

EU-Japan cooperation on security: what can be done?

Interview with Dr. Chikako Kawakatsu Ueki



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Question 1: Now that France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the EU have all published their own strategies for the Indo-Pacific, do you think there is a role for European countries in the region?

Yes, there is a role for European countries in the region on several levels. Some of this role can be carried out together with Japan and other regional countries, another part of it – by European countries alone, which can increase the effectiveness of pursuing common strategic goals.

In answering the questions, I have focused primarily on traditional security and conflicts involving China. This does not mean that I think that the likelihood of a traditional type of conflict involving China is high. Nor that problems involving Russia, North Korea, or other actors are less likely or less important, nor that non-traditional security issues are unimportant. In fact, European countries can play a significant role in resolving global issues that involve persuading, dissuading, or coercing some countries in the Indo-Pacific region. I am referring here, for example, to the problems of global warming and the observance of rules for solving international problems.

This role can be played by enforcing the rules and defending the commons, especially the safety of shipping, air travel, and trade/business practices, including market access. The means to achieve this would be through best practices – this will be important because European support for these practices will dilute the strategic competition aspect and will be more convincing to countries in the region, such as the ASEAN states that are not so close to the United States. These countries may be skeptical of the rules-based order because they see it as a way for the United States to counter China. They may fear being drawn into the strategic competition between the United States and China. European support will allay these countries' fears.

Political balancing is another way to play a role. The democratic countries and U.S. allies in the region – Japan, South Korea, and Australia – will find European political support to strengthen their position *vis-à-vis* China.

The military balance is another element. It is unclear what European countries can bring to the region in terms of military assistance and forces. If European countries can provide military capabilities, and if handled properly, this will contribute to the security of the region. As I will discuss in the next section, coordination between European and regional countries such as Japan will be important.

At the same time, Europeans can deter conflict and rule-breaking in several ways. Statements condemning negative behavior will raise the cost of aggression or uncooperative behavior. Joint exercises will help signal the above position and increase the validity of the commitment. Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) and the exercise of the right of free passage are important to reinforce the rules. This can be done jointly, but it will also have an impact if done independently. This will primarily be in support of the UNCLOS provisions that a rock is a rock and not an island. Building on a feature that has never been an island does not allow the feature to create a territorial sea. Freedom of innocent passage can also be upheld by navies and ships operating in territorial waters and exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

In times of conflict, it will be important for international shipping to continue to operate safely and without interruption. Japan and the European countries can engage in convoy operations of their merchant shipping. This is important to emphasize because many navies do not like this type of missions.

Another important element is economic sanctions. China's economy is ten times larger than Russia's. Economic sanctions against China may be less effective, but this also means that

greater coordination is needed to implement sanctions quickly and effectively. China probably expects that in the case of a Taiwan contingency, the United States, Japan, and their regional partners will impose sanctions on China. However, it is less certain about the European response. European countries have a role and leverage in dissuading China from taking aggressive action.

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Question 2: How and in what areas can Japan and the EU cooperate on security in the Indo-Pacific?

Japan and the EU can cooperate in the following ways. Japan and the EU can cooperate by aligning their strategic objectives and taking concrete steps in the event of rule violations, conflict and war. The concept of maintaining a rules-based order is important and serves as a common denominator for Japan and the EU. However, there is a danger of blurring in relation with where the red line lies for Japan and the EU to act. Japan and the EU may agree on rules, but their interests may differ due to geographical parameters and the existence of bilateral problems with the third country.

There also needs to be a common understanding of what each party would do if the rule is violated, ranging from verbal condemnation to economic sanctions to punishment by force. Of course, this will be difficult to agree on *a priori*, but regular strategic dialogues will be important to avoid misunderstandings about expectations.

Economic sanctions in the event of a military conflict in the Indo-Pacific is one possible response that the EU and Japan can take. As the EU is not a military force, this could be a more realistic response than sending troops. Strategic dialogue on economic sanctions in peacetime, prior to the outbreak of specific conflicts, will help to ensure that sanctions can be swiftly implemented when needed and to deter conflict by raising the costs of aggression.

Japan and EU member states can conduct joint exercises in the Indo-Pacific, such as FONOPs-type exercises. European states can also conduct individual FONOPs in the region to reinforce the practice of freedom of navigation and innocent passage.

European countries and Japan can benefit from cooperation because they have similar security needs. Their militaries are focused on homeland defense rather than expeditionary missions. One example is fighter aircraft. European countries and Japan will continue to rely on shorter-range aircraft rather than long-range bombers.

Both EU member states and Japan have fiscal and resource constraints, especially since many are advanced welfare states. EU-Japan cooperation in the development of low carbon emission technologies and materials is very important, even though this area may be outside the traditional (20th century!) security realm.

Other areas of cooperation could include the embargo on sales of military equipment to China, intelligence sharing on China and North Korea, and military assistance to Taiwan.

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