding process and the first month in employment are crucial, as 50 percent of newly established jobs are being terminated in the probation period or in the first year of employment.<sup>60</sup> Having a personal 'guide' during these stages could be essential to both sides. The German Federal Employment Agency has reacted to these developments and established a service of mediation that can be called upon by both employers and employees during the probationary period.<sup>61</sup> The same logic could apply to a mentor/mentee system.

10. Use well known influencers as figureheads in recruitment campaigns: although this is a difficult task (keeping in mind that any engagement with the military may lead to strong criticism from parts of the general public), it is still a promising measure. Influencers usually have an audience that mirrors their own socio-demographic characteristics, which leads to a very authentic and energetic engagement with their audiences. In this regard they could serve as 'brand ambassadors' for the armed forces, mitigating the

<sup>55</sup> Moran/David 2022; Barno/Bensahel 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence 2022; Wheaton/Richey 2013.

<sup>57</sup> GamesWirtschaft 2022.

<sup>58</sup> Süddeutsche Zeitung 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2023a.

<sup>60</sup> XING 2023; Statistisches Bundesamt 2023c.

<sup>61</sup> Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2023b.

often negative stereotypes on behalf of potential recruits and their close support network (family, friends, school, etc.). It could be helpful to do this in tandem with soldiers on active duty, so that the transformation from recruits to trained service members could be displayed more authentically.

11. Create a career path system exclusively for cyber personnel: A tightly designed, focused and controlled career path could be established, comparable to the medical service.<sup>62</sup> This could also include creating new competitive categories for promotion (e.g. ‘information dominance’) as for example in the U.S. Army,<sup>63</sup> cyber-specific incentive payments to up to 3,000 USD per month,<sup>64</sup> designing new leadership tracks within the cyber domain,<sup>65</sup> allowing for the lateral entry of civilians,<sup>66</sup> or designing new non-monetary incentives to attract and retain personnel in the cyber domain.<sup>67</sup> The aim would be to enhance professional adherence through industry certifications, continuous opportunities for further qualifications and/or advanced degrees, ‘esprit de corps’ and specific HR development. This might make changes in other military career paths, and especially assignment pro-

cesses, necessary. Talent would be the most important factor, not so much the right rank, branch and availability date. The selection model would be based on a best match logic, following a so-called deferred acceptance algorithm (it would identify the best match among participants of two types, using preferences (characteristics) from each participant with a threshold level, listing for example every pair that has at least over 80% of characteristics matched). This is the underlying matching logic used by public employment services and modern dating platforms.

12. Create a national government training institution: As the demand for skilled staff is not only high on the agenda of the Bundeswehr, but all government institutions, a national training institution (a university or academy) could help to fill the gap in the mid-term. Given that several such education facilities already exist (e.g. the two Bundeswehr universities, the University of Applied Labour Studies of the Federal Employment Agency and the Northern Academy for Finance and Tax Law), this would not have to be a start from scratch. A salary throughout the education, but also a binding obligation to stay within government service for a certain period of time after graduation could frame a programme encompassing the whole range of digital technical fields. In the United States, this idea has just recently been

<sup>62</sup> Ackermann 2013; Wenger et al. 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Haystead 2018.

<sup>64</sup> McKinney 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Seligman 2023.

<sup>66</sup> Phillips 2016; Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Cowan 2018.

brought into the discussion.<sup>68</sup>

13. Establish a Training with Industry programme: This will expose military staff to industrial techniques, procedures and in-work qualifications within the corporate world of their country.<sup>69</sup> Such a work-experience programme will help to retain personnel within the armed forces as it exposes the military staff to cutting edge training and processes. The danger of being hired by the companies right away might be there, but binding agreements could be put in place through non-competition clauses. Such a programme may also create the foundation for establishing better – and more – public-private partnerships.

To sum it up in one sentence: The armed forces will fail with regard to their recruitment efforts (be it for IT specialists or in general) both quantitatively and qualitatively, if they ‘try to implement third-generation strategies through second-generation organisations with first-generation management’.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Mervis 2021.

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center 2023; Johnson 2022; U.S. Air Force Institute of Technology 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Bartlett/Ghoshal 2002: 35.

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Christian Richter

## It's Freedom of the Seas, Not a Provocation!

A Japanese destroyer's transit through the Taiwan Strait seen from the perspective of public international law



**Fig. 1:** Destroyer Sazanami © Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (CC BY 4.0).

### 1 Introduction

In September 2024, the Japanese destroyer *Sazanami* navigated through the Taiwan Strait, marking the very first time that a vessel of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF)<sup>1</sup> passed

through the strait between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan.<sup>2</sup> Only one day later, Beijing sharply criticized the transit, stating that the Taiwan question concerned the People's Republic of China's sovereignty and terri-

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<sup>1</sup> On recent developments regarding Japan's Self-Defense Force see Smith 2019.

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<sup>2</sup> Tagesschau 2025.



**Fig. 2:** Geographical location of Taiwan © Bundeswehr.

torial integrity.<sup>3</sup> By doing so, the People's Republic of China reaffirmed that it considers both the Republic of China, generally referred to as Taiwan, and, as a logical consequence, the Taiwan Strait, to be part of its sovereign territory. From the perspective of public international law, however, this narrative is wrong for two reasons.

## 2 Taiwan

Taiwan's current status under public international law can only be understood if we take a closer look at its history. Searching for new lands to colonize, Portuguese seafarers arrived at the island today known as Taiwan in 1590. They named it Ilha Formosa – beautiful island –, a name that res-

onates even today. Later, the Netherlands and Spain ruled parts of Taiwan as colonial powers. After a military conflict, the Spanish surrendered their bases to the Dutch and left the island.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the 17th century, the Manchu dynasty was the first to place Taiwan under Imperial Chinese administration.<sup>5</sup> However, this changed in 1895, when China was defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War and Taiwan became a Japanese colony.<sup>6</sup>

After World War II, two treaties were concluded with Japan that touch the status of Taiwan – one in 1951 and one in 1952; however, China did not officially acquire title to Taiwan.<sup>7</sup> This is probably due to the fact that by that time, two Chinese governments ex-

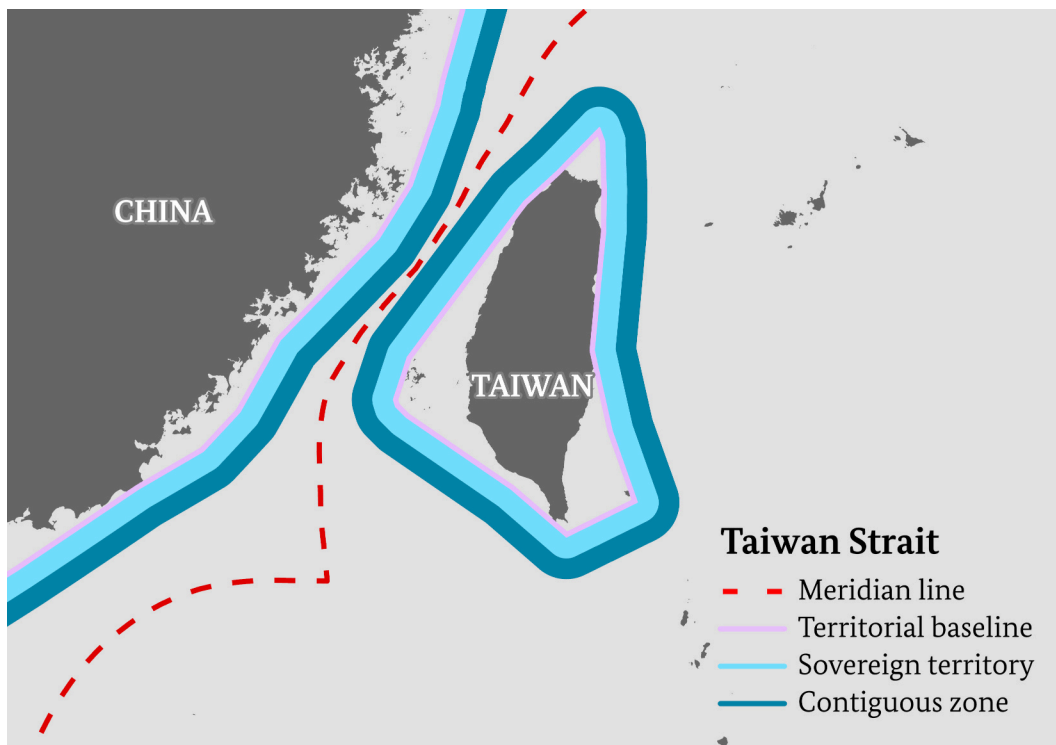
<sup>3</sup> Dominguez/Johnson 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Schubert 2013: 506.

<sup>5</sup> Palaskas 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Palaskas 2018: 26.

<sup>7</sup> Stahn 2001: 75.



**Fig. 3:** Taiwan Strait © Bundeswehr.

isted: Mao Zedong's Communist government on mainland China and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government on Taiwan.<sup>8</sup> The Chinese Civil War was effectively frozen after one party had retreated to Taiwan and the other remained on mainland China.

The Republic of China on Taiwan originally represented China as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. In 1971, however, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 2758, recognising the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate representative of China to the United Nations and thus denying the Republic of China the right to represent China.<sup>9</sup> Although not explicitly stated in Resolution 2758, Taiwan thereby also lost its membership in the

United Nations.<sup>10</sup> However, this did not make Taiwan part of the People's Republic of China's territory.

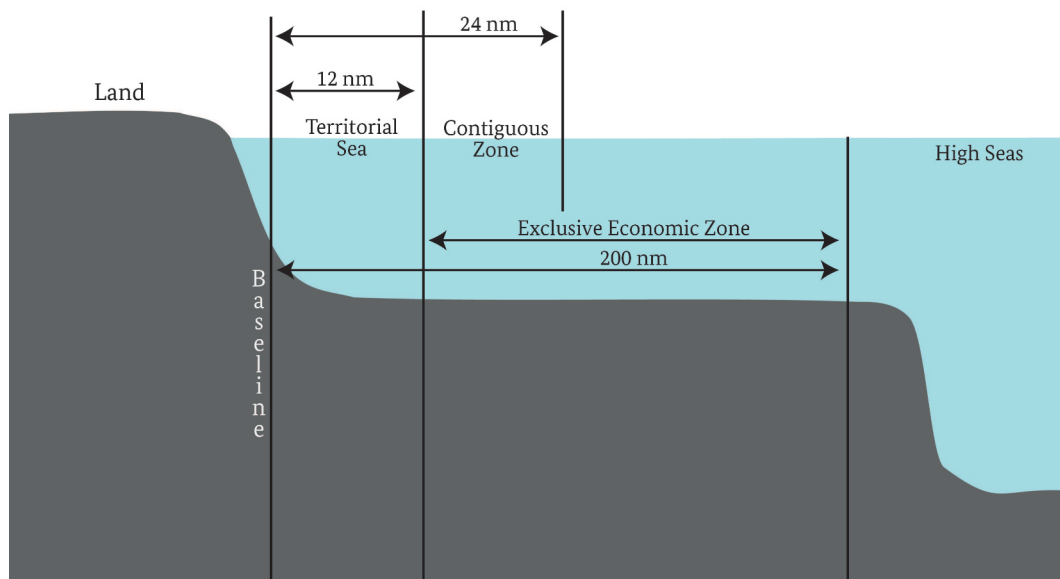
At no time in history did the People's Republic of China ever exercise effective control over the island of Taiwan. On the contrary, the Republic of China has effectively ruled the island for more than seven decades. According to public international law, if insurgents exercise permanent effective control over the territory they occupy, they may acquire the status of a stabilized de facto regime and thus enjoy partial international legal personality.<sup>11</sup> As for Taiwan, this is undoubtedly the case. Although Taiwan undisputedly features all three elements of statehood described by Georg Jellinek's three elements theory, some say that

<sup>8</sup> Stahn 2001: 76.

<sup>9</sup> See UN General Assembly 1971.

<sup>10</sup> Richter 2023: 3.

<sup>11</sup> Epping 2024: 463.



**Fig. 4:** Coastal seafloor depth © Bundeswehr.

Taiwan still lacks the declared self-image of being a state independent of the People's Republic of China.<sup>12</sup> These voices argue that it is not an option under public international law to impose statehood on Taiwan as long as it does not consider itself a state<sup>13</sup> – even though it seems that the only reason as to why Taipei does not officially communicate its self-image of being an independent state to the outside world these days is Beijing's military threat posture. Taiwan's status under public international law is therefore sometimes described as "in between": On the one hand, Taiwan still forms part of China. On the other hand, it qualifies as a de facto state.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of this, Taiwan by no means belongs to the territory of the People's Republic of China.

### 3 Freedom of the Seas

Even if, contrary to the common understanding of public international law, one assumed Taiwan to be part of the territory of the People's Republic of China, it does not follow that the Taiwan Strait in its entirety would fall within the territorial sea of the People's Republic of China. In accordance with Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and customary international law, every coastal state is entitled to establish the breadth of its territorial sea up to 12 nautical miles, measured from the baseline.<sup>15</sup> Only in this area, also referred to as territorial waters, has the coastal state the right to exercise unrestricted territorial power. Islands that are part of the territory of a respective state and located far off the state's coast have their own territorial waters.<sup>16</sup> As part of the People's Republic of China's

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Neukirchen 2005: 50f.

<sup>13</sup> Crawford 2006: 216.

<sup>14</sup> Stahn 2001: 67.

<sup>15</sup> Trümpler 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Heintschel v. Heinegg 2024: 837f.

territory, Taiwan would thus also be entitled to territorial waters of 12 nautical miles. The Taiwan Strait ranges in width between roughly 100 nautical miles at its widest and approx. 86 nautical miles at its narrowest. During its passage through the Taiwan Strait, the *JS Sazanami* apparently kept to the corridor of about 60 nautical miles in between the two territorial waters, which means it was navigating in international waters. Consequently, Beijing would not have been entitled to demand prior diplomatic notification, let alone to restrict access.

According to Art. 33 UNCLOS, a coastal state may exercise control in the zone contiguous to its territorial waters – also with a breadth of 12 nautical miles –, but only in order to prevent and punish infringements of law. It does not have any jurisdiction beyond that.<sup>17</sup> And in the present case, the Japanese warship did not pass through the People's Republic of China's contiguous zone. Even if one assumed that the People's Republic of China had another contiguous zone around Taiwan, this would not affect the present assessment.

The destroyer did pass through the People's Republic of China's exclusive economic zone of 200 nautical miles, which was inevitable. Even though a coastal state enjoys sovereign rights in this zone, these rights essentially refer to the marine resources in this area such as fish or other natural resources. They do not, however, affect the passage of ships. Here, too, the principle of freedom of the seas applies in the sense of Articles 87 and 58 UNCLOS; this is

also embedded in customary international law.<sup>18</sup>

## 4 Conclusion

By passing the Taiwan Strait, the Japanese warship has strengthened the principle of freedom of the seas and public international law – just as warships of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and, more recently, Germany have done in the past.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the passage of the Taiwan Strait by the German Navy unit in September 2024 is said to have encouraged Tokyo to also have a warship sail through the Taiwan Strait.<sup>20</sup> In the meantime, another Japanese warship has passed the Taiwan Strait, namely the destroyer *Akizuki* in February of this year. Unlike the *Sazanami*, which joined warships from Australia and New Zealand, the *Akizuki* sailed alone.<sup>21</sup> This is not a matter of military deterrence only, it is about maintaining peremptory norms of public international law. And by the way, Beijing likes to refer to these norms whenever this is to its advantage. For instance, it was only in July 2024 that the People's Republic of China's destroyer *Jiaozuo* and the battle group supply ship *Honghu* sailed through European waters as both warships crossed the Baltic Sea to attend the Russian Navy's anniversary celebrations in St. Petersburg.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it was the People's Republic of China that recently violated Japan's

<sup>17</sup> Heintschel v. Heinegg 2024: 857f.

<sup>18</sup> Heintschel v. Heinegg 2024: 867f.

<sup>19</sup> Ng/Wingfield-Hayes 2024.

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to Colonel (GS) Kiesewetter for this information.

<sup>21</sup> The Japan Times 2025.

<sup>22</sup> MarineForum 2024.



**Fig. 5:** Destroyer *Akizuki* © Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (CC BY 4.0).

territorial integrity. In August 2024, a reconnaissance aircraft of the People's Liberation Army entered Japanese airspace above the uninhabited Danjo Islands in Japan's southern Nagasaki Prefecture – the first-ever incursion by Chinese military into Japan's territorial airspace.<sup>23</sup>

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Yuichi Aizawa

# **The 2024 International General/Admiral Staff Officer Course at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College (Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr)**

## **A Japanese perspective**

### **Purpose**

In this chapter, I will introduce the study abroad programme for members of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in the Bundeswehr's International General/Admiral Staff Officer Course (IGASOC) [in German: Lehrgang Generalstabs-/Admiralstabsdienst International, LGAI], which has a long and important history in the defence relations between Japan and Germany. Also, I will describe my time as a student on this course and the lessons learned from this experience. I took part in the IGASOC at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College (BwCSC) from 2 January to 13 December 2024. Therefore, the findings and contents described in this text for the most part apply specifically to the 2024 iteration of the course.

### **Composition and curriculum of the 2024 IGASOC**

The International General/Admiral Staff Officer Course offered by the BwCSC covers a wide variety of subjects, with a focus on tactical education and command staff activities. It pro-

vides opportunities to learn not only about Germany, but also about European politics, economics, diplomacy, and the continent's security architecture.

Personally, I found the use of different educational methods, such as lectures involving integrated and branch-specific approaches and small seminar formats for specific educational objectives and the resulting efficiency impressive. Additionally, beyond the classes on site, there were external training opportunities, including visits to the NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, and to the Austrian National Defence Academy in Vienna. These trips and excursions were a valuable occasion to gain insights into European politics, economics, and security matters from perspectives beyond that of Germany. Furthermore, part of the curriculum is dedicated to the United Nations Staff Officer Course (UNSOC), which the Bundeswehr conducts each year on behalf of the UN. Upon finishing the course, students receive a certificate of completion from the UN.

Far from being a one-sided affair, the IGASOC proved to be a comprehensive educational programme that



**Fig. 1:** Regional Information Event in autumn 2024. The topic of the debate was 'China as an adjacent power' © Bundeswehr/ Daedo Yang.

provided ample opportunities for discussion, fostering trust and personal connections among German military personnel and international students, and cultivating a sense of international awareness.

The purpose of the IGASOC was to equip international students with the knowledge and skills necessary for staff duties, to supplement prior staff education received in their home countries, to expand their knowledge of the different services and branches as well as of a wide range of fields outside the military, including political, economic and cultural aspects, and to promote international understanding and create opportunities to build global networks. Ultimately, the course also served to provide international students with a positive impression of Germany. The 2024 IGASOC, which I attended, consisted of 68 participants from 33 countries (37 Army personnel,

13 Navy personnel and 18 Air Force personnel, plus 17 Bundeswehr students (10 German Army personnel, 3 Navy personnel and 4 Air Force personnel)).

Due to the fact that the group of army students was by far the largest, two army syndicates were formed, while the navy and air force students formed one syndicate for each service, resulting in a total of four student syndicates. Education and training activities were primarily conducted at syndicate level. However, depending on the subject and the educational objective, there were instances when the two army syndicates were combined or when joint classes were taught for all services. Furthermore, at particular moments, syndicates were taught together with the National General/Admiral Staff Officer Course (in German: LGAN). Some educational formats also involved participants from outside the

military, such as retired servicemembers or representatives of the business community.

Percentage-wise, tactical training and command and staff activities and exercises accounted for the greatest share of the curriculum (approx. 30%), followed by classes on strategy and security policy and visits and excursions for educational purposes, which made up about one fifth of the entire course. The core curriculum was supplemented by additional classes, such as physical training, German language classes and specialised presentations.

Tactical training was divided into seminars and scenario-based exercises. Within each module, lecture-based education lasted for about one month followed by exercises involving two scenarios conducted over approximately three weeks. A principal exercise involved a scenario in which the northern part of Germany around Hanover was treated as an island, using actual terrain and place names. This scenario was designed to teach military operations up to brigade level including delaying operations, defensive manoeuvres, and counteroffensive operations.

The students were divided into groups, and each group conducted research and prepared presentations on the assigned propositions (covering principles related to tactical actions such as offense and defence, staff work and command procedures). During the exercise phase, both CPX and map manoeuvre exercises were conducted with the aim of becoming proficient in German-style staff work, executing staff activities, situation assessment, and planning tasks. Specifically, a brigade headquarters was formed within the syndicate, with the lead instructor serving as the exercise brigade commander and students assuming positions such as chief of staff, resulting in

student-led planning. During the exercises, the lead instructor's primary instruction activity took the form of operational and staff meetings, with contributions from the various (student) staff branches. The lead instructor monitored the situation as needed and attended student discussions on key issues at each stage, providing guidance as the exercise commander. Unlike in Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) training, the instructors did not distribute any lesson plans at the end of the training. Instead, the instructors' summaries and feedback emphasised the decision-making process, timeliness, and speed over completeness of content.

In addition, prior to the start of the aforementioned command post exercise, field reconnaissance was conducted around the Hanover area, which served as the assumed operational area, and after the map exercise, a field tactical exercise was conducted to compare the students' operational plans with the actual on-site situation.

Having the opportunity to train with the Bundeswehr's various operational headquarters (equivalent to the Japanese Ground Component Command, Self-Defense Fleet Command, and Air Defense Command), to board armoured vehicles, ships, and transport aircraft of the Army, Navy, and Air Force and to be briefed on the military situation was essential for deepening my understanding of the Bundeswehr. Furthermore, during a training session at the Bundeswehr University, research was conducted on the early practical application of 3D printers, and, personally, I was impressed by the advanced state-of-the-art technology and the specific process leading to its practical application in the military.

The 2024 IGASOC also included several study trips and excursions that

were designed to foster the participants' understanding of the political, strategic, operational and defence industrial environment in which general and admiral staff officers have to act. Among others, we visited major German political institutions, including the Federal Chancellery, the German Bundestag (parliament), the Federal Ministry of Defence, and the Federal Foreign Office, improving our understanding of the current political and diplomatic situation and related challenges. We also visited the NATO Headquarters and the Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU in Belgium, and received presentations from Bundeswehr personnel currently working there. Listening to their descriptions of their responsibilities and current projects, we were able to gain first-hand information about European security, politics, economics, and the state of cooperation between NATO and the EU. In addition, we visited the UN and Germany's Permanent Mission to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Austria, gaining a deeper understanding of the importance of the OSCE, of which both Russia and Ukraine are members, and its efforts to bring an end to the war through various measures. At the Austrian National Defence Academy in Vienna, I received an explanation of the importance of Austria, a neutral country, and its efforts in balancing neutrality with European solidarity amid the recent rapid changes in the security environment. I was able to gain a first-hand understanding of the reality of the security environment and the measures being taken.

All these excursions were a fine complement to the classroom lectures in which we had already learned about

the organisational structures and missions of NATO, the EU, and other organisations.

In addition to these political and military institutions, we also visited important European arms manufacturers such as Airbus, which builds the German Air Force's M-400 transport aircraft, and KMW (Krauss-Maffei Wegmann), which develops the Leopard tank – the German Army's main battle tank. On these occasions, I realised once again that the German economy benefits to some degree from defence industrial activities.

## Course content

The future general and admiral staff officers studying on the course were trained in skills required for future command assignments. Among others, the students on the 2024 IGASOC were taught how to implement the Comprehensive Operational Planning Directive (COPD), NATO's operational planning process.

As part of the joint training phase, students were divided into two groups, one focusing on 'International Relations' and the other on 'Crisis Management', and lectures were given on strategic topics. Each group was then assigned a related topic, and presentations were given reflecting the perspectives and experiences of each student, which often differed from those of the Japanese military, resulting in a wide range of perceptions and insights.

During the service-specific training, navy and air force instructors provided general training at the tactical level for their respective services. This was followed by staff activities and planning for navy and air force operations. Essentially, the content was limited to

each tactical level, with no joint operational training. Given the advantage of having representatives of all the services on the course, it is likely that students would have gained an even deeper understanding through discussions with their peers from other services or through joint operational exercises.

In addition to becoming familiar with the planning process as it relates to military operations, the students on the 2024 IGASOC also received lectures on the organisation and structure of the United Nations and took part in the training related to UN peacekeeping missions (UNSOC). As mentioned before, students were awarded a certificate of completion from the UN.

Last but not least, the curriculum included physical training and language lessons. Since all classes are taught in German, the admission standard for this command and staff course is German language proficiency at level B1 or above. So, if necessary, international students must attend German language training at the Federal Office of Languages, another institution in the remit of the Federal Ministry of Defence, and pass the exam before enrolling in the IGASOC. The German language lessons held twice a week during the IGASOC focus on complex expressions, grammar, military terminology, etc., and are intended solely as an effort to promote understanding of the training contents delivered.

Physical training was also provided twice a week by civilian sports teachers, and a variety of training programmes were offered, ranging from simple warm-ups to full-scale weight training, circuit training, and ball games, allowing participants to maintain and improve their physical strength. Upon request, students could also take the

physical fitness test prescribed by the German military. Events included an indoor circuit, a 6km march (carrying a weight of approximately 20kg), pistol shooting (using an H&K P8), and swimming (200 metres freestyle or 50 metres swimming in clothes), among others. Gold, silver, or bronze badges were awarded depending on the passing criteria.

## Information Events

In addition to the seminars, exercises and lectures, the IGASOC curriculum was supplemented by various information events organised by the participants of the course. There were two types of events: Country Information Events called GNIT ('Großer Nationaler Infomationstag') and Regional Information Events named RIT ('Regionaler Infomationstag'). In a Country Information Event, international students from designated countries (four to five countries each year) give approximately three-hour presentations on their country's history, culture, political system, security policy, military organization, and other topics to a broad audience including external guests. In collaboration with embassies, consulates, or private organisations in Germany, the participants present their country's traditional culture by means of dance and music performances, and serve traditional cuisine. During the 2024 IGASOC, four countries – Mongolia, Brazil, South Africa, and Jordan – hosted GNITs.

Regional Information Events, on the other hand, focus on presenting entire regions. Students from each country belonging to the respective region are assigned a topic or issue to present, based on the challenges facing that re-

gion. Each group delivers a 20-minute presentation, followed by a question-and-answer session with the audience. In 2024, Japan, along with South Korea and Vietnam, was grouped in the East Asian region, and the event was themed ‘China as an adjacent power’. Utilizing open-source resources such as government websites, I presented Japan’s relationship with China to date, focusing on Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative and discussing not only military affairs but also topics related to politics, the economy and culture.

Furthermore, so-called ‘Expert Talks’ were held in which four international students, one from each syndicate, each gave an approximately 45-minute presentation on a specialist topic. Given the focus on public relations within the Japan Self-Defense Forces, I was selected to give a presentation to the course community on the topic of ‘Media Strategies of the Ministry of Defense and the Ground Self-Defense Force.’ Many German soldiers asked questions during the presentation, demonstrating the high level of interest on behalf of the German military in media strategy and enabling a meaningful exchange of opinions.

Another aspect that deserves to be mentioned is that all international students enrolled in the programme were assigned volunteer sponsors, known as a ‘Paten’ (which literally translates to ‘godparents’). In general, these ‘Paten’ were family members of former German military officers. They provided advice on assignments and educational content, as well as support in many areas, including participation in various public and private events. While the type and scope of support varied depending on the individual sponsors, they were all extremely kind, and we

had meals together outside of class, participated in events around town, and students were generally given the opportunity to experience the true German lifestyle – something that cannot be taught in a classroom.

## My personal assessment of the 2024 IGASOC

During my study time abroad, I shared the joys and sorrows of many military personnel from around the world and met people with completely different backgrounds, including cultures, languages, and religions. Various exchanges of opinions enabled me to develop an international perspective on a wide range of topics. Furthermore, by cultivating a multifaceted perspective independently from Japanese values, I was able to gain the foundation for successfully working in a defence attaché position.

Overall, the educational activities of the course were extremely well-planned, and I was able to deepen my understanding not only of military affairs but also of German and European politics, economics, and security matters. I also gained a detailed understanding of the Bundeswehr’s position and activities within NATO and the EU, and further realised the importance of international contributions and collective security from a military perspective. Above all, it was a valuable opportunity to build a relationship of trust between the JGSDF and the Bundeswehr, and I am confident that this will make the strong bond that links us even stronger and more special in the future.

Compared to what is taught at the JGSDF Command and Staff College, the



**Fig. 2:** Graduation ceremony of the LGAI 2024. On the left of the picture is the Commandant of the German Command and Staff College, Rear Admiral Ralf Kuchler. The person on the right side of the photo is the author © Bundeswehr/Pieter-Pan Rupprecht.

educational content delivered on the IGASOC is more diverse. In particular, the joint training with other services and the external activities with political leaders and international organisations were extremely valuable, allowing students to see things first-hand, hear directly from staff working there, and ask supplementary questions, thereby solidifying their knowledge. At the JGSDF Command and Staff College, too, opportunities to train with inter-

national organisations and other militaries, in addition to service-specific and joint training activities, broaden the students' perspectives and are likely to be useful in their future work.

The tactical training conducted in the scope of the IGASOC incorporates complex scenarios, such as those involving UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), into its exercises, in turn making the training more realistic. As a result, the operating

environment is significantly restricted, requiring consideration of UN and NGO activities and prior arrangements. This makes it easier to visualise actual combat as opposed to the JGSDF's simulated training, and requires a broader perspective when formulating plans.

Students from other countries can respond flexibly to these hypothetical situations, based on their previous experiences gained from participating in actual combat and operations. For this reason, one suggestion for improving the preparation of exercise conditions and procedures for the JGSDF's Command and Staff Course education would be to incorporate the opinions and assistance of members of other countries' armed forces with combat experience and thus adapt the exercises to the realities of modern warfare.

Germany also takes a generally proactive stance towards accepting immigrants, and the military includes personnel from a variety of cultures and religions. Furthermore, with a history spanning over six decades, the IGASOC has the know-how and the necessary infrastructure to accommodate all kinds of people. Particularly notable were the daily food options prepared for the students to accommodate religious differences and the provision of prayer time. While followers of Islam and Hinduism remain small minorities in Japan, given the current increase in combined training with foreign militaries and international missions, I believe it is necessary to understand and respect the religious beliefs of minority groups, regardless of their numbers, and to create an environment with a global perspective.

As mentioned above, the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College works with civilian volunteers to provide various types of support to each

international student. I believe a similar support system would be beneficial for international students attending the JGSDF Command and Staff College. This will not only provide support to the individual students, but will also help their families. It will also be an opportunity for German nationals in Japan to learn more about the Self-Defense Forces themselves, as well as to get to know Japanese lifestyle, culture, politics, and economics. This is believed to be extremely effective in terms of gaining an understanding for the Japanese government and the Self-Defense Forces.

## Conclusion

While many Bundeswehr soldiers have a positive impression of Japan, there is less reporting on Japan in Germany than we might expect, and they have few opportunities to interact with Japanese people. The primary role of exchange students is to acquire knowledge and skills in the host country; however, they also serve as representatives of their respective countries. If the number of exchange students from the Self-Defense Forces increases, the opportunities for Germans to interact with Japanese people will also multiply, allowing them to accurately understand the spiritual characteristics, customs, similarities with Germany, and the complex security environment surrounding Japan – thereby increasing the opportunities for sharing information that can help foster defence relations between Japan and Germany. In a nutshell, this exchange programme serves as a tool to promote mutual understanding between the Bundeswehr and the Self-Defense Forces, and to multidimensionally strengthen de-

fence relations between Japan and Germany.

In conclusion, I would like to propose a suggestion for deepening our relationship even further. Following the strengthening of German-Japanese defence relations at the political level and the initiation of training programmes for JSDF personnel in Germany in recent years, creating more opportunities for Bundeswehr and JSDF officers to participate in each other's training courses could be a first step in bringing a new quality to the defence relationship between Japan and Germany, aiming to both enhance the status of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in Europe and improve practical cooperation between the two militaries.



## Germany's Air Force in Japan

During the 2024 deployment to the Indo-Pacific region designated PACIFIC SKIES, Germany's Air Force flew around the world in two months, participating in five different exercises. The German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) had also partly been involved in the preparation and organisation of these exercises, which took place in Alaska, Japan, Hawaii, Australia and India.

After a first brief visit of the German Air Force to Japan in 2022, Exercise NIPPON SKIES 2024 in Japan laid the military-political and, above all, tactical foundations for the bilateral cooperation between the *Luftwaffe* and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF, Japanese: *Kōkū Jieitai*). In the future, the relations between the two countries' air forces will be further strengthened by mutual visits as well as exercises and flight operations in binational or multinational settings in Germany and Japan.

After two deployments to the Indo-Pacific in 2022 and 2024, the German Air Force will continue to be committed to this region in the future, too. In particular, the German Air Force plans to participate regularly in the important biennial PITCH BLACK exercise in Australia. During its deployments to the Indo-Pacific, the Air Force will nonetheless not lose sight of its commitment to national and collective defence, and continue to perform tasks such as NATO Air Policing at the Alliance's eastern flank.

### Strategic Foundations

The Bundeswehr's commitment in the Indo-Pacific is based on the German Federal Government's 'Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific',<sup>1</sup> which were adopted in September 2020. These guidelines take account of the increased economic and political importance of a region that will be key to shaping the international order of the 21st century. Given Germany's close involvement in international trade and its economic ties worldwide, stability in the Indo-Pacific region is crucial for Germany's prosperity and security. For example, any disruption of the heavily trafficked maritime trade routes and thus of the supply chains to and from Europe would have serious consequences for the prosperity of Germany's population and its supply situation.

According to the Federal Foreign Office, the guidelines were adopted with the objective of strengthening Germany's role in the Indo-Pacific in the long term, concluding strategic partnerships and expanding the Federal Government's security policy engagement in the region.<sup>2</sup> To this end, cooperation with democratic countries in the region sharing the same values is of particular importance. In addition to strategic dialogues, military staff talks and training cooperation activities, this also comprises an intensification of bi-

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Foreign Office 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Foreign Office 2021.

lateral visits as well as an expansion of defence contacts in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, this includes the participation in security policy forums, the deployment of liaison officers and the establishment of defence attaché offices, port visits and the participation in exercises in the region.

In this context, foreign and security policy consultations were conducted with Australia and Japan, and during his visit to Japan in April 2022, then Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz underscored Germany's commitment in the region by stating: 'My trip is a clear political signal that Germany and the European Union will continue and intensify their engagement with the Indo-Pacific region.'<sup>4</sup>

And in the foreword to the aforementioned guidelines, then Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, too, had called for Germany's participation in exercises in the region.

## Implementation of the Strategic Guidelines by the German Air Force

The Bundeswehr has been implementing these clearly defined strategic principles and guidelines with annual activities, starting with the German Navy

deploying its frigate *Bayern* to the Indo-Pacific in 2021, where it also visited the port of Tokyo in November 2021.

In 2022, the Air Force followed suit by deploying aircraft and personnel to Exercise PITCH BLACK in Australia, with a stopover in Singapore and short visits to South Korea and Japan. In 2023, the German Army took part in Exercise TALISMAN SABRE – also in Australia – and in 2024, both the German Air Force and the German Navy deployed to the Indo-Pacific at the same time, sending out a strong signal in terms of military policy reflecting Germany's commitment to the region. The Air Force and Navy units, including frigate *Baden-Württemberg* and combat support ship *Frankfurt am Main*, both of which later travelled on to Japan, came together in Hawaii to participate in Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), an international maritime exercise that is considered highly important by the United States in particular.

## The German Air Force's RAPID PACIFIC Deployment

Key characteristics of air assets are range, speed and agility. To demonstrate these capabilities, the German Air Force deployed to the Indo-Pacific for the first time in 2022 in an exercise dubbed RAPID PACIFIC.

Their mission was to demonstrate the Air Force's rapid deployment capability, i.e. its ability to deploy assets over strategic distances in a very short period of time. In this case, the aim was to deploy *Luftwaffe* assets from Germany to the Indo-Pacific region within 24 hours. This mission was accomplished with only one stopover in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). After just over 20

<sup>3</sup> According to the guidelines, strengthening bilateral defence cooperation with countries in the region also includes working within NATO to expand relations with the 'Partners Across the Globe', which explicitly refers to countries such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

<sup>4</sup> Press conference by German Chancellor Scholz and Japan's Prime Minister Kishida on the occasion of the Chancellor's visit to Japan on 28 April 2022.

hours, six Eurofighters, three A330 tanker aircraft of the Multinational Multirole Tanker Transport Unit (MMU) and four A400M transport aircraft arrived in Singapore, giving an impressive demonstration of the Air Force's operational readiness.

RAPID PACIFIC was conducted prior to Exercise PITCH BLACK in Australia, which is a regular training activity hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force and considered the most important tactical air force exercise for strengthening international cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Every two years, PITCH BLACK brings together more than 140 different aircraft from up to 20 nations, among them various European nations such as Great Britain, France and Italy (in 2024, the latter even deployed an aircraft carrier equipped with Italian F-35s), as well as the United States and Canada, and of course also several non-NATO nations from the region, e.g. Japan.

PITCH BLACK 2022 in Australia saw the German Air Force train together with the JASDF for the first time in history, conducting complex multinational scenarios.

Given the large number of participating nations from the Indo-Pacific region, Exercise PITCH BLACK proved to be an ideal opportunity for the *Luftwaffe* to implement the objectives laid down in the 'Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific', i.e. to deepen cooperation with local democracies and partners sharing Germany's values. As a consequence, the Air Force now plans to participate in PITCH BLACK on a regular basis, meaning it will deploy assets to the Indo-Pacific every two years – even if only a few aircraft are available.

In order to intensify cooperation with as many countries as possible, the redeployment from PITCH BLACK was used as an opportunity to deploy one

A400M transport aircraft to South Korea and three Eurofighters with an A-330 tanker aircraft to Hyakuri Air Base north of Tokyo.

No tactical training flights were conducted during this deployment to Japan – the first-ever flight of the post-WW II *Luftwaffe* to Japan was intended to be a symbol for the military and political cooperation between the two countries. Japanese F2 fighter jets escorted the German Eurofighters when they flew past Japan's emblematic landmark Mount Fuji. Even today, photos showing this historic overflight are of great importance to the air forces of both countries.

One of the three Eurofighters was flown by the Chief of the German Air Force, Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz, himself. He later engaged in talks with his Japanese counterpart, General Hiroaki Uchikura, and they agreed on further cooperation between their countries' air forces, particularly on conducting a joint exercise during the German Air Force's next deployment to the Indo Pacific in 2024.

## The Japan Air Self-Defense Force (Kōkū Jieitai)

In 2024, the JASDF celebrated its 70th birthday. Its closest partner is the U.S. Air Force. They first trained together in a binational exercise in 1978, and in 2014, the relationship between both air forces was strengthened even further by more detailed guidelines.<sup>5</sup> The headquarters of the Japanese Air Defense Command is co-located with the U.S. 5th Air Force at Yokota Air Base near Tokyo in order to allow for close

<sup>5</sup> Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) n.d.a.

cooperation between the two air forces.

The JASDF consists of approximately 50,000 military and civilian personnel.

Similarly to the German Air Force, the JASDF is tasked with the permanent protection of its country's airspace and air defence identification zone against airspace violations. In the Japanese fiscal year of 2016, a total of 1,168 scrambles were conducted.<sup>6</sup> This significantly exceeds the number of scrambles of the German Air Force and reflects Japan's geographical proximity to countries such as China, North Korea and Russia.

Like the German Air Force, the JASDF also uses the PATRIOT weapon system, which, together with the AEGIS-equipped ships of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), provides effective protection against ballistic missiles.

Evacuation operations and the operation of a VIP fleet are further tasks performed by the JASDF.

In terms of equipment, the JASDF has a large and broad portfolio of Chinook and Black Hawk helicopters, unmanned RQ-4 reconnaissance drones and combat, transport, tanker and training aircraft at its disposal, which were either purchased from the United States or produced in Japan. Among other things, Japan has also procured modern Boeing KC-46 tanker aircraft, uses Boeing E-767 and E-2 Hawkeye aircraft as AWACS and a Kawasaki C-1 aircraft for electronic warfare missions.

The backbone of the fleet are approximately 150 F-15J combat aircraft manufactured under license in Japan. The Japanese F-2, which is based on the American F-16, has also been produced

in Japan. The most recent acquisition for Japan's impressive portfolio consists of 105 F-35A and 42 F-35B (vertical take-off and landing) aircraft, ordered from Lockheed Martin in the United States. This makes Japan the country with the largest number of F-35 aircraft apart from the United States. At the same time, Japan has the largest fleet of Boeing's Chinook transport helicopters outside the U.S., with Germany likely to become the third largest user after the United States and Japan. With this portfolio, Japan is able to cover all aspects of air operations.

The JASDF is headed by a Chief of Staff, who, with his Air Staff Office in Tokyo, is directly subordinate to the Ministry of Defense. Talks regarding the planning and conduct of the German-Japanese exercise in 2024 were held with the Air Staff Office prior and during the exercise. Later on, the 2nd Air Wing at Chitose Base was given responsibility for conducting the exercise and involved in the planning process, too. Japan is geographically subdivided into five military districts with Chitose Base being located in the Northern District on Japan's second largest island Hokkaido.

## PACIFIC SKIES 2024

PACIFIC SKIES 24, the largest deployment exercise the German Air Force has been involved in so far, was in fact a tri-national deployment conducted together with the French and Spanish air forces. The German Air Force had the lead responsibility for planning and conducting the flights around the world. Aside from highlighting operational aspects of advanced tactical training, the exercise aimed to send a signal of Europe's military and political commitment to

<sup>6</sup> Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) n.d.b.

the region and to strengthen alliances.

The German Air Force first deployed to Alaska, where they participated in ARCTIC DEFENDER, the first of altogether five exercises. This two-week large-scale exercise also involved the U.S. Air Force (USAF), the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) and the Royal Canadian Air Force. In total, more than 90 aircraft from five different nations were involved in ARCTIC DEFENDER. As with Exercise AIR DEFENDER 2023 in Germany, the *Luftwaffe* prepared and conducted the exercise, this time using USAF infrastructure. After ARCTIC DEFENDER, the three European air fleets flew from Alaska to Japan, crossing the Bering Sea.

The greatest challenge in coordinating participation in the five exercises was that some of them took place at the same time. Since the exercise in Australia had already begun, they had only two days to fly from Alaska in the northern hemisphere via Japan to Australia in the southern hemisphere. On the route from Alaska to Japan, however, there are only a few alternate airfields on the Aleutian Islands. Consequently, fluctuating weather conditions at these alternate airfields had to be taken into account during flight planning. In this context, it was very helpful that the Japanese side demonstrated great flexibility, accepting incoming flights also at night and on weekends. At the same time, the problem of supplying large air fleets became apparent, as had been the case before, when it was identified as a major difficulty during Exercise AIR DEFENDER in Germany in 2023. In order to ensure the supply of aviation fuel, the three nations' 30 aircraft (12 German and Spanish Eurofighters, 6 French Rafale, 7 A-330 tankers and 5 A400M transporters) deployed to two different air-

ports in Japan – to Chitose Base in northern Japan and to Hyakuri Base near Tokyo. Thanks to the impressive support provided by Japan in terms of refuelling and ground equipment, the trinational fleet was refuelled overnight so quickly that they were able to start their next flight to Exercise PITCH BLACK right on time the next day.

In order to participate in all envisaged exercises, parts of the German contingent remained in Japan while the bulk of the trinational fleet, including most of the Eurofighters, deployed to Australia to participate in Exercise PITCH BLACK.

Three German Eurofighters and one A400M remained in Japan to conduct the first binational exercise NIPPON SKIES. Afterwards, they flew on to Hawaii to participate in the RIMPAC exercise. With a duration of more than ten and a half hours, this flight from Japan to Hawaii has been the longest Eurofighter flight so far. By splitting the contingent, it was possible to have German Eurofighters take part in all three exercises – in Australia, Japan and on Hawaii.

One major lesson learned from PACIFIC SKIES was the need for air refuelling. The great distances in the vast Indo-Pacific are impressive. For instance, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, which is one of six regional U.S. commands and based in Honolulu, has an area of responsibility that extends from the coast of California to the coast of India, thus covering more than half of the earth's surface. PACIFIC SKIES involved a total of 13 flight legs with at least six flight hours each. The majority of these were done by the MMU's A330 tanker aircraft, but also by U.S. Air Force KC-135s, which refuelled twelve Tornado aircraft on their way from Germany to Alaska. Given the scope of

PACIFIC SKIES, however, the capacities of the MMU and the U.S. Air Force were severely strained, as sometimes almost 50 aircraft of all three European nations involved in the exercise were airborne at the same time. For the first time in history, therefore, the German Air Force worked with a civilian contractor providing air refuelling support with KC-135 tanker aircraft. This company refuelled all three Eurofighters during their flight from Japan to Hawaii and on the way back via Guam and Malaysia to the UAE.

Almost the entire *Luftwaffe* participated in PACIFIC SKIES 2024, while one unit was helping to protect the Baltic airspace for nine months as part of NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission in Latvia.

## NIPPON SKIES

The second of the five exercises conducted during PACIFIC SKIES, which had been agreed on as early as 2022, was the bilateral NIPPON SKIES exercise at Chitose Air Base in Hokkaido, Japan.

The airfield is used for both military and civilian purposes, e.g. serving the Tokyo-Sapporo route, one of the world's busiest flight routes. Even so, smooth cooperation with the civilian air traffic control staff and close coordination with the local authorities ensured that there were hardly any restrictions for the exercise flight operations. Due to the large number of aircraft involved, the civilian part of the airport was also made available for parking and refuelling the A330 aircraft.

In altogether five meetings with the Japanese staffs and the wing stationed at Chitose, both air forces not only had to organise aspects such as messing, ac-

commodation, transport and security, but also to prepare the conduct of flight operations. It was a novel experience for both air forces since this was their first bilateral exercise, meaning that there were no pre-determined flying procedures and standards. This was the biggest challenge of all with regard to flight operations. NATO has numerous standardised regulations describing, for instance, minimum distances or tactics. In a large-scale exercise, one single NATO code word can trigger tactical reactions of 60 aircraft. With the JASDF, however, there was no common language or common set of tactical symbols to draw on, which is why flight preparations took significantly longer than they would have with NATO partners.<sup>7</sup> But now these foundations have been established, they can be used for future exercises. Both sides have benefited from getting to know the other's procedures regarding the flexible planning of air operations and from comparing and adapting different standards.

NIPPON SKIES lasted four days, with flight operations becoming more complex day by day, from one-on-one dog-fights between a Eurofighter and an F-15J aircraft (or the modernized F-15MJ version) to tactical intercept missions conducted by two Eurofighters and two F-15J aircraft against a simulated enemy. The exercise also involved A400M transport aircraft operating in a tanker role and additional U.S. commercial KC-135 tanker aircraft, which were also

<sup>7</sup> During PITCH BLACK, one could easily recognise which Indo-Pacific nations (e.g. Singapore and Thailand) had sent their military personnel to train in the United States as they were familiar with NATO's common tactical vocabulary.

to be used for refuelling during the subsequent transfer to Hawaii.

The airspace used for the exercise flight operations, which is largely over the sea, proved to be extensive enough for training purposes.

The flights during NIPPON SKIES were conducted by German and Japanese aircraft only, but for future exercises, it may be an option to also include USAF and USMC aircraft stationed in Japan.

The German contingent was accommodated in nearby Sapporo, the largest city on Hokkaido Island and host of the first Olympic Winter Games in Asia in 1972. Since then, Sapporo has also been one of the partner cities of Munich.

As for the German forces' stay in Japan, the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, which had been concluded between the two nations shortly beforehand, provided many benefits.

The exercise in Japan also served to test new procedures such as the German Air Force's rapid deployment capability, in order to ensure that the Air Force is capable of rapidly deploying small contingents to any place in the world, if need be, and thus able to react to crisis situations. This concept was tested both in Japan and Hawaii. All Eurofighter flight operations were conducted with a contingent of only 50 personnel.

## Cooperation between the *Luftwaffe* and the JASDF: Summary and Way Ahead

During the 2024 deployment to Japan, uncharted territory was entered in more than one respect. Considering that there was no prior set of common standards, regulations or tactical symbols and vocabulary to draw on, this exercise has laid the foundations for mutual understanding that can now be built upon. The objective of enhancing the crews' tactical skills was achieved, and the German Air Force has shown that it is capable of rapidly deploying assets worldwide.

Having thus established themselves as reliable partners, the JASDF and the German Air Force have since intensified their cooperation even further, for instance by return visits of Japanese delegations to Germany. In both countries, the strategic message of deepening cooperation and mutual support was clearly communicated to the public, particularly as this first-ever bilateral exercise was met with great interest and positive feedback by the German and Japanese media alike. The importance of the training exercise was underscored by the attendance of high-ranking visitors from Tokyo, among them several Japanese MPs, the Japanese Air Chief and the German Ambassador to Japan.

NIPPON SKIES has been a further step in strengthening global partnerships, an objective outlined in Germany's 'Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific'. Over the past few years, the German Army, Air Force and Navy have all been active in the Indo-Pacific, and plans for future projects show that the *Bundeswehr* will not waver in its commitment to the region. Japan will therefore

be part of future medium-term deployments to the Indo-Pacific, too, in order to continue the tactical exchange between the two countries.

Given the outstanding hospitality the German Air Force enjoyed in Japan, it will be more than happy to return to the land of the rising sun. As I said before: ‘The *Luftwaffe*’s commitment in the Indo-Pacific, and particularly its cooperation with the Japan Air Self-Defense Force, have highlighted the importance of direct, bilateral contacts and have shown how joint drills can help to build mutual trust. I am sure that the *Luftwaffe* will continue to work closely with Japan in the coming years and that our exercises in the Indo-Pacific were not just a flash in the pan but rather the beginning of Germany’s long-term, sustainable commitment in the region.’

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# **Indo-Pacific Deployment 2024 – Cooperation between the German Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF)**

## **Introduction**

In its foreign and security policy guidelines, the Federal Republic of Germany classifies the Indo-Pacific as a region of considerable strategic significance that, due to the fast growth of some of its economies, has gained even further political and economic importance. At the same time, this region is where a competition to shape the future of the regional and global order takes place, something which involves maritime territorial claims and maritime border disputes. Obstructing the maritime trade routes connected to the Indo-Pacific would have serious consequences for the supply chains from and to Europe and could jeopardise Germany's and Europe's prosperity. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific is a key region when it comes to the implementation of the rules-based international order (RBIO). China's political and economic rise as well as its increasingly dominant behaviour pose a challenge and are in conflict with German and European values and interests. In 2020, the German Government published its national policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, which underline the increased global political relevance of this geostrategic area. Strengthening European action, multilateralism, and reinforcing and maintaining the RBIO are among the core principles of Ger-

many's Indo-Pacific policy. To support the implementation of the Indo-Pacific guidelines of 2020 and the coalition agreement concluded in 2021, German armed forces have therefore been regularly conducting Indo-Pacific deployments (IPD). Each IPD is an overarching national project which, among other things, serves to strengthen the RBIO, to protect maritime routes and the freedom of the high seas, and to intensify cooperation in security and military matters with key states in the region.

Germany's decision to again deploy naval forces to the Indo-Pacific region in 2024 was carefully considered from a strategic point of view and was consistent with the guidelines stating that Germany wants to expand security cooperation with partners in the region and participate in exercises to strengthen the maintenance of the rules-based order. Japan was identified as a preferred partner in this endeavour as Japanese initiatives actively promote multinational cooperation in the protection of maritime routes. Moreover, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force is highly professional and has a lot of regional expertise – something which



**Fig. 1:** NOBLE RAVEN formation performing a steampast © Bundeswehr/OMT Rodewald.

German armed forces can benefit from in joint exercises.

With specific regard to the German Navy's area of responsibility, an Indo-Pacific naval task force was deployed by the Chief of the German Navy from 7 May to 2 December 2024 under the terms of a national project. This naval force, referred to as Task Group 500.01, consisted of the frigate *Baden-Württemberg* and the combat support ship *Frankfurt am Main*. In accordance with the Indo-Pacific policy guidelines, the objectives of this force included supporting or contributing to UN, EU and NATO activities, taking part in bilateral and multinational exercises, and deepening cooperation with friendly nations. Beyond that, an additional task of this naval force was to help maintain and preserve the RBIO and free navigability of the oceans and the high seas. The IPD 24 was one of the German Navy's most challenging and diverse maritime deployments of the last few

years, in the course of which German warships also called at Japanese ports such as Tokyo and Yokosuka. Japan, as a like-minded partner, performed a special role, which is why the IPD 24 also marked a milestone with regard to security cooperation between Germany and Japan. During the deployment, the German naval force conducted joint exercises with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) and was provided logistic support services.

### Taking Part in the Multinational RIMPAC 2024 and NOBLE RAVEN 2024 Exercises

Essential elements of the partnership formed between the IPD 24 force and the JMSDF were joint exercises, which ranged from bilateral ship-to-ship training activities up to participation in the complex multinational NOBLE RAVEN



**Fig. 2:** AV-8Bs and F-35Bs flying in formation over *ITS Cavour*  
© Bundeswehr/OMt Rodewald.

2024 exercise. In line with the actual mission, the overarching aim of this combined training programme was to increase interoperability between the navies as well as to exercise and train together within the context of security cooperation.

During the first stage of the deployment, the IPD force took part in the US-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024 major exercise conducted from June to August. The world's largest naval exercise, RIMPAC was conducted in the sea area off Hawaii and involved numerous countries with Pacific coastlines, including Japan. As part of the exercise, the frigate *Baden-Württemberg* and the combat support ship *Frankfurt am Main* operated in multinational formations and gained first experience in practical cooperation with the JMSDF. In this context, the Japanese guided missile destroyer *JS Haguro* operated as part of the task group charged with protecting the aircraft carrier USS

*Carl Vinson*, and, as the frigate *Baden-Württemberg* was this task group's flagship, was thus placed under the command of the German CTG.

In August, after RIMPAC had been completed, the German naval force deployed to Japan, where it conducted bilateral exercises with the JMSDF to further deepen cooperation between the navies.

This maritime cooperation with Japan eventually culminated in the IPD formation's participation in the multinational NOBLE RAVEN 24-3 exercise, which was hosted by Japan at the end of August 2024. Alongside naval units from Germany and Japan, vessels and aircraft from Australia, France and Italy also took part in this exercise. The Japanese assets involved included the helicopter carrier *JS Izumo* and the destroyer *JS Ōnami* while Italy was represented by the aircraft carrier *ITS Cavour* as the flagship of an Italian carrier strike group with the consort ships

*ITS Raimondo Montecuccoli*, *ITS Alpino* and the French frigate *FS Bretagne*.

The practical part of the exercise comprised a broad spectrum of naval scenarios such as air defence, anti-submarine warfare, replenishment at sea manoeuvres, and so-called cross-deck operations, which saw on-board helicopters practice landing on the flight decks of other participating units. The objectives of the NOBLE RAVEN 24 exercise included improving the tactical capabilities of all participating naval units and deepening collaboration between all navies involved. The strategic significance of this exercise was in line with the IPD 24 aim to demonstrate teamwork with international partners.

## A Bilateral Agreement for Logistic Support

A main cooperation element was the logistic support Japan provided to the German naval force during its stay in the West Pacific. From 20 to 27 August 2024, the force was berthed at Tokyo for resupply purposes. This port visit emphasised the political significance of the close ties and partnership between Germany and Japan. Japanese officers visited German vessels – and vice versa – in an atmosphere distinguished by comradeship and openness. These visits showed that the relationship of the two navies is based on trust and great respect and characterised by trusting cooperation.

An agreement on mutual support (Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, ACSA), signed by both countries prior to the IPD 24, had formally placed their logistic support cooperation on a new footing, thus facilitating the exchange of supplies, fuel, spare parts and services between Ger-

man and Japanese military forces. This agreement was first put into practice during the German force's stay in Japan and has proven its worth by simplifying account settlement procedures and immensely reducing the bureaucratic effort involved in the use of Japanese support services.

Overall, it can be stated that the JMSDF proved to be an exemplary host, a highly professional force and a reliable partner. At the operational level, the impression is also nothing but positive. The German IPD force and the JMSDF worked together almost seamlessly – something which demonstrated the high level of training of both partners. Differences in procedures or doctrine were resolved constructively, and a common working mode was swiftly established.

## Geopolitical Context – the Rules-Based International Order in the Indo-Pacific

The close naval cooperation displayed by Germany and Japan during the IPD 24 can also be viewed against the backdrop of geopolitical developments in the Indo-Pacific. Both countries are liberal democracies and share basic values such as freedom, the rule of law, and the observance of international law. As like-minded partners, they are united in the effort to preserve the RBIO, which has increasingly come under pressure in the region.

It is of vital interest to Germany that principles such as a peaceful settlement of conflicts, freedom of movement on the high seas, and the application of international law and of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) are adhered to in

the Indo-Pacific. The region accounts for around 40% of German foreign trade outside the EU, which is why safe shipping routes are essential for the export-oriented German economy. And Japan as an island country and trade nation relies on open sea routes, as well. As democracies and leading economies, both countries are therefore interested in preserving and strengthening the RBIO. Germany and Japan are close partners and share values in terms of security policy even without having joined a common military alliance. During the IPD 24, the German naval force was able to show Japan its solidarity and support by means of direct presence and cooperation. Its invitation to and participation in the NOBLE RAVEN 24-3 exercise underlined Germany's strategic alliance with Japan.

In summary, the geopolitical context shows that Germany and Japan working together during the IPD 24 was far more than just a temporary bilateral event. Instead, it symbolises the close and deliberate cooperation of two leading industrial countries and democracies, which in the face of new security challenges aim to assume responsibility together. This way, the two nations will contribute to preserving the RBIO and maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Conclusion: German Commitment to be Continued in Accordance with Indo-Pacific Guidelines

The Indo-Pacific deployment 2024 has conclusively proven the close and trusting partnership established between the German Navy and the JMSDF and has shown that distance is not an obstacle to close cooperation in the field of security policy. Japan has been exemplary in providing the IPD force with generous hospitality and great logistic support and has contributed to the successful completion of this deployment. With the IPD 24, Germany has consolidated its commitment in the Indo-Pacific region in close cooperation with allies and partners such as Japan and has demonstrated that it stands up for strengthening and further developing the RBIO based on international law and the Charter of the United Nations and that it actively implements its Indo-Pacific guidelines.

The successful teamwork displayed during the RIMPAC 2024 and NOBLE RAVEN 24-3 exercises has exhibited a high level of interoperability between the German and Japanese naval forces. Going forward, it will be essential to further increase this interoperability through mutual visits, joint exercises and continued cooperation, e.g. in the framework of future Indo-Pacific deployments. A regular presence of German units in the Indo-Pacific region – in close coordination with partners such as Japan – should be continued in the future to promote open sea routes and stability. Despite all positive aspects, however, it must not be left unsaid that these kinds of deployment also involve challenges. The German Navy has limited resources only – and a

seven-month deployment ties up a substantial number of forces and requires sophisticated logistic solutions.

With their cooperation, Germany and Japan have promoted maritime security, the rule of law and partnership in a region in which the RBIO is increasingly coming under pressure. As a result, they both make a significant contribution to security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

The Indo-Pacific guidelines adopted by the German Government set a new course – now, practical experience has shown that this course must be continued and that Germany and Japan see eye to eye in security matters.

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## Authors

**Yuichi Aizawa** is a lieutenant colonel serving in the Japan Self-Defense Force. He has served as an officer in the military police of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force since 2006. Aizawa has a specialisation in military public relations and has been deployed to Djibouti to combat piracy. He was participant at the 2024 international general staff officer course at the German Command and Staff College.

Major General **Frank Gräfe**, German Air Force, is an experienced military officer with over 30 years of distinguished service as a fighter pilot, commander, and strategic leader. Holding a Master's degree in computer science, he has worked in both operational and policy roles within the Federal Ministry of Defence, NATO, and in the field of international diplomacy. His career includes command of Fighter Wing 74, service as German Defense and Air Attaché in Washington, and senior staff positions at national and multinational levels. With 1,800+ flight hours and extensive NATO expertise, he now serves as the Chief of Staff at NATO's Allied Air Command.

From 2019 to 2023, Colonel (GS) **Karsten Kieseewetter** served as the German Defence Attaché in Japan, a capacity in which he contributed to deepening the security cooperation between Germany and Japan by launching numerous initiatives in close coordination with the Federal Ministry of Defence (FMoD). Following his subsequent participation in the Senior Course at the NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy, and several assignments in the FMoD's Directorate-General for Security and Defence Policy and with the GIDS that enabled him to broaden his expertise on the Indo-Pacific region even further, he is currently employed as the first German liaison officer to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command on Hawaii.

Lt. Commander Dr **Tobias Kollakowski** is a research fellow at the German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies. Currently, Dr Kollakowski is a visiting scholar at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research in Taipei. He specialises in maritime security and strategy, naval theory, Russian naval strategy and security in East Asia. Prior to joining the GIDS in 2020, Dr Kollakowski served at the German Navy Headquarters as acting department head. He holds a PhD and an MA in War Studies from King's College London and a Bachelor's degree in Russian Area Studies and Chinese Studies from the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg.

Dr **Wolfgang Müller** is a Resident Senior Researcher at the GIDS. He leads research projects focusing on the concept of total defence as well as China and the Indo-Pacific region. Previously, he held several management positions with the German Federal Employment Agency. Before that, he was an air force officer with assignments at the UN and NATO. Now a lieutenant colonel in the German Air Force reserve, Müller holds an MBA and a PhD in Economics.

Vice Admiral (ret.) **Umio "Man of the Sea" Otsuka** joined the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force after graduating from the National Defense Academy in 1983. Among others, he served as Chief of Staff of the Self-Defense Fleet and President of the Maritime Command and Staff College before concluding his military career as Director General of Defense Intelligence Headquarters in 2019. He subsequently served as Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Djibouti from 2020 to 2023. After spending several months in Asunción, Paraguay, accompanying his spouse, the Japanese Ambassador to the Republic of Paraguay, he became the Chief Priest of Yasukuni Jinja in April 2024, a Shinto shrine dedicated to the spirits of over two million soldiers and sailors who have died in wars since 1853.

Dr **Christian Richter** is a Senior Research Fellow at German Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (GIDS) in Hamburg. His research areas include Public International Law, International Criminal Law and German Constitutional Law. He is also a lieutenant colonel (Army) in the Reserve.

Dr **Johannes Berthold Sander** joined the West German Navy as a member of Crew 7/77. Having completed his naval officer training, he was deployed on various navy ships and boats. After studying Education Science at the Bundeswehr University – today called the Helmut Schmidt University/Bundeswehr University – Hamburg, Dr Sander underwent naval aviation training and was deployed as an aircraft operations officer. In 1989, he was assigned to study History and Japanese Studies at the University of Hamburg. He then led a research project at the Military History Research Institute, now part of the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences, in Potsdam. From 2005, Dr Sander completed training as a 'UN Military Observer and Senior Staff Officer,' after which he was assigned to the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). Following his return in 2008, Dr Sander lectured History and Social Sciences at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College in Hamburg until he retired at the end of 2017.

Rear Admiral **Axel Schulz** is a senior officer in the German Navy with extensive leadership and policy experience. From 1991 to 1995, he studied Aeronautical and Spacecraft Engineering at the Bundeswehr University in Munich. Admiral Schulz has held various command assignments, including commanding officer of the air defence frigate *FGS Hamburg* from 2013 to 2015. From 2021 to 2024, he served as Commander of Flotilla 2 (Einsatzflottille 2), a capacity in which he acted as Commander Task Group of the German Navy's Indo-Pacific Deployment 2024, strengthening partnerships with allies across the Indo-Pacific region. Currently employed as Deputy Director-General for Personnel at the Federal Ministry of Defence, he is in charge of strategic personnel development.

**Natsumi Shiino** is a PhD candidate at the University of Warwick. She has an MA in International Relations from King's College London and a BA in Foreign Languages from the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Natsumi's research interests include security in East Asia, Japan's national security, the Japan-Sino relationship, and strategic communication. Natsumi has been serving as a civilian employee at the Japanese Ministry of Defense since 2012. She also has experience in working as a seconded researcher for the Acquisition Technology and Logistics Agency.

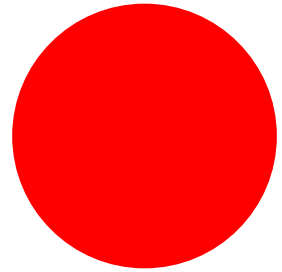
# GIDS

## German Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (GIDS)

Founded in 2018 as a cooperation between the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College and the Helmut Schmidt University/Bundeswehr University Hamburg, the German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies (GIDS) serves as the Bundeswehr's think tank. It provides analysis and research on military and security matters and is responsible for advising decision-makers both within the Bundeswehr and the Federal Ministry of Defence. With its insights and recommendations, the GIDS is able to contribute to the German armed forces' operational readiness. Moreover, it makes an important contribution to Germany's public debate on security and strategic culture. Bringing senior officers and researchers together, the GIDS combines military expertise with scientific excellence.







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GERMAN INSTITUTE  
FOR DEFENCE AND  
STRATEGIC STUDIES

@Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr  
Manteuffelstrasse 20 | D-22587 Hamburg  
Tel: 040 8667 6802 | FueakBwGids@bundeswehr.org