

RSIS Commentary is a platform to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy-relevant commentary and analysis of topical and contemporary issues. The authors' views are their own and do not represent the official position of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced with prior permission from RSIS and due credit to the author(s) and RSIS. Please email to Editor RSIS Commentary at RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg.

Climate Change in Japan's New Defence and Security Strategies

By Alistair D. B. Cook

SYNOPSIS

Japan has taken concrete steps to integrate climate change into its defence and security strategy going forward, and to provide the necessary budget for implementing the relevant measures needed in mitigating the impacts of this threat. This may signal a more prominent leadership role for Japan on climate security in the Indo-Pacific.

COMMENTARY

On 16 December 2022 Japan released its new [Defence](#) and [Security](#) strategies that outlined its new priorities. Hitherto, attention had mostly focused on the security challenges posed by China, North Korea, and Russia, as well as that of cybersecurity. Less attention had been paid to climate change and other natural hazards in Japanese defence and security priorities.

On 23 December 2022, Japan announced an increase in its annual defence budget of 2 per cent of Gross Domestic Product by 2027 in support of the new Defence and Security strategies. This includes Japan's new climate priorities and its commitment to the integration of climate security into defence and security policy. These changes will have implications for the wider Indo-Pacific.

Integration of Climate Security

The backstory to Japan's climate security strategy started with a notable public commitment from Japan's defence and security establishment at the climate security session of the virtual Leaders Summit on Climate convened by US President Joe Biden in April 2021.

At the meeting, Japan's Minister of Defense Kishi Nubuo [announced](#) the

establishment of the MOD Climate Change Task Force. Just over a year later in August 2022, Japan released its *Ministry of Defense Response Strategy on Climate Change*. This strategy outlined Japan's climate commitments in the defence and security sectors. The new Defence and Security strategies together with the budget increase are the next steps in turning these commitments into reality.

Response Strategy on Climate Change

In its strategy, Japan recognises the security impacts of climate change and the implications for its Ministry of Defence and Self-Defence Forces' operations, plans, facilities, and equipment, and the wider international security environment. The strategy disaggregates global climate trends to its consequences at the micro and macro levels for Japan and places the defence and security sectors within its whole-of-government approach as an integral component of national security policy.

This is part of a wider trend for defence to take its place as an active contributor to climate response strategies. Japan's strategy document includes examples of climate security initiatives by the defence establishments of Australia, France, the US, and the UK. It identifies seven core components of climate security for defence, namely, (1) vulnerability assessment of facilities; (2) integration of climate considerations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels; (3) infrastructure development of facilities; (4) reinforcement of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; (5) investment in resilient supply chains; (6) knowledge management and institutional memory; and (7) reduction in fossil fuel dependence.

The strategy frames its effort as an opportunity to make Japan's defence and security sectors more robust, resilient, and efficient. The roadmap also reinforces Japan's strategic security cooperation with the wider international community. Japan remains a trusted partner with other countries in the Indo-Pacific and the development of its climate security policy will provide further impetus for the defence and security sectors in the region to engage in a proactive whole-of-government effort to address the security impacts of climate change.

From Words to Deeds

The release of the *Response Strategy on Climate Change* was an important development to chart the vision of Japan's defence and security sectors as they address climate change by 2050. The next substantive step to realising this vision was the inclusion of climate change in the new Defence Strategy which includes a specific section on sustainability and resiliency. In this section, Japan identified the implications of climate change as having an inevitable impact on the Ministry of Defence and Self-Defence Forces' strategy, operations, and tactics.

The Defence Strategy commits to promoting measures to construct underground command headquarters and relocating and consolidating facilities in major bases and camps to improve resiliency against natural hazards. It begins these efforts with those bases and camps considered important for operations and anticipated to be damaged significantly by disasters such as tsunamis. The Defence Strategy identified 2027 as a date when Japan will have strengthened its defence capacity to respond to such

threats at home, and that 10 years from now, it will have further improved resiliency and be better placed to respond to disasters further away.

As part of its international cooperation initiatives, the Defence Strategy identifies the use of defence capabilities to make proactive efforts towards responding to global challenges requiring humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the event of large-scale international disasters caused by climate change. Japan aims to achieve this through identified areas of comparative advantage such as engineering and medicine, while collecting detailed information using intelligence-related functions, and swiftly transferring the necessary response units using mobile deployment capabilities.

International Cooperation

Japan remains the [most trusted partner](#) in Southeast Asia, a position mirrored across the wider Indo-Pacific. The test for Japan will be on how it engages other countries with these priorities to address the implications of climate change. Some scholars often point to the distance between local priorities in the region and the priorities of development partners. With Japan as the leading Asian development partner with a long history of often well received engagement, there is scope for Japan to draw on this history with countries across the Indo-Pacific to bolster its climate security role. It also places Japan in a position to influence how other development and security partners pursue their climate security strategies to support locally led climate action.

Japan's commitment to climate security will be a catalyst for countries in the region to further develop their own approaches to address the impacts of climate change on national defence and security. It will add a much-needed perspective from the region on global climate action drawing on its diverse experience of the impacts of climate change. More avenues to develop climate security policies will provide countries with an anchor to include climate change within defence and security thinking as part of wider whole-of-government efforts in the Indo-Pacific.

Alistair D. B. Cook is Coordinator of the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief [HADR] Programme and Senior Fellow, Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
T: +65 6790 6982 | E: rsispublications@ntu.edu.sg | W: www.rsis.edu.sg