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Japan, U.K. to team up on defense projects

By WILLIAM HOLLINGWORTH

Kyodo

LONDON — Plans for Britain and Japan to collaborate on defense projects are likely to be "uncontroversial" in the early stages before moving toward more substantial programs in the future, experts say.

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and his British counterpart, David Cameron, agreed in April to identify "a range of appropriate defense equipment for joint development and production," and to "seek to launch at least one program" as soon as possible. At the same time, the two sides will explore the feasibility of major collaboration in future years.



Playing it safe: Simon Chelton, a former attaché at the British Embassy in Japan, is interviewed in London on April 25. KYODO

Britain is the first country to sign such a collaboration agreement with Japan, following Tokyo's decision to relax a ban on arms exports in December.

Simon Chelton, a former defense attaché at the British Embassy in Japan, described the step as "good news" and added they could turn out to be ideal partners, given they are both two island nations, have comparable defense budgets and enjoy close ties to the United States.

He believes several project ideas have already been floated to the Japanese government, although Britain's Ministry of Defense has refused to comment.



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"I would suspect the projects they will initially look for will be 'soft,' and not 'offensive' like a fighter plane or missile," Chelton said in an interview in April.

The United States and European countries have been collaborating on defense projects for years, as technological advances have continued driving up the costs of developing new equipment, he added.

Potential projects British and Japanese companies might collaborate on include helicopter engines, cockpit simulators for jet aircraft, suits and gloves to protect against nuclear, chemical and biological attacks, and defense systems to counter cyber-attacks, according to experts.

Christopher Hughes, a defense expert at Warwick University in central England, sees the two sides engaging in "small-scale, confidence-building" projects at first, perhaps involving Rolls Royce PLC and a Japanese partner to develop engines.

He said Japan is seeking overseas collaboration projects because its domestic defense industry is "slowly being strangled by a lack of funding and orders."

"The Japanese defense budget is largely static despite the fact that the cost of weapons systems keeps rising," he said. "It only has one customer — the Self-Defense Forces. It cannot share development costs or gain economies of scale with other defense producers."

But Hughes questioned whether Tokyo and London will be able to cooperate in full-fledged defense programs, particularly given Britain's tight finances.

Still, the move also has been welcomed in Japan.

Nobushige Takamizawa, president of the National Institute for Defense Studies, described the agreement as "significant" during a recent visit to London.

He said Japanese defense firms should begin collaborating with their British counterparts and present projects to the government, adding such cooperation is likely to take the form of producing "components" rather than end products.

To smooth collaboration, Chelton, the ex-defense attache, believes the Japanese government should consider easing some of its rules and regulations governing procurement to make them more compatible with those of other nations, including Britain.

For example, defense planners in Japan design equipment to a different set of standards from NATO countries, an organization Britain belongs to.

"You can't design the same piece of kit to two different standards," he said. "NATO standards have been around 60 years and they enable interoperability.

"There's no reason why Japan shouldn't agree with NATO to design to its standards and I believe they are already moving in that direction."

A common approach will also be required on issues such as a company's liability over the development of equipment and the treatment of intellectual property rights for products developed with government funds, Chelton added.

Meanwhile, Alessio Patalano, a specialist on Japan's naval forces at King's College London, referred to additional factors that may complicate the envisioned collaboration.

"The key factors to keep an eye on concern the regulations for export of the jointly developed equipment to third parties, the standards in the production

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of the equipment itself, and the political commitment to support the project in all its phases," Patalano said.

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