

Japan and Europe as Strategic Partners: Opportunities and Challenges

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Introduction

Japan and Europe are natural partners, though this may not be an obvious proposition to many observers. Yet, given the essential values that Japan and Europe share—such as democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights, and market economies, as well as the fact that both are long-standing U.S. allies—it is natural to talk about the Japan-Europe partnership. Though Japan and Europe have shared common values and interests since the start of the Cold War, the strategic significance of the partnership appears to have increased considerably in recent years. This is spurred in part by the rise of illiberal or authoritarian challengers to the liberal international order, and the arrival of President Donald Trump in the United States.

The main purpose of this paper is to make sense of Europe as Japan’s foreign policy and security partner, examining both opportunities and challenges the relationship faces today. The first section briefly reviews the development of Japan-Europe relations, particularly the context within which the relationship has evolved. The next section discusses the main pillars and opportunities for the relationship today, namely the Japan-European Union (EU) Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), the Japan-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) cooperation, and Japan-United Kingdom and Japan-France bilateral security and defense ties. As the third section will argue, however, there are still obstacles for the relationship, including the challenges of addressing Brexit, the “China gap,” the “Russia gap,” and inward-looking tendencies on both sides. The final section will make some policy recommendations for the development of Japan-Europe cooperation, particularly in the foreign and security policy domains. While the main focus of this paper is the Japanese side of the story, it discusses the situation in Europe and its approach to Japan where necessary.

Historical Background

The idea of Japan-Europe political and security cooperation is not new. It dates back to the Cold War period when Japan and Western Europe were both part of the Western bloc, often called the free world, as part of the U.S.-led alliance network. In a sense, Japan and Western Europe were “a friend’s friend,” indirectly connected via the United States. Yet, from time to time, Tokyo made direct overtures to Europe in view of the communist threat. This was

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particularly true in the 1960s and again during the Euro-missile crisis regarding the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) negotiations in the 1980s. Japan feared that the negotiations could adversely impact its security since Tokyo wanted to avoid a situation in which Moscow would be allowed to relocate missiles from Europe to Asia. If only intermittently, the Cold War structure did provide opportunities for Japan and Western Europe to work with each other to address common security issues.² For example, The G7 Summit in Williamsburg in 1983 adopted a communique stating that the “security of our countries is indivisible and must be approached on a global basis.”³ Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone played a vital role in making this possible.⁴

Following the end of the Cold War, there was a degree of optimism that the role of military power was declining, opening the way for civilian powers like Europe and Japan to raise their profile in international relations. In addition, the Japanese economy was still booming at that time and Tokyo was eager to expand its engagement in the world. For example, Japan sought to increase its official development assistance (ODA) and participate in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. It was in this context that Japan became involved in the reconstruction of the Balkans in the 1990s. Japan’s ODA played a substantial role there and the fact that Yasushi Akashi, a Japanese UN diplomat, served as the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for the former Yugoslavia was symbolic in this regard. More broadly, Japan also joined the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) as a founding member.⁵ In the meantime, the EU participated in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), including by making financial contributions, to help solve the first North Korean nuclear crisis in the 1990s. Those reciprocal moves—Japan’s engagement in Europe and Europe’s engagement in Asia—constituted what was often called “cross-support.”⁶

Yet, despite all the rhetoric about globalization and the notion that the EU and Japan were becoming global players commensurate with their economic prowess, in hindsight the world proved too disconnected, particularly as far as the international security was concerned. Europe was able to focus on its own region, particularly on EU enlargement into central and

² See, Michito Tsuruoka, *The Development of Political and Security Relations between Japan and Europe after World War II*, PhD Thesis submitted to the Department of War Studies, King’s College London, September 2010.

³ “Statement at Williamsburg (Declaration on Security),” Williamsburg, May 29, 1983.

⁴ Tsuruoka, *The Development of Political and Security Relations*, chapter 2.

⁵ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Japan and the EBRD: Working together in Transition Countries* (London: EBRD, November 2006).

⁶ See, for example, Takahiro Shinyo, “EU-Japan Political-Security Co-operation,” *EurAsia Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (April 2003).

eastern European countries. At the same time, Japan's focus on Asia was evident. In a sense, they did not have to look beyond their respective regions. Therefore, despite the fact that various Japan-EU and Japan-NATO dialogue mechanisms were established after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, it is hardly surprising that they generally lacked substance and did not prosper.⁷ Japan and Europe generally lacked a sense of urgency about working together to address common political and security challenges.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 changed this situation, demonstrating that security threats and challenges had become truly global and that Europe and Japan could no longer be indifferent to what takes place in other regions of the world. Events in Afghanistan could directly affect daily life in distant hometowns. The September 11th attacks changed the nature of international security discourse (though the extent to which the general public participates in this discourse is quite another issue). This finally brought Europe and Japan together. Since then, Japan and Europe—NATO, the EU, and individual European countries—have cooperated in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden, and other areas. In other words, Europe and Japan have met between their respective home regions, including in the Arctic and Central Asia.⁸

Tokyo has realized over the past 15 years that whenever and wherever it sends Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) troops abroad, they see European counterparts on the ground or at sea, be it in Iraq, Djibouti, or the Indian Ocean. Interestingly, aside from disaster relief operations in Asia, the JSDF contingents have cooperated more with European forces in international missions than with Americans, despite the political rhetoric in Japan that sending JSDF abroad strengthens the alliance with the United States. The gap between the political rhetoric and the reality on the ground should come as no surprise given the fact that there is a substantial difference between what Japan is able or willing to do (and allowed to do in legal terms) and what the United States is likely to do in international crisis management, stabilization, and reconstruction operations.⁹ As both the EU (and Europe as a whole) and Japan have sought to raise their political and security profile in their own regions and beyond, the scope for Japan-Europe cooperation has expanded accordingly.

⁷ Regarding Japan-NATO relations at that time, see, Michito Tsuruoka, "NATO and Japan: A View from Tokyo," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 156, No. 6 (December 2011), p. 62.

⁸ On this point, see Luis Simon, "Europe, the Rise of Asia and the Future of the Transatlantic Relationship," *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (2015).

⁹ See, for example, Michito Tsuruoka, "Japan-Europe Security Cooperation: How to 'Use' NATO and the EU," *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security*, No. 12 (December 2011); Michito Tsuruoka, "The UK, Europe and Japan: Forging a New Security Partnership," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 158, No. 6 (December 2013).

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's approach to Europe can also be put in this context. Japan's 2013 National Security Strategy states:

Europe has the influence to formulate international public opinions, the capacity to develop norms in major international frameworks and a large economy. Japan and European countries, especially the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland, share universal values of freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law, and principles such as market economy. They are partners for Japan which together take a leading role in ensuring the peace, stability and prosperity of the international community... Japan will further strengthen its relations with Europe, including cooperation with the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Japan has contributed to the democratization of East European countries and Baltic countries, and will engage in strengthening relations with them, as well as the Caucasus countries.¹⁰

In light of Abe's "diplomacy through a panoramic perspective of the globe [*chikyuugi wo fukan suru gaikou*]" and his emphasis on shared universal values and commitment to maintain and foster the rules-based international order, cooperation with Europe is a natural choice.¹¹ Aside from the United States, Australia, and a handful of other democracies in the Asia-Pacific region, many major countries with which Japan shares values and which have capability and influence to advance the rules-based international order are situated in Europe.

In addition to the increasing connectivity between Asia and Europe, the deterioration of the European security landscape—caused by the resurgence of Russia and its annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine—has brought about a situation in which there are a growing number of common security challenges facing both Asia and Europe. At least, the two regions are starting to use increasingly similar vocabularies, including referencing the change of the status quo by force, anti-access/area denial (A2/AD), and hybrid warfare.¹² Despite all the obvious differences, one might argue that the European security landscape is becoming more like that in Asia.

For Europe, the change of the status quo by force used to be seen as a distant issue that occurred in other parts of the world. But the Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008 and Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea represented blatant changes of the status quo by force, on a scale

¹⁰ The Government of Japan, "National Security Strategy (provisional translation)," Tokyo, December 2013.

¹¹ Daniel Kliman and Daniel Twining, *Japan's Democracy Diplomacy*, German Marshall Fund of the United States, July 2014.

¹² See Michito Tsuruoka, "NATO's Challenges as Seen from Asia: Is the European Security Landscape Becoming like Asia?" *Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2016).

not seen recently in Asia. Compared to what Russia has done in Crimea and the Eastern part of Ukraine, Beijing's actions in the South China Sea look rather restrained. Though Beijing could learn from Russia's actions, including its success in Crimea and failures in Donbas, which raises concern in Japan and elsewhere in Asia. A related question is how Japan and Europe can address hybrid challenges from Russia and China, including cyber attacks, disinformation, and other kind of influence operations as well as "little green men" and "little blue men" (maritime militias) in their respective regions.

The term A2/AD has been used primarily in the context of U.S.-China relations. Beijing has been developing anti-air and anti-ship missiles that could ultimately prevent the United States from intervening in a future conflict, potentially one involving Taiwan. While Chinese do not normally use the term, Americans call this capability A2/AD. The United States has been addressing China's increasing A2/AD capabilities by developing counter-A2/AD capabilities, including long-range missiles as well as air and missile defense capabilities. In Europe in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, NATO had to realize that Russia's A2/AD capabilities, deployed in the vicinity of NATO territories, including Kaliningrad and Crimea, pose a serious threat to NATO's military posture, particularly its commitment to defend the Baltic countries and other eastern allies.¹³ How to counter both China's and Russia's A2/AD capabilities has thus become a question common to U.S. allies in Asia and Europe alike.

Opportunities and Developments

The Japan-EU EPA and SPA

One of the most visible new developments in the EU-Japan relationship has to do with the conclusion of negotiations on two agreements, namely the Economic Partnership Agreement and Strategic Partnership Agreement. The EPA was agreed in principle in July 2017 and confirmed in December 2017, whereas the SPA's conclusion was announced in March 2018. Japanese and EU authorities aim to sign those agreements by the end of 2018, with the agreements to provisionally enter into force in 2019.

Japan and the EU constitute approximately 28% of world gross domestic product and 37% of world trade. The EPA is the only remaining "mega-free trade agreement" between major industrialized economies after the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the collapse of talks between the European Union and United States on a

¹³ See, for example, Richard Fontaine and Julianne Smith, "Anti-Access/Area Denial Isn't Just for Asia Anymore," *Defense One*, April 2, 2015; Luis Simón, "The Third U.S. Offset Strategy and Europe's 'Anti-access' Challenge," *European Gestrategy*, October 25, 2015.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In light of increasing international concern about protectionism, not least fueled by the Trump administration's rhetoric and actions, the EU-Japan deal has demonstrated that the idea of free trade is still alive and that Europe and Japan are prepared to lead while the United States is more or less absent.¹⁴ It is in U.S. interests that Japan and the EU take the lead in maintaining free trade and particularly that Japan try to ensure that the EU and the United Kingdom do not become inward-looking.¹⁵

The SPA is much less well known than the EPA, but no less important.¹⁶ It is an agreement covering a wide range of areas of cooperation beyond the EPA, including foreign policy and security, export controls, and climate change, among other issues. Tokyo was initially not enthusiastic about the SPA, questioning the merit of concluding such an agreement as a legally-binding international treaty. Yet, the EU demanded a political agreement be concluded in parallel with any Free Trade Agreement (FTA) or EPA. Tokyo needed to accommodate Brussels' position as it was eager to start EPA negotiations. However, the SPA could well prove to be an effective tool in strengthening political and security ties with the EU and getting the Europeans on board regarding the increasing number of political and security challenges facing Japan. These include ballistic missile and nuclear weapons developments by North Korea, the rise of China, the increasing unpredictability of global governance, and challenges to maritime security in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Japan-EU cooperation in counter-piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia is a good example of operational cooperation between Japanese and EU forces. While Japanese vessels and patrol aircraft (P-3Cs) are not officially part of the EU mission called EUNAVFOR Atalanta, there is a high level of coordination and cooperation between EU and Japanese forces on the ground and in the air, which could almost be seen as a joint operation. Japan and the EU have also conducted a number of joint trainings and exercises there.

Japan-NATO Relations as a New Pillar

Japan-NATO cooperation constitutes the second pillar of Japan-Europe security cooperation. While Japan was the oldest NATO partner outside the Euro-Atlantic region, it was only in the 2000s, during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's first term in office, that the relationship started to become substantial. The initial phase of this growing relationship was stimulated by Afghanistan, specifically NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Japan's

¹⁴ See, for example, "An EU-Japan Pact Shows How Free Trade Strides on," *Financial Times*, July 5, 2017.

¹⁵ See, Irina Angelescu, "The Economic and Political Impact of Brexit on Japan," *Sasakawa USA Forum*, No. 11, January 2018, p. 8.

¹⁶ See, Axel Berkofsky, "The EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) – Responding to the Crisis of the Liberal World Order," *Asia Policy Brief*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, December 2017.

involvement in the peace process and economic development. Operations in Afghanistan forced NATO to cooperate not just with non-member countries, but also with other international organizations like the United Nations and the EU as well as non-governmental organizations in the context of its “comprehensive approach.” NATO’s partnerships, including the Japan-NATO partnership, were thus developed, despite the fact that Tokyo did not send troops to Afghanistan.¹⁷

From the beginning, the Japan-NATO partnership was not intended to be confined to cooperation in Afghanistan. Seen from Tokyo, NATO is first and foremost a political partner, providing another venue for Japan to discuss security issues with Europe. In this context, Japan appreciated a series of NATO statements, both by the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and by the Secretary General, on North Korea’s nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches. A NAC statement on North Korea in September 2017, released immediately after Pyongyang’s nuclear test, included a paragraph stating that “[w]e reiterate our full solidarity with our partners in the region, Japan and the Republic of Korea, and our support for their security.”¹⁸ One should not read too much into such a text and NATO is still not prepared to support Japan’s or South Korea’s security through physical means. However, the statement demonstrated the heightened concerns among NATO allies about North Korea’s ballistic missile and nuclear developments, laying a foundation on which to develop the partnership.¹⁹

Other promising areas for Japan-NATO cooperation include maritime security (particularly maritime domain awareness), cyber security, and ballistic missile defense (BMD). Japan has recently decided to join the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) based in Tallinn, showing Japan’s increasing interest in this area.²⁰ The imperative of BMD cooperation has also increased as Japan decided to introduce the Aegis Ashore system to meet the growing threat from North Korea. The only Aegis Ashore installment that is operational outside the United States is in Romania. While it is fully owned and operated by U.S. forces, it is still part of NATO’s BMD architecture and the upcoming Aegis Ashore system in Poland is supposed to be equipped with a new type of interceptor called SM-3 Block IIA, currently under joint development between the United States and Japan.

¹⁷ Tsuruoka, “NATO and Japan”; Michito Tsuruoka, “NATO and Japan as Multifaceted Partners,” *Research Paper*, No. 91 (NATO Defense College, April 2013), pp. 3-5.

¹⁸ “Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK),” Press Release (2017)132, NATO HQ, Brussels, September 6, 2017.

¹⁹ “The Geography of Danger Has Shifted,” Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Japan National Press Club, Tokyo, October 31, 2017.

²⁰ “Japan to Join the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn,” CCDCOE, Tallinn, January 12, 2018.

Related to BMD is the challenge of developing a new deterrence architecture for today's evolving challenges. There is now more room for U.S. allies in Asia and Europe to consult with each other on U.S. extended deterrence and the role of nuclear weapons in the wake of the Trump administration's new Nuclear Posture Review.²¹ More such dialogues are beginning to take place at various levels.

Development of Bilateral Defense Cooperation with the United Kingdom and France

When it comes to Europe-Japan security and defense cooperation, the most substantive part is composed of bilateral relations between Japan and major countries in Europe, namely the United Kingdom (UK) and France. On the one hand, this reflects Tokyo's preference for bilateral relations with individual countries over relations with NATO or the EU as a whole. On the other hand, from a more substantive perspective, much of what Tokyo is most interested in achieving is done at the national level rather than at the multilateral or regional level, to include intelligence exchanges, military exercises, and defense equipment cooperation.

Tokyo now holds annual "2+2" meetings at the ministerial level with the UK, bringing together foreign and defense ministers. While it may be tempting to dismiss 2+2 meetings as a political show without much substance, these dialogues work as an important "deadline setter" in moving concrete cooperation forward. Without such deadlines, agendas—particularly difficult ones—tend to get delayed at the working level.

In addition to political dialogue, Japan and the UK have been engaged in defense equipment cooperation. This includes joint research and development, such as a new generation of air-to-air missile (Meteor missile), as well as joint training in Japan with the participation of Royal Air Force fighter jets, enhanced intelligence sharing, and deepening cyber security cooperation. In view of the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics, such efforts are particularly beneficial for Japan due to the UK's experience hosting the 2012 London Olympics.²² The fact that the UK is believed to be the closest U.S. ally in Europe is also helpful, since there is little need to be concerned about Washington's reaction.

²¹ See, for example, Michito Tsuruoka, "The NATO vs. East Asian Models of Extended Nuclear Deterrence? Seeking a Synergy Beyond Dichotomy," *Asan Forum*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (May-June 2016); Michito Tsuruoka, "Japan's New Nuclear Deterrence Challenges: Implications of Russia's Nuclear Saber-Rattling and NATO's Response," in Aaron Friedberg, et al., *North Korea and Asia's Evolving Nuclear Landscape: Challenges to Regional Stability*, Special Report, No. 67 (National Bureau of Asian Research, August 2017).

²² For various aspects of Japan-UK security cooperation, see Jonathan Eyal, Michito Tsuruoka and Edward Schwarck (eds.), *Partners for Global Security: New Directions for the UK-Japan Defence and Security Partnership*, Whitehall Report, 3-15 (Royal United Services Institute, August 2015).

As for France, in addition to 2+2 meetings there has been some progress in defense equipment cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint training and exercises.²³ While the UK is still Japan's primary partner in Europe and the Japan-UK relationship is deeper and wider than that between Japan and France in many respects, Paris has two sets of comparative advantages as a security partner for Tokyo. First, France is a "Pacific country," a resident power in the Pacific possessing territories with French nationals and a permanent military presence.²⁴ France's level of permanent military presence is much higher than that of the UK in the Indo-Pacific region. Second, France has a unique perspective and different intelligence sources from which Japan can learn, including access that Japan cannot get from the United States or United Kingdom.

Japan-Europe Relations in a Wider Context

Japan-Europe cooperation does not need to be confined to the bilateral context. Putting it in a wider context involving other partners is also becoming more fashionable. In this regard, the fact that Japan-Australia and Japan-India bilateral security and defense cooperation, Japan-US-Australia and Japan-US-India trilateral cooperation, and even quadrilateral cooperation between Japan, the United States, India, and Australia have developed in recent years opens up new possibilities for involving European countries.

When discussing quadrilateral cooperation, Foreign Minister Taro Kono talked of "collaborative roles" for the United Kingdom and France.²⁵ As both London and Paris have shown their willingness to get more engaged in the Indian Ocean, it would make sense for Japan to think of working with them, as well as Indian Ocean neighbors like India and Australia. That the UK and Australia have a special relationship and France and India have developed close security and defense ties in recent years seems helpful in contemplating a "Quad plus Europe" cooperative arrangement in the Indian Ocean region. Naval exercises among those countries represent an avenue for new Japan-Europe cooperation.

Challenges

Addressing Brexit

Arguably, the biggest challenge that Japan faces in its relations with Europe is Brexit. In short,

²³ In fact, the Japan-France 2+2 started earlier than the Japan-UK 2+2.

²⁴ French Ministry of Defence, *France and Security in the Asia-Pacific*, no publication date given (edited by Directorate for Strategic Affairs), pp. 10-11.

²⁵ "Japan to Propose Dialogue with US, India and Australia," *Nikkei Asian Review*, October 25, 2017 (online).

Britain's departure from the Union is detrimental to Japan's interest in all conceivable respects, from economic and business interests to political and security terms. That was why Tokyo's position was clear from the beginning that it wanted the UK to remain in the EU, as was expressed on various occasions by Prime Minister Abe and others.²⁶ Tokyo has long depended on London as the most significant gateway to the EU and Europe as a whole. This has a long tradition and many Japanese still find it difficult to change this mindset.

First and foremost, the government in Tokyo needs to ensure that Japanese business interests are protected from the adverse impact of Brexit, particularly regarding trade vis-à-vis the EU single market. What is at stake concerns not only the export of cars and other manufactured goods, but also the import of automotive and other parts from across the EU. The business community is increasingly concerned about the prospect of a "hard Brexit" – meaning that the UK will end up being outside both the EU's single market and customs union. Tokyo has been uncharacteristically aggressive and visible in expressing concern about Brexit and a policy paper released in September 2016 attracted much attention in the UK.²⁷ It was essentially a list of demands from the Japanese business community regarding Brexit. While Tokyo first needs to see what relationship the EU and the UK will sort out, concluding a bilateral Japan-UK EPA will be on the agenda as early as the post-2019 EU-UK transition.

Beyond economic interest, Brexit will also inevitably decrease the EU's importance as a political and security partner in Japan's eyes. The foreign policy and security clout of the EU after Brexit will decline. It remains to be seen how the EU will offset this adverse impact by enhancing cohesion and strengthening defence cooperation among the 27 member states after Brexit. At the same time, it is in all parties' interest to contemplate a framework to bring the EU, the UK, and Japan together to cooperate on both economic and political agendas. One way would be to make use of the G7 framework, which brings together the EU (Commission and Council),²⁸ the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan. During the 2016 Ise-Shima G7 Summit in Japan, the Japanese and European participants held a brief meeting to issue a statement showing their commitment to the Japan-EU EPA. While this was essentially a photo opportunity and it seems difficult to find time for such high-level meetings, there should be

²⁶ See, for example, Abe's press conference with British Prime Minister David Cameron in London in May 2016, one and a half months before the referendum. "PM statement at press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Abe," London, May 5, 2016.

²⁷ Government of Japan, "Japan's Message to the United Kingdom and the European Union," Tokyo, September 2016.

²⁸ At the summit level, the EU is represented by the President of the European Commission, currently Jean-Claude Juncker and the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. The High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini attends the Foreign Ministers meeting. Other G7 ministerial meetings are attended by relevant Commissioners of the European Commission.

more opportunities at lower levels, including between foreign ministers and other senior officials (sherpas, sub-sherpas, political directors, deputy political directors, etc.). From a Japanese point of view, these efforts keep the UK involved in the Europe-Japan conversation and ensure synergy between the Japan-EU and Japan-UK relationships. It is also in the EU's interest because it makes little sense to exclude the UK from the EU's overall engagement in Asia.²⁹

Yet, at the same time, Tokyo fears that the UK might not be able to maintain its active engagement beyond Europe, including in Asia, during the Brexit negotiations and post-Brexit period. The UK has to spend substantial resources in the negotiations and to address the adverse economic impact stemming from Brexit, despite the “Global Britain” rhetoric from Prime Minister Theresa May.³⁰ Whether London will remain active on the world stage is something that Tokyo is closely—and worriedly—following.

Managing the “China Gap” and “Russia Gap”

China, not surprisingly, constitutes one of the most complicated agenda items in Japan-Europe relations. On one hand, it can bring Japan and Europe closer and they share fundamental interests vis-à-vis China. These include ensuring that China respects intellectual property rights and improves its investment environment as well as preventing Beijing from undermining the existing liberal international order, such as the principles of freedom of navigation and the rule of law. After all, Japan and Europe share fundamental values, while China does not. However, it is undeniable that Japanese and European perceptions on China differ significantly in various respects, most notably regarding China's military build-up and assertive actions in the maritime domain. Tokyo faces China's daily challenges against the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, where Chinese government vessels regularly enter into the territorial waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands, which are administered by Japan, but also claimed by China (and Taiwan). Beijing also often exerts overt political pressure on Tokyo, not least regarding history issues.

The Europeans do not face such challenges or pressure in their own region. Chinese vessels and military aircraft are not coming to Europe to challenge European countries' territorial integrity. Because of the geographical distance between Europe and China, Europe has been able to focus on gaining economic benefits from China and has typically avoided viewing China as a security challenge.

²⁹ On this, see Michito Tsuruoka, “Tokyo Wants a Stronger European Foreign Policy,” *The International Spectator*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (2016), pp. 43-44; Michito Tsuruoka, “Japan and the UK as Strategic Partners after Brexit,” *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, No. 410, January 9, 2018, p. 2.

³⁰ See, for example, Angelescu, “The Economic and Political Impact of Brexit on Japan”; Tomohiko Taniguchi, “Brexit: The Consequences for Japan,” *The Diplomat*, July 8, 2016.

This perception gap—the “China gap”—between Japan and Europe has from time-to-time resulted in policy differences and disagreements, as was most visibly demonstrated regarding the lifting of the EU arms embargo against China in the mid-2000s.³¹ At that time, there were growing calls in Europe to lift the arms embargo, which Japan (and the United States) vehemently opposed.³² Japanese often suspect that Europe is too soft on China, while at the same time, Europeans believe that Japan is too tough on China and that Sino-Japanese bilateral ties are too tense. It is therefore no surprise that there are fears in Europe that it could get entrapped in a Sino-Japanese conflict if it is too close to Japan.³³

Therefore, Tokyo has been seeking to “educate” Europe regarding the security situation in Asia, most notably about the strategic challenges that China’s rise poses to the region and the world. From Tokyo’s point of view, the main purpose of various strategic dialogues between Japan and Europe is to discuss China (and North Korea), in order to generate shared perceptions regarding Asia’s security environment. Due to China’s increasingly assertive behaviors in the South China Sea and elsewhere, Europe’s concern has increased substantially in recent years. Furthermore, China’s apparent “divide and rule” approach to the EU, aggressive and sometimes covert investment in strategic sectors, and deteriorating human rights situation have all raised concerns among Europeans, particularly in Germany, which used to be seen as the “softest” country on China.³⁴

In light of shifting European perceptions on China, one of the most fundamental challenges for both Japan and Europe is to align their respective concerns and formulate a comprehensive agenda covering not just security, but also investment screening, human rights, climate change, market access, and the protection of intellectual property rights. Otherwise, Japan will be seen as too focused on security, while Europe will be seen as too soft on China, neither of which is in Japan’s or Europe’s interest.

A similar Japan-Europe gap also exists on Russia, where the respective positions of Japan and Europe are just the opposite. While some Japanese see Europe as too tough on Russia, many Europeans regard Japan as too soft on Moscow—the “Russia gap.” To be sure, as in the

³¹ On the concept of the “China gap” in the context of Japan-Australia relations, see Tomohiko Satake, “The Japan-Australia Contribution to a Liberal and Inclusive Regional Order: Beyond the ‘China Gap,’” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (2016).

³² On these controversies, see May-Britt Stumbaum, *The European Union and China: Decision-Making in EU Foreign and Security Policy towards the People’s Republic of China*, Nomos, 2009.

³³ Michito Tsuruoka, “Conclusion: Challenges and the Way Ahead,” in Eyal, Tsuruoka and Schwarck (eds.), *Partners for Global Security*.

³⁴ François Godement and Abigaël Vasselier, *China at the Gates: A New Power Audit of EU-China Relations*, European Council on Foreign Relations, December 2017; John Seaman, Mikko Huotari and Miguel Otero-Iglesias (eds.), *Chinese Investment in Europe: A Country-Level Approach*, a Report by the European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC), December 2017.

case of China, the reality is much more complicated than this simplified description. However, the potential adverse consequences of this gap should not be dismissed.

Tokyo needs to deal with Russia as a resident player in the strategic landscape in Northeast Asia and Tokyo deals with Moscow primarily on its behavior in that region, which looks much less assertive compared to Russian actions in Ukraine and Syria.³⁵ Perceptions of Russia in many (if not all) European countries remain very negative, and the state of relations between Europe and Russia has further deteriorated in the wake of the March 2018 nerve agent attack against a former Russian spy in the UK town of Salisbury. It remains to be seen how this latest diplomatic crisis will play out, but it is already undeniable that the “Russia gap” between Japan and Europe is again widening, thereby raising the risk of growing suspicion between the two sides.

Inward-Looking Tendencies in both Europe and Japan

Last, but not least, the strategy of pursuing Japan’s own interest through cooperation with Europe will collapse if Japan becomes inward-looking and cannot allocate the necessary economic, foreign policy, and security resources to Europe. Given resources limitations and the increasingly severe strategic environment surrounding Japan, more Japanese now argue that Tokyo needs to concentrate all its available resources on the highest priority issues, such as North Korea and China. As far as security and defense are concerned, this means focusing on BMD and territorial defense of the Senkaku Islands. It is hard to sell the internationalists’ argument that precisely because the security environment in Asia is deteriorating, Japan needs to reach out more widely to partners outside the region.³⁶ Those in the internationalist camp need to formulate a better argument about why reaching out to Europe is in Japan’s interest, rather than a waste of its precious resources.

Although this paper discusses mainly the Japanese side of the story, it needs to be noted here that Europe is hardly free from these same inward-looking tendencies. Staying engaged in the world in times of mounting internal challenges is always difficult and Europe is no exception.³⁷

³⁵ See, Michito Tsuruoka, “Strategic Considerations in Japan-Russia Relations: The Rise of China and the U.S.-Japan Alliance,” in Shoichi Itoh et al., *Japan and the Sino-Russian Entente: The Future of Major-Power Relations in Northeast Asia*, Special Report, No. 64 (National Bureau of Asian Research, April 2017).

³⁶ On this, see Michito Tsuruoka, “Japan first versus global Japan,” *The National Interest* (online), January 14, 2018.

³⁷ Nathalie Tocci, *Framing the EU Global Strategy: A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World*, Palgrave, 2017, pp. vii and 62-63.

Policy Recommendations

Three sets of policy recommendations emerge from the proceeding discussion. First, there needs to be a clear definition of the level of ambition in the Japan-Europe relationship. While a lot has already taken place and the Japan-EU, Japan-NATO, and individual bilateral partnerships have developed substantially, it is still not clear what Tokyo should expect from the overall Japan-Europe relationship (and vice versa). As a result, there remains a large number of people in Japan who dismiss cooperation with Europe as useless or a waste of resources because Europe does not seem to be prepared to help defend Japan militarily in a contingency. However, Tokyo does not expect Europe to fight a war in Asia in defense of Japan in the first place. Dismissing Europe in this way is, therefore, not constructive.³⁸ Thus, Japanese perceptions on political and security cooperation with Europe depends in large part on expectations management.

Second, in light of Brexit, Tokyo's urgent task is to find an alternative gateway to the EU. While the UK will remain an important partner for Japan in economic, political, and security terms, its influence in the EU will decline severely. The most obvious candidates for Japan's new gateway are France and Germany. The fact that Tokyo has been strengthening political, security, and defense ties with France can be seen as important groundwork. In comparison, Germany is almost absent as a driver of Japan-Europe relations, despite the long history of relations between Japan and Germany. It is therefore a high priority for Tokyo to cultivate its relationship with Berlin, including in the political, security, and defense dimensions.

Third, for the purpose of advancing operational cooperation between Japanese and European forces—and preparing for more robust joint operations in the future—it is imperative to conduct more joint training and exercises to enhancing interoperability. As long as Japanese and European vessels continue to be engaged in counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden, conducting maritime exercises will not be difficult, but it remains a challenge to make those exercises more substantial and go beyond the level of goodwill exercises. Also, in thinking about peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations, Japan and Europe might need to contemplate ways in which they could involve other services, particularly ground forces, in joint exercises.

As noted above, whenever and wherever JSDF troops are sent abroad, they will likely see European forces in the same theater. Even after the 2016 Peace and Security Legislation and a possible forthcoming amendment to the Japanese Constitution, the JSDF is not supposed to engage in combat missions abroad (outside the confines of Japan's own territorial defense).

³⁸ On this point, see Michito Tsuruoka, "Europe's Potential in Addressing Maritime Security in Asia: A Japanese view," *Commentary* (European Policy Centre, June 29, 2016).

Therefore, the need for Japanese and European forces to be interoperable with each other will not decline.

Conclusion

Japan's strategic partnerships with Europe—be it the EU, NATO, or individual European countries—have developed substantially over the past decade. Joint military exercises, defense equipment cooperation, and the EPA were not even conceived as realistic merely a decade ago. These advances have been made possible by Japan's more active foreign and security policy under Abe, the increasing connectivity between Europe and Asia, Europe's desire to get more engaged in Asia, and the unpredictability caused by the arrival of the Trump administration.

However, as this paper has discussed, there remain difficult challenges that need to be overcome for the relationship to prosper. Ultimately, what Japan and Europe need to do is to re-define what they want to achieve through cooperation and what cost they are prepared to accept to gain the benefits of this important and growing set of relationships.