



Crisis with A

Regional Outlook

US LEADERSHIP IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC: TRENDS AND POLICY
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIA-JAPAN RELATIONSHIP

The 6th Annual Australia-Japan Dialogue, Tokyo, December 9, 2016

Policy Brief

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US Leadership in the Asia-Pacific

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Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the Australia-Japan Foundation for their generous provision of funds supporting the 2016 Australia-Japan Dialogue.

The authors also acknowledge the collaboration and support of the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA). JIIA is a long-standing and much-valued partner of GAI and their contributions remain essential.

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Executive Summary

The annual Australia-Japan Dialogue, jointly hosted by the Griffith Asia Institute and the Japan Institute of International Affairs in Tokyo in December 2016, brought together experts from Australia, Japan, and the US¹ to consider the nature of the Australian and Japanese commitment to the US as guarantor of the current Asian security order and how the shared interests underpinning that commitment can best be managed in the future.

Three key questions guided the Dialogue's discussions, each of which were agreed by participants to be fundamental to understanding Australian and Japanese policy thinking, given that so much of Canberra and Tokyo's outlook and ambition in the post-war period has been predicated on continuing US extended deterrence and support for the region's liberal order. These questions merit particularly careful consideration in Canberra's highly anticipated Foreign Policy White Paper.

1. How far are Japanese and Australian policy makers likely to go in keeping the US committed to strategic engagement in the Asia-Pacific?
- 2.

1. Australia-Japan Security Cooperation: Perceptions of US Leadership in the Asia-Pacific

Since 1945, the American strategic presence in Asia has been central to the region's geopolitical evolution. For most of the post-war period, this has been based on military pre-eminence and unrivalled economic influence through major trade and investment ties with countries in Asia. The US strategic presence has been generally regarded as a stabilizing influence on the region's geopolitics and America's role in reassuring allies and deterring adversaries has provided a critical degree of stability in Asia. All of this has been underpinned by the historically unprecedented material power advantages enjoyed by the US over all other states. As one account has noted, 'the depth, scale and projected longevity of the US lead in each critical dimension of power are noteworthy. But what truly distinguishes the current distribution of capabilities is American dominance in all of them simultaneously'.²

The pre-eminence of the US in material power terms is a key reason explaining the long and enduring shadow of America's post-war strategic presence in Asia, but it is Washington's willingness to exercise leadership in the pursuit of commonly held interests in the region that has provided both the agency *and* the legitimate authority that has underpinned its sustained strategic presence. Perceptions of US leadership, as a consequence of its pivotal role in the region, are at the centre of the current tensions in East and South East Asia – China is challenging it, some in ASEAN are ambivalent about it, but Australia and Japan clearly want US leadership to remain.

But what does it mean to speak of US leadership in the current context, and what does its more contested role suggest about where Australia-Japan security relations are heading? Despite the change in presidential administration in Washington, and persistent doubts about President Trump's commitment to the status quo, senior US officials have been quick to reaffirm a willingness to use military force to defend the territorial interests of allies in Asia. Japanese and Australian governments, meanwhile, continue to highlight what they regard as the link between ongoing US military, economic, and political engagement and the region's stability and prosperity. Focusing on Australian and Japanese perceptions of America's leadership role, as distinct from their different perceptions of China

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and urgency, were already on the table even with the expectation that Hillary Clinton would be elected. Keeping the US engaged, growing irritation in Washington over

2. Policy Recommendations

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management challenges on other important issues, such as China's posture on

Notes and References

¹ The following participants presented papers at the 2016 Australia-Japan Dialogue in Tokyo:

Adjunct Associate Professor James Brown, University of Sydney, Australia

Dr Zack Cooper, Centre for Strategic and International studies, US