

Defense cooperation set to play greater role

Japan expands security ties with ASEAN

Analysis
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Defense and security cooperation is set to play an increasingly important role in relations between Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations amid growing regional tensions over territorial and maritime spat with China.

That's one of the key takeaways of a Japan-ASEAN leaders summit held in Tokyo over the weekend, which saw the comprehensive strategic partners lay out a "new vision" for bilateral ties and launch a range of cooperation initiatives in the diplomatic, security, economic, cultural and social fields.

At the summit commemorating 50 years of bilateral relations, Tokyo and the 10-member bloc agreed to deepen security ties in areas such as capacity building, defense equipment and technology, as well as joint training and exercises, according to a statement issued Sunday.

The move highlights the changing dynamic

of Japan-ASEAN ties as the partners aim to both increase mutual trust and future-proof their partnership amid an array of shared challenges and objectives.

While Tokyo was initially a source of economic aid and investments for Southeast Asia, relations have become increasingly balanced and mutually beneficial in recent decades, particularly given the region's rapid economic growth, with Japan now more often seen as a critical partner for strengthening regional security.

As Beijing becomes more assertive and expands its regional footprint, Japan has grown wary of the shifting balance of power. This has prompted Tokyo to gradually boost security assistance to ASEAN countries in a bid to bolster regional autonomy while increasing their capacity to resist external pressures and retain a range of geopolitical choices.

This serves three key purposes, according to Collins Chong Yew Keat, a foreign affairs and security strategist at Malaysia's Universiti Malaya. The first is to try and deter Chinese aggression by bolstering the maritime capa-



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, ASEAN leaders and their spouses release paper lanterns into the air with students from the regional bloc during a lighting ceremony for the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit at Azabudai Hills in Tokyo on Sunday. POOL/VIA AFP-JIJI

bilities of countries in the region. The second is to help secure trade routes that are critical to Japan, and the third is to expand Tokyo's connections and soft power with the so-called Global South developing nations.

"Japan has realized that governments in Southeast Asia are in need of a strong third force they can trust as they seek to avoid being sucked into the endless abyss of the China-U.S. rivalry," said Universiti Malaya's Chong.

This diplomatic push has seen a number of concrete results.

For instance, Japanese security assistance, initially meant for coast guards and law enforcement agencies, was recently expanded to also cover the region's armed forces after Tokyo in April launched its official security



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Kishida vows to take lead in meeting Asia's carbon goals

KYODO, AFP-JIJI

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida pledged Monday that Japan will "take the lead" in efforts to achieve a carbon-free Asia as he spoke at a multinational forum in Tokyo focused on discussing decarbonization measures.

Kishida said Japan will try to create a huge "decarbonization market" capable of attracting investment from around the world to Asia, adding that reducing carbon dioxide emissions is a "common challenge" for the region.

A joint statement issued after the first-ever summit of the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) said the leaders agreed to pursue decarbonization through "diverse" and "practical" pathways, depending on the "circumstance and different starting point of each country."

In his speech, Kishida said Y4 quadrillion (\$28 trillion) is estimated to be required for decarbonizing Asia, while promising to establish a new organization to support AZEC members in implementing necessary policies for carbon neutrality.

Japan, Australia and nine states from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations except Myanmar, attended Monday's gathering.

In the statement, the participants also confirmed their cooperation on maintaining economic growth and ensuring energy security as well as cutting carbon dioxide emissions.

Tokyo is boosting its renewables sector but has also come under fire from environmental groups for providing large-scale public financing for fossil fuel projects across Asia.

Japan has also been seeking to push the export of tech aimed at reducing emissions by coal plants, such as co-firing with ammonia and carbon capture. But critics say these methods are unproven and expensive.

"This push to lock in fossil fuel-based energy across the continent is delaying the transition from fossil fuels to renewables," the Climate Action Network said this month.

Ammonia "fails to meaningfully reduce emissions, jeopardizes the decarbonization of Japan's energy and any possibility of phasing out fossil fuels," the group added.

The AZEC meeting took place a day after Japan and ASEAN held a special summit to commemorate 50 years of their friendship and cooperation.

North Korea launches long-range ballistic missile for fifth time in 2023

JESSE JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

North Korea test-fired one of its most powerful long-range ballistic missiles on Monday, Seoul and Tokyo said, a day after the nuclear-armed country launched a short-range weapon into the Sea of Japan.

Japan's Defense Ministry said the weapon, believed to be an intercontinental ballistic missile, had flown for about 73 minutes before splashing down into waters outside the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), approximately 250 kilo-

meters west of Hokkaido's Okushiri Island.

In Seoul, the South Korean Presidential Office "strongly condemned" what it said was the launch of a "solid-fueled ICBM," with President Yoon Suk-yeol ordering a joint response together with the U.S. and Japan by employing the countries' real-time missile information-sharing system.

The missile appeared to have been launched on a "lofted" trajectory, meaning it had been fired on a steep vertical path, hitting a maximum altitude of more than 6,000 km and traveling around 1,000 km, the Japanese Defense Ministry said.

The ICBM launch was the North's fifth firing of a long-range missile in 2023 — its most ever in a single year.

"Based on the flight trajectory of the ICBM-class missile that was launched, it is estimated that its range could exceed 15,000 km, depending on its weight and other factors," Parliamentary Vice Minister of Defense Shingo Miyake said. "In that case, the entire United States would be within the missile's range."

Miyake said Japan was working closely with South Korea and the U.S. to analyze the launch.

Speaking at a news conference later Monday, the Japanese government's top spokesman said that Tokyo had protested the latest missile launch via Pyongyang's embassy in Beijing. North Korea is banned under United Nations sanctions from using ballistic missile technology.

"The actions of North Korea, including its repeated launches of ballistic missiles, are a threat to the peace and security of our region and the international community, and are absolutely unacceptable," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi.

Tokyo, Seoul and Washington are

expected to begin operating a system for sharing real-time North Korean missile warning data before the year's end, but Hayashi said the system was not yet operational.

"The real-time display of North Korea's missile warning data is in the final stages of implementation, and we are still working with the U.S. and South Korea on the details, including the specific timing for the start of implementation," he said.

The White House also condemned the launch, with U.S. national security adviser

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Security tight ahead of key Hong Kong trial

JESSIE PANG AND JAMES POMFRET
HONG KONG
REUTERS

A landmark national security trial for leading China critic Jimmy Lai opened in Hong Kong on Monday amid tight security, with the pro-democracy activist battling charges that he colluded with foreign forces, including the United States.

Queues formed outside the West Kowloon Law Court building the night before, with scores of police deployed. Hong Kong's security chief warned last week any attempts to disrupt proceedings would not be tolerated.

Lai, the founder of now-shuttered pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily and one of the most prominent Hong Kong critics of China's Communist Party leadership, has faced a salvo of litigation under a China-imposed national security law that was enacted in response to a wave of pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The 76-year-old, sporting a crew cut and a gray jacket, appeared calm and thinner than in previous court appearances, smiling and waving to the packed court.



Members of the media stand outside the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts during the national security trial of media mogul Jimmy Lai in Hong Kong on Monday. REUTERS

"When fundamental rights are engaged, any protection must be interpreted generously in favour of Mr. Lai and narrowly for the prosecution," Lai's lawyer, Robert Pang, told the three high court judges: Esther Toh, Susana D'Almada Remedios and Alex Lee.

Lai has pleaded not guilty to all charges, which could see him jailed for life.

Lai is already serving a 5-year, 9-month jail term for a fraud conviction over a lease dispute for his newspaper.

Lai was brought to the court building in an armored prison van. A security cordon was set up around the perimeter with riot police, police vehicles and sniffer dogs.

A lone protester chanting for Lai's release was fenced off by police about 100 meters from the courtroom.

"The national security law has destroyed the legal foundations of the past," said the activist, Alexandra Wong, 67, flanked by six uniformed and plainclothes police officers.

Other supporters of Lai lined up overnight in the winter chill to secure a spot in the courtroom.

"Lai has been detained in prison for almost three years now. I want to witness this," said Jolly Chung, 29. "If he can't come out and has to die in prison, I hope he can be proud of himself, and many Hong Kongers want to say thank you to him."

Western democracies, including the United States, Britain and the European Union, are watching closely, with the trial looming as a fresh diplomatic flashpoint and a key test for Hong Kong's judicial independence and freedoms under the

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