

# Frontline Anchors: The Shared Strategic Trajectories of Japan and Poland in the Era of Revisionist Threats

by Prof. Stephen R. Nagy

## Executive Summary

As the global security architecture faces unprecedented strain from revisionist powers, Japan and Poland have emerged as the indispensable frontline anchors of the United States' alliance networks in the Indo-Pacific and Europe, respectively. Both nations share a profound geopolitical symmetry. They are geographically proximate to revanchist authoritarian neighbors, China for Japan, and Russia for Poland and both rely fundamentally on the U.S. security umbrella to deter regional hegemony. This policy brief examines the geopolitical similarities between Japan and Poland through the dual lenses of hard security and economic security. It outlines their shared strategic concerns, current and potential areas of bilateral cooperation, and the institutional frameworks that can facilitate this alignment. The brief concludes with two concrete policy recommendations to deepen Japan-Poland cooperation in both hard and economic security domains, ensuring the resilience of the democratic international order.

## Introduction

The contemporary international order is increasingly defined by systemic competition between democratic alliances and authoritarian revisionist states. In this volatile environment, Japan and Poland occupy remarkably similar geopolitical spaces. Poland stands as the eastern bulwark of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), directly bordering the war in Ukraine, the heavily militarized Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, and Belarus. Japan sits at the edge of the First Island Chain, facing a rapidly militarizing China, an unpredictable and nuclear-armed North Korea, and a belligerent Russia.

For both Warsaw and Tokyo, the United States is the ultimate guarantor of national survival. However, recognizing the shifting global balance of power and the domestic political pressures within the United States regarding burden-sharing, both nations have abandoned post-Cold War complacency. They are currently undertaking historic military build-ups and economic de-risking strategies. The historical foundation for this cooperation is strong; despite geographical distance, Poland and Japan have maintained a legacy of mutual respect dating back to the early 20th century, culminating in the establishment of a Strategic Partnership in 2015 (Pałasz-Rutkowska, 2019; Poland Japan Foundation, n.d.). Understanding the parallel trajectories of Japan and Poland is crucial for U.S. policymakers seeking to integrate the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security theaters.

## **Hard Security: Shared Strategic Concerns**

The hard security environments of Japan and Poland are defined by the tyranny of proximity to revisionist powers. Poland's strategic calculus was irrevocably solidified by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Warsaw recognizes that a Russian victory in Ukraine would place Russian forces directly on its extended border, posing an existential threat to the Polish state and the broader European security architecture.

Similarly, Japan views China's aggressive posturing in the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea as a direct threat to its own territorial integrity and the sea lines of communication upon which its economy depends. In its 2023 Defense White Paper (令和5年版防衛白書), the Japanese Ministry of Defense explicitly categorized China's military activities as an "unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge" (防衛省, 2023). Furthermore, the growing military alignment between Beijing and Moscow has heightened Tokyo's threat perception, mirroring Warsaw's concerns about the Russia-Belarus union state. The late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's warning that "a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency" perfectly mirrors the Polish understanding that a Ukrainian defeat is a Polish crisis.

## **Hard Security: Areas of Cooperation**

To mitigate these threats, both nations have fundamentally restructured their defense postures, moving away from minimal deterrence toward robust, proactive defense capabilities. In 2022, Poland passed the Homeland Defence Act (Ustawa o obronie Ojczyzny), which mandated a massive increase in defense spending to at least 3% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a figure that has since climbed even higher, making Poland NATO's top spender by GDP proportion (Dz.U. 2022 poz. 655; Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, 2021). Warsaw has embarked on an unprecedented procurement spree, purchasing advanced U.S. systems such as Abrams tanks, HIMARS artillery, and F-35 fighter jets.

Concurrently, Japan has shattered its decades-old, self-imposed ceiling of capping defense spending at 1% of GDP. Tokyo is on track to double its defense budget to 2% of GDP by 2027, transforming the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) into a more lethal and integrated force. Japan is also procuring U.S. Tomahawk cruise missiles to develop a "counterstrike capability" (反撃能力), a historic departure from its strictly defensive post-World War II posture (防衛省, 2023; RIETI, 2023).

The shared reliance on U.S. defense technology presents a significant area for cooperation. Both nations are integrating the F-35 into their air forces and utilizing advanced missile defense systems. This commonality in platforms offers opportunities for joint training, shared maintenance protocols, and interoperability exercises. Furthermore, as Poland transforms into the primary logistics hub for NATO's eastern flank and Ukraine, Japan is acutely interested in studying Warsaw's logistical architecture. The JSDF can learn critical lessons from Poland on how to serve as a forward staging ground and logistics hub for U.S. and allied forces in the event of a Taiwan contingency.

## **Economic Security: Shared Strategic Concerns**

While hard security addresses immediate military threats, both Japan and Poland recognize that economic coercion is a primary weapon utilized by their revisionist neighbors. Economic security has therefore been elevated to a core pillar of their respective national security strategies.

For Poland, the primary economic security threat historically emanated from Russian weaponization of energy exports. Prior to 2022, Europe's reliance on Russian natural gas gave Moscow immense geopolitical leverage. Poland, however, had presciently pursued energy diversification, constructing a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in Świnoujście and the Baltic Pipe to import Norwegian gas. Today, Poland's economic security concerns have broadened to include the protection of critical infrastructure from Russian cyberattacks and sabotage, as well as managing supply chain vulnerabilities in critical technologies.

Japan's economic security concerns are primarily focused on China's dominance over critical supply chains. Japan experienced Beijing's economic coercion firsthand in 2010 when China restricted exports of rare earth elements following a territorial dispute in the East China Sea. Since then, Tokyo has been a global pioneer in economic security, passing the Economic Security Promotion Act in 2022. Japan is actively seeking to "de-risk" its economy by diversifying supply chains away from China, particularly in critical sectors such as semiconductors, electric vehicle (EV) batteries, and critical minerals.

### **Economic Security: Areas of Cooperation**

The intersection of these concerns provides a fertile ground for Japan-Poland cooperation. Both nations are acutely aware of the vulnerabilities inherent in over-reliance on authoritarian regimes for critical materials and technologies. The bilateral relationship has increasingly focused on these modern challenges. Recently, the two governments signed an updated Action Plan for the Implementation of the Polish-Japanese Strategic Partnership, which explicitly highlights cooperation on economic resilience, supply chain reliability, and preventing the leakage of critical and emerging technologies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, 2025).

Energy transition is another vital vector for collaboration. As Poland seeks to decarbonize its economy and permanently decouple from Russian fossil fuels, it is heavily investing in nuclear energy and hydrogen technologies. Japan, possessing decades of expertise in civil nuclear technology and advanced green tech, is well-positioned to assist Poland in building a robust and resilient energy supply chain.

Furthermore, both nations can cooperate in the development and securing of critical mineral supply chains, which are essential for the defense industrial base and the green energy transition. The Expo 2025 in Osaka, Kansai, has served as a pivotal platform for fostering this exact type of economic collaboration, highlighting sectors such as green technology, IT, and medical pharmaceuticals (Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, 2025; Polskie Radio, 2025). By pooling resources, Japan and Poland can reduce their mutual dependence on Chinese processing monopolies.

### **Institutions to Cooperate In**

To operationalize this alignment, Japan and Poland must leverage both bilateral and multilateral institutions.

Bilaterally, the Japan-Poland Strategic Partnership serves as the foundational framework. Regular diplomatic and defense dialogues must be institutionalized to synchronize threat assessments and coordinate policy responses. The historical goodwill between the two nations, highlighted by the 10th anniversary of their Strategic Partnership, provides strong political capital for these initiatives (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2022).

Multilaterally, NATO is the premier venue for hard security cooperation. Japan's status as a highly active partner nation and its engagement with the Indo-Pacific Four (IP4) alongside South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand provides a mechanism for Tokyo to engage deeply with the Euro-

Atlantic alliance. Poland, as a leading voice on NATO's eastern flank, can champion deeper intelligence sharing, joint exercises, and technological cooperation between NATO and the IP4.

In the economic security realm, the G7 (where Japan is a leading member and Poland is represented via the European Union) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are critical platforms. Both countries can use these forums, along with the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, to advocate for standardized export controls, outbound investment screening mechanisms, and coordinated responses to economic coercion by state actors.

## **Concrete Suggestions**

To transition this shared strategic outlook into actionable policy, this report recommends the following two concrete initiatives:

### **1. Hard Security: Establish a Cross-Theater Logistics and Interoperability Task Force.**

Japan and Poland should establish a formal military-to-military working group focused on logistics, mobility, and interoperability. Given Poland's real-world experience acting as the logistical lifeline for Ukraine, the JSDF can learn invaluable lessons regarding the rapid movement of materiel, the hardening of civilian infrastructure for military use, and the management of complex supply chains under the threat of long-range precision strikes. This task force could culminate in reciprocal deployments, where Polish officers observe U.S.-Japan exercises in the Indo-Pacific (such as Keen Sword), and Japanese officers observe NATO exercises in Eastern Europe. This cross-pollination of logistical expertise is vital for preparing both nations for high-intensity, protracted contingencies.

### **2. Economic Security: Launch a Joint Critical Minerals and Technology Protection Initiative.**

To counter supply chain vulnerabilities, Tokyo and Warsaw should create a bilateral initiative focused on securing critical minerals and protecting emerging technologies. This initiative would pool research and development resources to find alternatives to rare earth elements currently dominated by China, leveraging Poland's growing tech sector and Japan's advanced manufacturing base. Furthermore, the initiative should establish a formal mechanism for sharing intelligence on foreign direct investment (FDI) risks and cyber threats to critical infrastructure, ensuring that neither Russian nor Chinese state-backed entities can exploit vulnerabilities in either nation's defense industrial base or energy grids.

## **Conclusion**

Japan and Poland are no longer merely regional actors; they are the load-bearing pillars of the democratic world's defense against authoritarian revisionism. By recognizing their shared geopolitical vulnerabilities and capitalizing on their complementary strengths, Tokyo and Warsaw can forge a trans-regional partnership that not only enhances their own national security but also fortifies the broader U.S.-led alliance network.

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