

## Japan-EU Views on the US and Russia in an Age of Hybrid Threats

by Giulio Pugliese

China's recent assertiveness in the South and East China Seas has reinforced Japanese anxieties over the implications of Beijing's rising power. Through "hybrid warfare" – that is, a set of coercive measures that fall short of outright military aggression – China has considerably enhanced its constabulary presence and military projection in the region.<sup>1</sup> At roughly the same time, Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and the Kremlin's decision to pursue a more aggressive hybrid strategy, which included influence operations in the heart of Europe, signalled the return of great power politics across the Eurasian landmass.

The advent of the populist and potentially disruptive Donald Trump administration serves as a further

reminder of the uncertain and turbulent times we live in, also in light of Russia's alleged interference in the US elections. In light of the breadth of hybrid threats and challenges, how have Japan and the European Union reacted to these developments and what are the implications for their foreign and security policy?

Abe's electoral comeback in 2012 instilled Japanese diplomacy with long-sought dynamism, and Tokyo's policy towards Moscow has been no exception. The heated Sino-Japanese standoff over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands prompted the Abe administration to resolve another territorial dispute at the opposite end of the Japanese archipelago. Here, Japan's claims over the Southern Kurils/Northern Territories – administered by Russia since the end of World War II – still prevent the two neighbours from signing a peace treaty.

<sup>1</sup> Alessio Patalano, "Chinese Hybrid Warfare and its Implications for Maritime Security", in *NMIOTC Journal*, No. 13 (2016), p. 6-14, <http://www.nmiotc.nato.int/files/NMIOTCjournal13.pdf>.

*Giulio Pugliese is Lecturer in War Studies at King's College London. Paper presented at the IAI conference on "Promoting EU-Japan Cooperation in Uncertain Times", Rome, 18-19 January 2018.*

A landmark Japanese-Russian agreement would put an end to what leaders in both countries understand to be an “abnormal” state of relations.<sup>2</sup> An agreement would also prevent Russia from tilting towards China almost by default, burnish Abe’s public image by leaving a personal legacy in post-war Japanese history and allow Tokyo to reorient more of its military towards the East China Sea. In light of these strategic, personal and political calculations, the Abe government has demonstrated substantial flexibility and pragmatism in dealing with Russia’s Vladimir Putin.

Following the 2014 crisis in Ukraine, Japan has sided with the US and the EU’s rhetorical and economic retaliation against Russia, but analysts agree that Tokyo’s sanctions on Moscow have been largely symbolic. In fact, Japan consistently engaged Putin against US desiderata – an important structural factor in Japanese diplomacy – and lobbied Western governments for a more accommodative posture towards Russia, a position close to the Italian government’s quest for productive dialogue with Moscow. Finally, the Abe government has made use of Japan’s financial muscle to mollify Russia through economic carrots, such as bilateral cooperation in healthcare, housing and infrastructure in the Russian Far East.

In stark contrast to the ongoing diplomatic chill between Russia and many Western governments,

<sup>2</sup> James D.J. Brown, *Japan, Russia and their Territorial Dispute. The Northern Delusion*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016.

2017 witnessed the second round of a Japan-Russia security meeting between respective foreign and defence ministers, and a series of visits by high-ranking Russian officials, such as the Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, who visited Tokyo on 11-13 December 2017.<sup>3</sup>

Gerasimov’s recent visit to Japan aptly symbolizes the divide between Japan and the EU over Russia. Many Western observers (mistakenly) believe Gerasimov to be the mastermind behind Russia’s strategy of hybrid warfare: a short transcript of a speech he gave in 2013 – commonly known as the Gerasimov Doctrine – spells out the need to adapt to 21st century warfare, where the lines between states of war and peace are increasingly blurred.<sup>4</sup> Given his prominent role in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, his name was placed on the EU sanction list early on in 2014, following the annexation of Crimea.

More importantly the five principles governing the EU’s policy towards Russia suggest that the sanctions regime will persist until the Minsk ceasefire agreements have been fully implemented and they also spell out the need to build EU resilience in the face of hybrid threats.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> James D.J. Brown, “Japan Woos Russia for Its Own Security”, in *Nikkei Asian Review*, 11 December 2017, <http://s.nikkei.com/2Bs4yua>.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Foy, “Valery Gerasimov, the General with a Doctrine for Russia”, in *Financial Times*, 15 September 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/7e14a438-989b-11e7-a652-cde3f882dd7b>.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Russell, “The EU’s Russia Policy: Five Guiding Principles”, in *EPRS Briefings*, February 2018, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

Tokyo's posture may therefore suggest that Japan and the EU are not on the same page with respect to Russia. Yet, their roles are inverted when it comes to China.

While both are concerned about Russian and Chinese challenges to the so-called liberal international order, through unlawful coercion, distorted state-run market economies, political involution and creeping authoritarian influence, different threat perceptions and economic and strategic considerations inform their respective approaches. Thus, while the EU-Japan Economic and Strategic Partnership Agreements (EPA and SPA) exemplify a shared interest in the maintenance of a rules-based and free market-oriented international order, there are differences in the way the two actors view their surroundings and the rising influence of Moscow and Beijing.<sup>6</sup>

In this respect, the EU and Japan can seek to bridge these gaps by reminding each other about their antithetic positions vis-à-vis Moscow and Beijing.

Hybrid threats and warfare represent one of the most pressing security issues in contemporary world politics. Seldom noticed and appreciated, the unravelling of the international order may slowly come about through repeated hybrid blows to US military

[thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)614698](http://thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)614698).

<sup>6</sup> Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)*, 15 December 2017, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/page6e\\_000013.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/page6e_000013.html); and *Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement*, 13 June 2017, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page22e\\_000707.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page22e_000707.html).

credibility and its alliance system. In fact, the unconventional nature of coercion, and the confusion and ambiguity central to hybrid warfare have kindled fears of abandonment by security partners. Because such operations fall short of a direct and conventional "armed attack" by one state against another, the stipulated condition for self-defence and retaliation, allies may fear that in such circumstances security commitments will not be upheld.

Japan, for instance, was uncomfortable with the Obama administration's weak-kneed response to China's steady encroachment in the South and East China Seas, which began with China's seizure of the Scarborough Shoal in 2012. In 2015, Abe eventually secured a redefinition of the guidelines governing the US-Japan security alliance to deter China in so-called "grey zone" scenarios also through intelligence sharing, deeper coordination and bilateral planning.<sup>7</sup> Somewhat similar dynamics and reassurances have been at play among NATO partners following Russia's encroachment in Ukraine, but fears of abandonment persist.

Concerns of potential entrapments, or slippery slopes towards a full-blown military entanglement due to US security commitments, combined with the very nature of hybrid/grey-zone scenarios, is likely to cloud US decision-making in such instances. This will potentially slow retaliatory measures and circumstantial political factors will

<sup>7</sup> Japan's Ministry of Defense, *The Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation*, 27 April 2015, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/ampo/shishin\\_20150427e.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/ampo/shishin_20150427e.html).

have more weight than ever on such decisions. For these reasons, Russian and Chinese activities are currently at the centre of NATO summits and security consultations between Japan and the United States.

In this context, Trump's "America First" instincts could bring considerable disruption to US alliances. During his first NATO summit, Trump avoided reaffirming US commitment to the principle of collective defence enshrined in Article 5, despite its inclusion in the original script.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Trump has linked US security guarantees to his personal obsession with long-standing trade imbalances; in other words, the US is using its geopolitical leverage to extract economic concessions from regional allies, such as Japan, South Korea and many NATO countries.

Given the importance of the US-Japan alliance for Japanese security, Japan has few alternatives but to work with the Trump administration. Abe's personal engagement of Trump mimics his efforts towards Putin. The muscular National Security Strategy unveiled by the Trump administration has dispelled earlier fears of US abandonment, yet hybrid warfare and Trump's mercenary instincts pose a serious challenge that might still drive a wedge between the US and its allies on vital security matters.

The EU and Japan must therefore rise to the challenge. This is especially

true of Russia's and China's turbid public-private synergies to influence traditionally open, cash-strapped liberal democracies, many of which are going through a legitimacy crisis.

A more realist, if not realistic, EU-Japan strategic partnership might tackle Japan and the EU's weaknesses as easy targets for hybrid operations, which include matters of both hard and soft security, such as strategic communications and influence operations. For that purpose, both parties should firstly enhance confidence-building measures to ensure greater openness on sensible topics. An institutionalized exchange of information over the intentions and capabilities of both actors, intelligence sharing of major cyber operations with strong "forensic" evidence of Russian and Chinese involvement and the exchange of best practices in countering hybrid threats are some examples of the possible way forward for the EU-Japan strategic partnership.

Understandably, much of this type of cooperation takes place between states and, in recent years, Japan has signed a number of information sharing agreements with European countries. Yet, it could also go through triangulation with NATO, as this bolsters its cooperation with the EU. After all, in January 2018, Abe announced Japan's participation in NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn, Estonia.<sup>9</sup> Looking further into the future, Japan and the EU could also consider promoting cooperation

<sup>8</sup> Rosie Gray, "Trump Declines to Affirm NATO's Article 5", in *The Atlantic*, 25 May 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/article/528129>.

<sup>9</sup> NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, *Japan to Join the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn*, 12 January 2018, <https://ccdcoe.org/node/1258.html>.

among private actors or, at the very least, research institutions, such as a Japanese informal participation in the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. Finally, through the EPA and incoming SPA, the EU and Japan should project common values based on the rule of law, openness and freedom of the Internet and of cyberspace in order to help shape the “rules of the game” in these domains.

*26 February 2018*

### Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, IAI does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*Affarinternazionali*), two book series (*Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

Via Angelo Brunetti, 9 - I-00186 Rome, Italy

T +39 06 3224360

F + 39 06 3224363

[iai@iai.it](mailto:iai@iai.it)

[www.iai.it](http://www.iai.it)

## Latest IAI COMMENTARIES

- 18 | 11 Giulio Pugliese, *Japan-EU Views on the US and Russia in an Age of Hybrid Threats*
- 18 | 10 Akiko Fukushima, *Global Security Challenges and Japan's National Security Thinking: Room to Cooperate with the EU?*
- 18 | 09 Nathalie Tocci, *Italian Foreign Policy: A Message in the Bottle to the Next Italian Government*
- 18 | 08 Leo Keay, *Sleepwalking into Thucydides's Trap: The Perils of US Hegemony*
- 18 | 07 Noemi Lanna, *Europe, Japan and a Rising China: Policies and Prospects*
- 18 | 06 Dilek Ulutaş, *Conspiracy to Spy Novel: The Reza Zarrab Case and US-Turkey Relations*
- 18 | 05 Alessandro Marrone, *Italy's Defence Policy: What to Expect from the 2018 Elections?*
- 18 | 04 Francesco Gaudiosi, *Economic Nationalism and the Post-Global Future*
- 18 | 03 Giorgio Gomel, *Israel, Diaspora Jews and the Anti-Semites*
- 18 | 02 Leo Keay, *Surviving the End of US Hegemony*