

BOOK REVIEWS

***Bilateral Perspectives on Regional Security: Australia, Japan and the Asia-Pacific Region.* Edited by William T. Tow and Rikki Kersten. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Hardcover: 279pp.**

The region's major security stories recently have focused on the rise of China and America's so-called "pivot" or rebalancing of military forces towards Asia. A related story, which is arguably as important but not mentioned nearly as often, has been Japan's gradual moves to "normalize" its defence posture. The recent re-election of Shinzo Abe as Prime Minister in Japan might, according to a number of senior commentators, reinforce this trend as evidenced by, for example, Japan's tentative participation in operational tasks in Iraq, its active counter-piracy patrols in the Indian Ocean and off the coast of Somalia, attempts to redefine Article 9 of its Constitution, and moves to develop military links beyond those with its treaty ally the United States.

It is against that final context that the present volume has been produced. It is the collected and edited papers of scholars who have been working since 2008 to assess the implications for regional security of the 2007 Australia–Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. In thirteen chapters plus an introduction and conclusion, the editors and contributors traverse the domestic issues related to a closer military relationship between Japan and Australia, the dynamics of their security relationship, and the regional and global ramifications of an intensified relationship. In the words of the editors, the "security relationship is proving to be adaptable to rapid and historical structural changes", defence relations fit "with the emerging strategic doctrine of their mutual senior ally", and these relations supersede "traditional post-war alliance politics by

being less threat-centric and more nimble instruments of strategic reassurance” (p. 241).

The book is timely. It provides a very useful background to this developing relationship and a range of insights concerning its utility.

Part 1 of the volume — the interplay of domestic and international factors leading to the closer relationship — is, perhaps inevitably, backward looking and focuses heavily on Japanese politics. The three chapters contain a good deal of useful detail and alternative views, but only one is devoted to the debate within Australia, a reflection, perhaps, of the relative interest in the topic in the two countries.

Part 2, which deals with bilateral dynamics, is more forward looking but is heavily descriptive. Eiichi Katahara argues that the relationship should be developed by building on the Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD) involving Japan, Australia and the United States, ensuring it includes discussions on “common approaches towards China”, promoting information sharing between the TSD partners, widening the TSD process to include a whole-of-government approach, having the two countries continue to play a leading role in nuclear disarmament and arms control and undertake to build a “viable [regional] security architecture” (pp. 142–43). These are worthy aims, albeit limited, but they can hardly “represent the epitome of advancement for an Australian-Japan security dyad that has already exceeded the original expectations of those who have supported its development” (p. 143).

Part 3 is perhaps the most thoughtful section of the book, in part because it lifts itself from the details of the relationship into a more conceptual realm in which the international context is given more space. Tow notes that the development of the bilateral relationship will “hinge significantly on how effectively US policymakers manage their own country’s strategic interests and behaviour” (p. 156). Why Japan and Australia cannot work together directly is not spelled out, but perhaps it is implicit. The implicit thought is almost picked up by Tomohiko Satake who notes each country’s redefinition of its relationship with America and the consequential increasing involvement in international security missions (p. 198). “Increasing involvement” is unlikely to be correct for Australia which has a long history of participation in international security missions. But in any case, rather than increasing involvement in U.S.-led missions, redefinition of the U.S.-relationship by each country

could have led, but apparently has not except on the margins, to a closer relationship with each other purely in bilateral terms.

Probably because of the relatively homogeneous backgrounds of the contributors (mostly political scientists), there is much overlap in content as each writer spends several paragraphs in contextual throat clearing before getting into the detailed thesis for the chapter. On the other hand, to the extent that writers take alternative views, over China for example (a cause for friction according to Envall and Fujiwara (citing Kokobun, p. 70), in search of peaceful development (Togo, p. 81) and a subject of bilateral hedging (Wilkins, p. 124)), useful insights into the issues can be found. Examining the range of perspectives is a useful task for any student of any subject.

Overall, the volume has to be given a mixed grade. There is too much description and repetition (primarily a matter for the editors rather than the individual contributors who will always want to introduce their contribution with some context) and too little prescription, which is an issue for the contributors themselves. This is a book for scholars of the topic and policy-makers rather than the general reader (not a criticism), but more importantly, one wonders whether the book might not have been better as a single-authored volume drawing on the current chapters as background and producing a more cohesive analysis of the bilateral relationship.

In terms of the subject's enduring worth, perhaps the last word should go to the newly elected Prime Minister Abe. In an opinion piece written before he became Prime Minister, but only published after the election, he argued that Japan had, correctly, continued to strengthen ties with Australia and India after he left office, but that of the two countries, "India — a resident power in East Asia, with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands sitting at the western end of the Strait of Malacca (through which some 40 per cent of world trade passes) — deserves greater emphasis".