

The Donald J. Trump Administration as Seen from Tokyo: Will the US-Japan Alliance Remain Unique?

by Michito Tsuruoka

ABSTRACT

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's approach to the Donald J. Trump administration is clear – embrace the president as tightly as possible. The rationale behind Abe's choice is threefold. First, Japan continues to depend on the US for its security and defence in view of growing threats and challenges from North Korea and China. Second, the foreign and security policy of the Barack Obama administration was never popular in Tokyo. Third, there is little concern about a possible spillover of the "Trump phenomenon" in Japan as the current Abe government faces no serious populist or anti-establishment challenges in domestic politics. So far, Abe's gamble has paid off. The Trump administration has taken a different approach to Japan compared to NATO allies in Europe: while the latter are constantly called on to spend more on defence, Japan is generally let off the hook despite its military spending being a tiny fraction of its GDP. However, it is premature to assume that this differentiated approach will continue. One of the most important challenges for US allies in Asia and Europe is to enhance their security role as well as to re-define the meaning of burden-sharing.

Japan's foreign policy | US-Japan bilateral relations | Japan's military policy | Military budget | NATO | US military policy



keywords

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by Michito Tsuruoka*

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's approach to the Donald J. Trump administration is clear – embrace the president as tightly as possible. This approach is based on the belief that whether or not one personally approves of the occupant of the White House, the United States is the only ally of Japan that is committed to defending the country. This paper examines the main factors behind Abe's approach to Trump and compares them with those of European allies of the US, which have a visibly more reserved attitude towards the Trump administration. It also explores the Trump administration's apparently different approaches to the US–Japan alliance on the one hand and to NATO on the other: will such a differentiated approach continue, and the US–Japan alliance remain unique?

1. Conditions and beliefs behind Abe's approach to Trump

There are three major reasons why Tokyo's approach to the Trump administration appears somewhat relaxed, and why the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is committed to building a good relationship with the Trump administration and, specifically, with the president in person.

First, Tokyo cannot afford to distance itself from the United States amid the worsening security environment surrounding Japan – most notably, North Korea's nuclear and ballistic-missile developments and China's increasingly assertive behaviour in the East and South China Seas. Upon returning from a series of meetings with Trump in February 2017, Abe argued in a Diet debate that "only" the United States would help defend Japan and retaliate "in the event that North Korea were to launch a ballistic missile" and "there is no other choice than to cultivate

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a close relationship to Mr. Trump and display it to the world.”¹ Abe sounded quite candid about the matter.

Deterrence depends on political unity and North Korea, China and other states and actors continually watch the state of the US–Japan alliance. Any show of estrangement between Tokyo and Washington could invite an escalation of actions by those who want to test the alliance and change the status quo. This is widely believed to have happened during the government of Yukio Hatoyama (2009–10) and subsequent, short-lived administrations led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), when the alliance was under pressure – particularly over the issue of the relocation of the US Marines’ Futenma Air Station in Okinawa – and trust between US and Japanese leaders seemed lacking. This is something that Abe was determined to address upon returning to power in December 2012. In short, Tokyo – as far as Abe and his government are concerned – does not have the luxury of voicing concerns about or criticising US presidents in public. And the Trump administration’s commitment to Japan and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole is seen to be robust.²

Second, Tokyo’s response to the Trump administration is also connected to its experience with its predecessor. Simply put, former President Barack Obama was never popular within Japan’s foreign and security policy community, though the general public held positive views of him partly because of his agenda of seeking a “world without nuclear weapons” and his status as the first sitting US president to visit Hiroshima. Despite his declared “pivot” to Asia, many experts and officials in Tokyo remained sceptical about its credibility and sustainability. Obama’s policy towards China was particularly poorly received in Japan, where it was regarded as being indecisive and too soft; his national security adviser, Susan Rice, was especially unpopular and often seen as a *bête noire* in Tokyo.³

Additionally, Tokyo has a traditional proclivity to prefer Republican administrations over Democratic ones, and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s relationship with the George W. Bush administration was often described as the best in Japan’s modern history, while the Bush administration was probably the least popular in Europe. In fact, the notion that “Europe is blue and Asia is red”, whereby Europe likes Democratic presidents and Asia Republican ones, seems more or less true. Obama’s popularity in Europe remained high throughout his administration⁴ – in fact,

¹ “Handling China is Greatest Challenge, Abe Told Trump”, in *Nikkei Asian Review*, 15 February 2017, <http://s.nikkei.com/2i9nqVR>; Reiji Yoshida, “Deflecting Criticism of Trump Ties, Abe Says ‘No Other Choice’ But Close Japan-U.S. Relationship”, in *The Japan Times*, 14 February 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/14/national/politics-diplomacy/deflecting-criticism-trump-ties-abe-says-no-choice-close-japan-u-s-relationship>.

² Noboru Yamaguchi, “Reaffirming U.S. Alliances in the Asia-Pacific: A Japanese Perspective”, in *Asia Policy*, No. 24 (July 2017), p. 13-18.

³ Hiroyuki Akita, *Turbulent Waters. The US-China-Japan Security Dynamics* (in Japanese), Tokyo, Nihon Keizai Shimbun Pub., 2016, Ch. 4.

⁴ Richard Wike, Jacob Poushter and Hani Zainulbhai, “As Obama Years Draw to Close, President

Europeans had been enthusiastic about him even before he was elected. “Obamania” or “Obama fever” were observed in many countries in Europe – in large part, a result of the Continent’s antipathy towards the preceding Bush administration – and Obama himself wanted to take advantage of Bush’s unpopularity in Europe.⁵ Views in Japan (and in other parts of Asia, for that matter) and Europe on the US have therefore diverged, particularly during the Bush administration in the early to mid-2000s.

Prime Minister Abe makes no effort to hide the fact that he did not feel comfortable in personal terms with President Obama, and was determined not to repeat the failure of building a good personal relationship with the new president.⁶ Abe’s approach to Trump, which focuses enormously on building personal ties, can be viewed in this context. His visit to Trump Tower in New York to see the president-elect less than two weeks after Trump’s surprising election victory was an extraordinary diplomatic move, as there was the danger of offending the sitting president and no one was able to predict the outcome of the meeting. But Abe took the risk and became the first foreign leader to see Trump after the election, believing that it would pay off. Following the meeting, a buoyant Abe declared Trump “a leader who can be trusted” and stated that the meeting “gave me confidence that the two of us can build a relationship of trust”.⁷

The first official summit meeting between Abe and Trump in February 2017 also went well – it far exceeded prior expectations. After the series of meetings, including a joint round of golf at Trump’s own course in Florida, Abe was reported as saying that he already spent more time with Trump than with Obama over the past four years put together – a first sign of success in building personal ties with the new president. The fact that Trump referred to the issue of North Korea’s abduction of Japanese citizens in his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2017 was also a testimony to the close personal bond between him and Abe, as the latter is known to be committed on the issue.⁸

As a general rule, it is dangerous to rely too much on personal relations with foreign leaders in the conduct of foreign and security policy. However, in the case of Trump – an unusual occupant of the White House – it would be hard to hold too closely to this rule: talking to this particular President directly seems to matter far

and U.S. Seen Favorably in Europe and Asia”, in *Pew Research Center Reports*, 29 June 2016, <http://pewrsr.ch/295KqQz>.

⁵ Jeff Zeleny and Nicholas Kulish, “Obama Gets Pop Star Reception in Berlin”, in *The New York Times*, 24 July 2008, <https://nyti.ms/2FwxBeO>.

⁶ Noriyuki Yamaguchi, *Prime Minister* (in Japanese), Tokyo, Gentosha, 2016, p. 183-209; Noriyuki Yamaguchi, *Struggle* (in Japanese), Tokyo, Gentosha, 2017, p. 27-33.

⁷ Japan Prime Minister, *Comment by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Following the Meeting with President-elect Donald Trump*, New York, 18 November 2016, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201611/1220021_11019.html.

⁸ White House, *Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, New York, 19 September 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly>.

more than it has done with previous administrations.

Third, but by no means least important, Tokyo's embrace of the Trump administration is more or less risk-free in domestic political terms. The Abe government looks highly stable and currently faces no serious challenges from anti-mainstream political forces – be they against the establishment, the elite, globalisation, Islam or immigration, or other forms of extreme-right and/or populist appeal.⁹ While the snap election that Abe called in October 2017 looked risky at certain points, and it ignited a realignment of opposition parties, his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the end secured a comfortable majority in the lower house of the Diet and Abe was re-elected as prime minister without any major surprises.

In many parts of Europe, however, the rise of anti-establishment and anti-elite political movements poses a serious threat not just to governments themselves but also to Europe's political order as a whole. The June 2016 referendum in the UK resulting in the decision to leave the EU caused the first shock wave across the Continent. While the French electorate prevented the emergence of a far-right president, the result of the German federal election in September 2017 and the Austrian election in the following month has shown that the age of populism (or, at least, of discontent) is far from over. For political leaders under such high domestic pressure, Trump's victory and his mere existence as US president can only be seen as an extension of domestic politics and represents something deplorable. They naturally worry about potential ramifications on their own political situations – they fear that the "Trump phenomenon" in the US could spill over and galvanise populist and extreme-right political forces in their own countries.

This also means that European leaders need to tread carefully in dealing with President Trump. On the one hand, various populist and extreme-right parties and leaders in Europe enjoy some sort of relationship with the Trump camp and they often praise his policies and populist rhetoric. On the other hand, given the mainstream public's strong antipathy towards Trump, European leaders must be careful not to be seen as too close to him. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's congratulatory letter to Trump after his election demonstrated the sensitivities that Merkel needed to take into account. It read,

Germany and America are bound by common values – democracy, freedom, as well as respect for the rule of law and the dignity of each and every person, regardless of their origin, skin colour, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or political views. It is based on these values that I wish to offer close cooperation, both with me personally and between our countries' governments.¹⁰

⁹ See, for example, Yoichi Funabashi, "Japan, Where Populism Fails", in *The New York Times*, 8 February 2017, <https://nyti.ms/2k2UCKl>.

¹⁰ Anthony Faiola, "Angela Merkel Congratulates Donald Trump – Kind Of", in *The Washington Post*, 9 November 2016, <http://wapo.st/2fDrVUk>.

Conditional offer of cooperation is indeed rare among allies.¹¹ During the 2017 Bundestag election campaign, Social Democratic leader Martin Schulz tried to use anti-Trump rhetoric to woo voters and distanced himself from Merkel's policies, including the idea of raising defence spending – something that the Trump administration was pushing for.¹²

Japan, at least for the moment, seems more or less free from such concerns and Abe does not see any domestic political risk in embracing Trump. Abe's seeming success in establishing such a strong personal relationship with Trump is seen positively and regarded as a tremendous asset in Japan's foreign and security policy. Because of this domestic context, the Abe government has the luxury of focusing on concrete policy items such as security, rather than worrying about the domestic political ramifications of the "Trump phenomenon". This constitutes by far the biggest difference between Japan and US allies in Europe as to their respective approaches to Trump.

Yet compared with the government's views, the Japanese public has far less favourable views on Trump. According to the Pew Research Center, Japanese confidence in the US president fell from 78 percent in 2016 (under Obama) to 24 percent in 2017, and favourable views of the US as a country also fell from 72 to 57 percent during the same period.¹³ Japanese pollster Genron NPO also reveals that 50.8 percent of respondents stated that their trust in the US as an ally had decreased, while a mere 2 percent said it had increased. In the same poll, 44.1 percent declared, "American actions may harm the international order" and 41.3 percent said, "although Japan-US relations are important, it is dangerous to focus [only on] the US".¹⁴ There seem obvious gaps between public perceptions and the position of the Abe government – how these gaps will play out in Japan's domestic politics remains to be seen.

2. NATO and the US–Japan alliance: different tales

When it comes to concrete policy items, security burden-sharing between the US and its allies is likely to be the most contentious issue of the Trump era. In the initial months of the administration, there seemed to have been a stark difference between what the Trump administration demanded from NATO allies in Europe and from Japan.

¹¹ Ibid.; Stefan Wagstyl, "Merkel Takes Liberal-democratic Stand in Post-Trump World", in *Financial Times*, 10 November 2016.

¹² Tony Barber, "Schulz Taps Pacifist Tradition by Playing the Trump Card", in *Financial Times*, 28 August 2017.

¹³ Bruce Stokes, "Japanese Divided on Democracy's Success at Home, But Value Voices of The People", in *Pew Research Center Reports*, 17 October 2017, <http://pewrsr.ch/2kW7OGX>.

¹⁴ Genron NPO, *Japanese Public Opinion on American Leadership and the Role of Japan*, July 2017, http://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5359.html.

In respect of Europe, the Trump administration is adamant in demanding that European allies meet NATO's stated commitment to spending 2 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defence. NATO's summit in Wales in September 2014 agreed to "aim to move towards the 2% guideline within a decade".¹⁵ Though this language was deliberately vague and cannot literally be seen as a binding commitment, the Trump administration takes it as a basis from which to push its European allies to increase their defence budgets¹⁶ – this constitutes, in fact, one of the few consistent demands on the administration's policy agenda. Vice President Mike Pence, in his address to the annual Munich Security Conference in February 2017, stated that "the truth is that many others, including some of our largest allies, still lack a clear and credible path to meeting this minimum goal" of spending 2 percent of their GDP on defence. He went on, "Let me be clear on this point, the President of the United States expects our allies to keep their word to fulfill this commitment, and for most that means the time has come to do more."¹⁷ After meeting Chancellor Merkel in Washington, Trump tweeted that Germany owed the United States "vast sums of money" for "the very powerful, and very expensive, defense it [the US] provides to Germany".¹⁸ US insistence in this regard is highly likely to continue in the coming months and years.

In addition to these initial encounters, Trump's performance at the NATO leaders' meeting in Brussels on 25 May 2017 caused a shock wave across the Continent.¹⁹ The President failed to mention Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty – the very heart of NATO, the collective defence clause – in his remarks to unveil the Article 5 monument in front of the new headquarters of the alliance in front of all the leaders of the allies. It was later reported that the speech draft had included a reference to Article 5 that was deleted at the last minute.²⁰ In a closed-door meeting with NATO leaders, Trump was reported as pushing Europeans to spend 3, rather than 2, percent of GDP on defence, which was yet another blow to the Europeans.²¹

¹⁵ NATO, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 September 2014, para. 14, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

¹⁶ Only five countries in addition to the US meet the 2 percent guideline. For the latest official NATO figures, see NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2010-2017)*, 29 June 2017, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_145409.htm.

¹⁷ White House, *Remarks by the Vice President at the Munich Security Conference*, 18 February 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-munich-security-conference>.

¹⁸ Donald J. Trump@realDonaldTrump, 18 March 2017, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/843090516283723776>.

¹⁹ Economist, "Donald Trump Fails to Endorse NATO's Mutual Defence Pledge", in *The Economist*, 26 May 2017, <https://www.economist.com/blogs/democracynamerica/2017/05/trump-s-trip>. For views that we should not take this too seriously, see Thorsten Benner, "Stop Panicking over Trump and NATO", in *The Washington Post*, 30 May 2017, <http://wapo.st/2r8eD9r>; Michael O'Hanlon, "On Trump's Article 5 Omission", in *Order from Chaos*, 25 May 2017, <http://brook.gs/2rEcaEB>.

²⁰ Susan B. Glasser, "Trump National Security Team Blindsided by NATO Speech", in *Politico Magazine*, 5 June 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/05/trump-nato-speech-national-security-team-215227>.

²¹ Robbie Gramer, "Trump Discovers Article 5 after a Disastrous NATO Visit", in *Foreign Policy*, 9 June 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/09/trump-discovers-article-5-after-disastrous-nato>.

In hindsight, however, this was perhaps the peak of Europe's concerns about the US commitment to NATO. After the Brussels summit, Trump expressed his commitment to Article 5 at a joint press conference with the visiting Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis, in Washington in early June – albeit only in reply to a question.²² In an address in Warsaw in July 2017, Trump finally officially pronounced his commitment to Article 5: "To those who would criticize our tough stance, I would point out that the United States has demonstrated not merely with words but with its actions that we stand firmly behind Article 5, the mutual defense commitment. Words are easy, but actions are what matters."²³

Trump was right to argue that actions are more important than words. Indeed, his administration has continued to deploy troops to Poland in the context of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence as planned by the previous administration, and substantially increased the budget request to support it and other reassurance and deterrence measures in Europe – from 3.4 billion dollars (Fiscal Year 2017) to 4.7 billion dollars (FY2018).²⁴ As a result, talk of the US abandoning the alliance has more or less subsided within NATO, though Trump's unpredictability continues to cause concern across the Continent.

At least as far as the President himself is concerned, it seems that he is content with the fact that European allies have finally started to increase their defence budgets and expand their contributions to the US-led international counterterrorism coalition against Islamic State (ISIL) on account of his prompting. However, this increase in European defence budgets in fact had begun before Trump was elected – mainly to cope with the growing threat of Russia. Trump stated that "[a]s a result of this [his administration's] insistence, billions of dollars more have begun to pour into NATO. In fact, people are shocked. But billions and billions of dollars more are coming in from countries that, in my opinion, would not have been paying so quickly."²⁵ Whether his claim is valid or not, letting Trump feel happy about this is a small price to pay for many NATO countries.

visit-brussels-visit-transatlantic-relationship-europe.

²² Trump stated rather casually as the following: "Well, I'm committing the United States, and have committed, but I'm committing the United States to Article 5. And certainly we are there to protect. And that's one of the reasons that I want people to make sure we have a very, very strong force by paying the kind of money necessary to have that force. But, yes, absolutely, I'd be committed to Article 5" – again in conjunction with the budget considerations. See White House, *Remarks by President Trump and President Iohannis of Romania in a Joint Press Conference*, Washington, 9 June 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-iohannis-romania-joint-press-conference>.

²³ White House, *Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland*, Warsaw, 6 July 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-people-poland>.

²⁴ Dan Lamothe, "In Spending Bill, New Muscular Ways That the Pentagon Could Deter Russian Military Action", in *The Washington Post*, 28 June 2017, <http://wapo.st/2tmQZHP>; Cheryl Pellerin, "2018 Budget Request for European Reassurance Initiative Grows to \$4.7 billion", in *DoD News*, 1 June 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1199828>.

²⁵ White House, *Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland*, cit.

Regarding the US–Japan alliance, Tokyo was deeply shocked when then-candidate Trump argued that Japan should pay 100 percent of the cost of the stationing of US forces there, lest the US leave the country.²⁶ Many experts and officials complained that the Trump team understood nothing about the alliance, and tried to reach out to key figures in the Trump camp in order to explain how much Japan contributes to the cost of stationing US forces on its territory – something called host nation support (HNS).²⁷ Though the exact percentage of the overall cost of US forces in Japan that the nation covers is difficult to determine, as various different definitions and calculations are involved, what seems clear is that it is substantially higher than that paid by other US allies and partners, including those in NATO – somewhere in the region of 75 percent (US–Japan) versus 30–40 percent (US–NATO).²⁸ In fiscal year 2017, Japan spent more than 587.5 billion yen (approximately 5 billion dollars) from its Ministry of Defence (MoD) budget towards the cost of US forces in Japan.²⁹ In addition, the Japanese Government paid 204.1 billion yen on renting properties for US military use from outside the MoD budget. This is indeed a substantial contribution, making it cheaper to keep forces in Japan than in the US.

The main reason Japan has increased HNS over the years has to do with the fact that the country's scope for burden sharing in other areas, such as contributing troops to US-led operations and other more operation-oriented activities, has been extremely limited due to its Peace Constitution and the government's interpretation of it. Historically, therefore, the fact that Japan meets such a large proportion of the cost of US forces overseas cannot be considered evidence of burden sharing, but it has constituted an important element of the US–Japan alliance nevertheless. It has been argued that the alliance has been based on exchange/cooperation between material and personnel – Japan making forward bases available and providing HNS, with the US providing troops.³⁰

The Trump administration appears content with the level of Japan's burden-sharing within the alliance. Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis said in a press conference with his Japanese counterpart in Tokyo in February 2017 that "Japan has been a model of cost sharing, of burden sharing", and went on to argue that "we can point to our Japanese-American cost-sharing approach as an example for other nations to

²⁶ For Trump's comment, see Wolf Blitzer interview: "Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees", in *CNN*, 4 May 2016, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1605/04/acd.01.html>.

²⁷ Noriyuki Yamaguchi, *Struggle* (in Japanese), cit., p. 40-45.

²⁸ According to 2003 official US figures, Japan's percentage of cost-sharing ("U.S. stationing cost offset percentage") stands at 74.5 percent, while the UK 27.1, Italy 41, Germany 32.6, Belgium 24, Turkey 54.2, and South Korea 40. See US Department of Defense, *2004 Statistical Compendium on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense*, 2004, http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/allied_contrib2004/allied2004.pdf.

²⁹ Japan Ministry of Defense, *Cost-sharing for the Stationing of USFJ, FY 2017* (in Japanese), April 2017, http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/zaibeigun/us_keihi/keihi.html.

³⁰ Kazuya Sakamoto, *Bond of the Japan-US Alliance. The Security Treaty and the Search for a Symmetry* (in Japanese), Tokyo, Yuhikaku, 2000.

follow”.³¹ In the light of what then-candidate Trump had said during the early stage of his campaign, this could be seen as a result of Japan’s success in explaining the facts to the Trump camp in the meantime.

Abe’s visit to Washington and Florida in the following week in February also far exceeded initial expectations concerning the level of US commitment to the alliance with Japan. The joint statement released by Trump and Abe read, “The U.S. commitment to defend Japan through the full range of U.S. military capabilities, both nuclear and conventional, is unwavering”,³² and went on to state that “[t]he two leaders affirmed that Article V of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security covers the Senkaku Islands.³³ They oppose any unilateral action that seeks to undermine Japan’s administration of these islands.” In short, Tokyo got everything that it could have wished for. As will be discussed in the following section, there has been no insistence yet from the Trump administration for Japan to spend more on defence, to the great relief of the country’s officials.

One could argue that Japan’s efforts over the past few years to enhance operational cooperation between US and Japanese forces, thereby improving burden sharing, has worked to soften the Trump administration’s demands on the country. The two nations revised the US–Japan Guidelines on Defence Cooperation in 2015,³⁴ and the Abe government enacted new security legislation in 2016. While both moves preceded the inauguration of the Trump administration, they proved to be of perfect timing. Tokyo is now in a position to argue that it has already done its homework, and that wider options of cooperation are available. Indeed, there are more joint operations and exercises taking place in and around Japan than before, particularly between the US Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF). In view of China’s increasing assertiveness in the maritime domain and North Korea’s ballistic-missile and nuclear threat, the value of the alliance with Japan – its military assets and forward bases – has increased in the eyes of the Americans.

Yet, it is far from clear whether or to what extent the Trump administration’s rather favourable views of the US–Japan alliance stems from the fact – and US perceptions – that the role of Japan in the alliance has increased substantially over the past few years.

³¹ US Department of Defense, *Joint Press Briefing by Secretary Mattis and Minister Inada in Tokyo, Japan*, 4 February 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1071436/joint-press-briefing-by-secretary-mattis-and-minister-inada-in-tokyo-japan>.

³² White House, *Joint Statement from President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe*, Washington, 10 February 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-prime-minister-shinzo-abe>.

³³ The small islets in the East China Sea administered by Japan but claimed also by China.

³⁴ Japan Ministry of Defense, *The Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation*, 27 April 2015, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/index.html.

3. Burden sharing à la Trump

In thinking about burden sharing in the Trump era, there are three unanswered questions from a comparative perspective of NATO and the US–Japan alliance. First, the overarching question relates to different levels of security dependence on the US in the US–Japan alliance (or, more broadly, in Asia as a whole) and NATO, how the difference has come about and how it is seen in Washington, and whether it is acceptable or not. During the Cold War, for the purpose of deterring the Soviet Union and the entire Communist bloc, Western Europe had to depend substantially on the US for its own security. The situation was not much different in the Asian theatre, where the United States was also an indispensable security provider.

The question that needs to be asked now is whether there is really a legitimate reason for Europe’s dependence to be regarded as no longer acceptable, whereas Japan’s (or Asia’s) remains more tolerable. On the one hand, one could argue that Europeans have had longer to redress the problem of dependence on the US after the end of the Cold War, whereas Asia is facing a rising threat – particularly from North Korea and China.³⁵ On the other hand, however, one could also argue that assuming that the latter countries are now viewed as more pressing primary threats, US allies in Asia need to contribute more to their alliances with the US. It is still unclear on what basis the Trump administration’s stances on burden sharing differ between NATO and the US–Japan alliance. Perhaps the mere fact that it is hard to find a convincing answer to the question of why Japan’s low defence spending is acceptable while Europe’s is not (particularly to a non-expert audience) might suggest that the Trump administration’s differentiated approaches to Japan and Europe should not be taken for granted and could change at any time without warning.

Second, in more concrete terms, while the Trump administration talks a great deal about the level of its overall defence budget vis-à-vis Europe, the same administration stays focused on HNS when it comes to Japan. HNS is of a much smaller scale compared to the overall defence budget. The Trump administration is not pushing European NATO countries to increase HNS. This represents another puzzling question about the way in which the Trump administration approaches the issue of security burden sharing by its allies.

Third, regardless of whether the Trump administration’s different approach to NATO and Japan will continue or not, one of the common significant challenges for both Europe and Japan is how they can expand their security role within their respective alliances with the United States. Increasing defence budgets may be unavoidable, but it should not be seen as an end in itself – it is a means to shoulder a larger burden and play a larger role. In the case of Japan, the new peace and

³⁵ See, for example, Mac Thornberry and Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr, “Preserving Primacy. A Defense Strategy for a New Administration”, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 5 (September/October 2016), p. 26-35.

security legislation that came into force in 2016 is good evidence that Tokyo is willing to play an enhanced security role in the region and in bilateral terms with the US.

Another related question is how and to what extent non-budget and non-military aspects can be taken into account as contributions to common defence. Official development assistance (ODA), security-sector reform, capacity-building assistance, preventive diplomacy, and financial contributions to the United Nations and other international bodies working on peace and security are cases in point. While the military component is no doubt indispensable, there are other things that need to be done in a coordinated manner. Allies' contributions to international peace and security by other means have always been part of the whole picture of security burden sharing between the US and its allies. Therefore, Trump's seemingly narrow focus on defence spending causes concerns and frustration among its allies in Europe.³⁶ Europe and Asia share the challenge of broadening the meaning of "fair share" of the security burden beyond that of defence budgets.³⁷

Conclusions

The US–Japan alliance tends to be discussed – in both countries – purely in a bilateral context, probably reflecting the fact that the people involved in the relationship wish to believe that the alliance is special and unique. However, for the United States the alliance with Japan is part of its global network of such agreements, which obviously includes NATO. Outside a small circle of people who deal with the US–Japan alliance on a daily basis, there seems to be no obvious reason for treating Japan differently from other allies.

Japan's and Europe's general responses and approaches to the Trump administration are currently substantially different, and Washington also seems to be pursuing apparently different goals in Asia and in Europe. However, it is far from certain that the current situation will continue – and Tokyo needs to be prepared to respond, for example, to a possible demand from Washington to increase its defence budget. That is why there needs to be more comparative research on US alliances in different regions, most notably NATO and the US–Japan alliance.

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³⁶ Arthur Beesley and Stefan Wagstyl, "German Foreign Minister Attacks US's NATO Spending Demands", in *Financial Times*, 31 March 2017; Rick Noack, "German Defense Ministry Contradicts Trump, Says It Doesn't Owe U.S. Money for NATO", in *The Washington Post*, 19 March 2017, <http://wapo.st/2nS9mhA>.

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