

## Japan's Global Diplomacy: Japan-Europe Relations

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 18, Stimson hosted Michito Tsuruoka, Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute for Defense Studies, for a roundtable discussion on Japan-Europe relations.

Tsuruoka described the fundamental problem in Japan-Europe relations to be that the objectives have been ill-defined, with cooperation only for the sake of cooperation. The biggest pillar of Japan-Europe relations remains trade and economy, especially with the current FTA negotiations. For this, the objectives must be to lower tariffs on Japanese exports to the EU market, harmonize standards and regulations to lower transaction costs, and lead international rule and norms-making in view of the growing weight of emerging economies. Political and security relations are complicated because of Japan's partnerships with the EU, NATO, and individual countries. Objectives must be to generate shared perceptions on the evolving nature of the world including Asia, and enhance interoperability in security and defense.

Japan's first modern alliance was with the UK in 1902, though Japan's security policy has been dominated by the US since World War Two. Since the 1990s, Japan and Europe expanded their activity in the political and security dimensions, which has resulted in broader room for Europe-Japan political and security cooperation. The Hague Declaration of 1991 became the first opportunity for the two sides to declare their willingness to strengthen the relationship beyond trade and economy, which was reaffirmed by the EU-Japan Joint Action Plan of 2001. Abe visited NATO in 2007, the first prime minister to do so, and since, Japan has signed security agreements with NATO in 2010, France in 2011 and the UK in 2013. The UK-Japan Framework Agreement on Defense Equipment Cooperation was also signed in 2013 to facilitate equipment cooperation. In mid-2013, Japan and the EU started parallel negotiations on an FTA and Strategic Partnership Agreement. Another notable development is the start of 2+2 ministerial meetings, with France and the UK to follow

The challenges in this are:

- Mutual indifference and a lack of strong purpose: while natural that Japan prioritizes relations with the US and its neighbors, Europe's role and importance has been underestimated.
- Lack of public knowledge: many are unaware of the security cooperation so they don't see further potential, even though the JSDF often works alongside European forces abroad.
- Europe's lack of leverage in Asia: Europe is not seen as a reliable political/security actor, even though Asia has a direct impact on Europe's security and prosperity.

The US can be a natural component of Japan-NATO relations, and there are substantial possibilities for Japan-US-UK and Japan-US-Australia-UK cooperation. Darwin can be a hub, with US marine rotational presence, increased US-Australia and US-Japan-Australia exercises, and more UK naval ships in the

region. The US could aid Europe's role in Asia through discussions on maritime issues of freedom of navigation and rule of law. There could also be coordination between Japan-EU FTA, TPP and TTIP, to demonstrate how established, advanced countries can lead a new set of norms and regulations in international trade.

For policy recommendations, Tsuruoka suggested: 1) build an intellectual foundation for cooperation, beginning with why Europe matters to Japan/Asia and why Japan/Asia matters to Europe, corresponding with public diplomacy efforts; 2) enhance interoperability between Japanese and European forces through joint exercises; 3) ensure synergies between the relationships with NATO, EU, and individual countries.

One participant asked whether there is a perception gap between Japan and Europe on China. He also noted the danger of having many objectives that don't get implemented – it can look like a hollow arrangement if there is not enough focus. Tsuruoka agreed on the gap but suggested it was natural – Europe does not want to be involved in an Asian military conflict as Japan would not want to be involved in a European conflict – and there remain common issues. On 2+2, Tsuruoka echoed concern, as the preparations are difficult. When Abe and Hollande agreed to have a 2+2 meeting, it was intentionally ambiguous whether this would be a permanent framework or one-time event, while it is now agreed that it will be repeated. The UK and Japan were initially not enthusiastic about the idea of 2+2 as both parties were seen to be satisfied with the existing level of cooperation, but in the wake of the Franco-Japanese 2+2, it was agreed to have a similar meeting between the UK and Japan. Now, 2+2 is further expanding with the potential for Japan-India.

Tsuruoka agreed with a comment that Japan-Europe relations cannot be complete without Germany. However, Germany's apparent lack of interest in Japan is an obstacle. Germany is clearly much more interested in China, which is evidenced by the fact that Chancellor Merkel's last visit to Japan was in 2007 while she goes to China almost every year. Though Germany used to be showing interest in defense equipment cooperation with Japan, it has not quite active these days compared to the UK and France. However, there is bilateral cooperation in areas of disarmament and UN reform (in the context of G4), and this year, Abe visited Berlin and discussed some political and security issues. One participant noted that geopolitically, the leader of Europe is Merkel, so Japan needs Germany to become a player.

The participant further questioned how can Japan move past seeing Europe in the context of the US, especially as the US moves from transatlantic to transpacific. The participant also commented on the lack of human resources in Japanese experts on Europe – with the many Japan experts in Europe, there is an imbalance. Tsuruoka responded that there is a substantial pool of expertise on Europe in MOFA and the business community, but the expertise needs to be diversified, as most information on Europe in Japan comes from London. Further, in foreign policy and security, the notion of cooperation with Europe is still perceived as an exotic, luxurious idea, not urgent or substantial. How to “mainstream” considering Europe in dealing with various issues is an important challenge.

An embassy representative described Ukraine as an issue for more than just Europe because it challenges world order, suggesting that Japan and Europe find synergies to deal with Russia. One

participant questioned how Japan-Europe relations can be perceived as more relevant, as there are existential security issues on both sides, so there is scope for cooperation. Tsuruoka affirmed the importance of the crisis in Ukraine within Japan-Europe relations as creating a two-way street: Japan has been asking the Europeans to understand more about the security situation in East Asia, not least the political and security implications of the rise of China.. Now in the wake of the crisis in Ukraine, Japan has an opportunity to play a substantial, concrete security role in Europe by assisting Ukraine and imposing sanctions on Russia, reminding Europe that the notion of changing the status quo by force or coercion is a common security challenge for Europe and for Japan. The implication is that Japan will expect more of Europe if something happens in Asia. In Japan's public discussions on the Ukrainian crisis, people still tend to believe that Japan faces a difficult dilemma between cooperating with other G7 partners versus seeking Japan's own national interest, while overlooking the fact that cooperation with in the G7 framework itself is part of Japan's national interest. Tatsumi added that one problem is the media attention given to Japan's Russia experts, who are often sympathetic towards Russia without examining diplomatic cost in hesitating to join the G7 coalition. There is a diplomatic cost to Japan vis-à-vis the East China Sea if Japan prioritizes this empty hope for a territorial resolution. Another participant countered that this could be a double-edged sword, in that Japan is getting more bogged down in issues in Eastern Europe and the Middle East as the US becomes less focused on the Senkaku. As Japan becomes more relevant, the US is less focused on the region and China grows even more aggressive.

One participant encouraged further people-to-people exchange to develop experts. She also asked if the perception that Germany is close to China feeds Japanese distrust. Tsuruoka responded that the problem was the perception that Germany is solely interested in China. One unfortunate item that has come up in Franco-Japanese security and defense cooperation is the issue of export control: there was an issue a couple of years ago over a French company's export of helicopter landing grids . Tokyo fiercely opposed such export and it almost collapsed prospects for equipment cooperation between France and Japan. In the end, the two countries established a new framework to discuss export control, which is important for equipment cooperation.

A participant suggested that Japan follow the format laid out by the transatlantic conversation on Asia, quintilateral talks between the US, UK, France, Germany and Italy. Tsuruoka replied that the EU and Japan haven't been successful in institutionalizing such a framework, but it could be an interesting idea to think about.