

## Perspectives on an Uncertain World: Japan-EU Views on the United States and Russia

by Kazuto Suzuki

Japan and the European Union share many commonalities. Both are advanced industrialized countries, are governed by liberal democratic institutions and are allies of the United States. The ongoing, dynamic shift in global power structures may produce diverging views and policies, however.

Against this backdrop of fluidity and unpredictability, how are Japan and the European Union adapting to these changes and how does their geographical collocation affect the way each views global powers and developments?

Beginning from the role of the United States, the key external security guarantor for both actors, from Japan's point of view, the US remains the only reliable ally for its security, no matter who sits in the White House. Japan clearly needs a strong external ally that is committed to its defence. Article 9 of

the Constitution implies that Japan has renounced the use of force to resolve international crisis and, under current interpretations, only allows the country to possess armed forces for self-defence (or a very limited exercise of collective self-defence).

During the Cold War, the Japan-US alliance worked extremely well for Japan due to a US commitment to come to its defence in the event of Soviet aggression. With the emergence of China as military power and North Korea as a nuclear actor, Japan has returned to view its alliance with the United States as indispensable. It is therefore imperative for the Japanese government to ensure that President Trump not deviate from this traditional US posture, a possibility that cannot be discounted out of hand given the general unpredictability flowing from Washington.

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Japan needs to engage the US proactively, taking pre-emptive action to limit possible shifts in US policy and seek to modify the views and priorities of key members of the Trump administration, if and when they appear to be shifting away from a commitment to Japan's defence.

The situation is quite different for Europe. While Britain's departure from the EU may change security dynamics within the NATO alliance, European states' face no legal constraints on their armed forces, independently from the US's role within NATO. However, a prospective European re-armament does face financial, social, ethical and technical limits. President Trump's attitude displayed during the May 2017 NATO summit can be construed as a sign that his administration is not fully committed to the defence of Europe.<sup>1</sup> Baltic and Central/Eastern European states in particular, fear the possibility of Russian aggression, and believe in the importance of the alliance with the US to balance this perceived threat.

In the event that Trump retreats from the US's commitment to NATO, the cost of defending Europe will be extremely high. Nevertheless, if Europe continues its heavy security dependence on the US, this too could lead to a situation of insecurity and perceived weakness. Therefore, the EU has now launched a new security framework of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Daniella Diaz, "Watch President Trump Push a Prime Minister Aside", in *CNN*, 25 May 2017, <http://cnn.it/2qTgJK2>.

<sup>2</sup> European External Action Service, *Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) - Factsheet*, 5 March 2018, <http://europa.eu/tg94Hv>.

in an effort to enhance its security capabilities independently from the United States.

While there may be some differences on security issues and posture, Japan and the EU are on the same page when it comes to global governance and trade. Trump's "America First" policy has led the US to reject the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and abandon the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The US has also withdrawn from the Paris Accords on Climate Change and has isolated itself in the UN Security Council on many occasions.

The decline in US global leadership is creating dangerous vacuums on many issues, and is increasing the probability that China and Russia move to fill this gap. Russia is expanding its influence in the Middle East and Latin America while China is strengthening its presence in Central, South, Southeast and West Asia through its One Belt One Road Initiative.

While neither Japan or the EU hold hegemonic ambitions in these regions, it is extremely important for both to take the initiative and support the liberal international order created and maintained by the values and ideals that are shared by Japan, the EU and the United States. The potential of a sustained decline in US global leadership means that it is up to Japan and the EU to make sure that global governance is conducted with liberal concepts and institutions.

Moving to their respective views on Russia, a number of important points must be made. For Japan, the relationship with Russia is strongly defined by territorial issues relating to the Northern Islands. Since the end of World War II, Japan has claimed that Russia has unlawfully occupied islands attached to Hokkaido.<sup>3</sup> There have been many attempts by Japanese governments' to negotiate a return of these territories but none has produced results. The Abe administration has outlined its objective to redefine the Post-War regime,<sup>4</sup> including the territorial issue with Russia. The administration's approach is to offer economic aid in exchange for regaining sovereignty over the territory. There are a lot of projects of economic cooperation – including gas extraction in Eastern Siberia and Sakhalin, urban development projects, medical support and more – that may ease tensions and improve the political atmosphere needed for negotiations.

Japan expects that international isolation and sanctions will create a situation where Russia would welcome Japanese economic aid and political support. While Japan joined the international coalition to condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea and its intervention in the Donbass region, the Abe administration believes that sanctions on Russia could provide

Japan leverage in negotiations. Nevertheless, Russia's recent challenges to the territorial integrity of states may establish a precedent for developments in the South and East China Sea. Japan would be unable to accept any challenge to territorial integrity or changes of the international order by force, especially in light of China's ambitions in this region. Japan's opposition to any potential action that may threaten the territorial integrity of states will therefore likely be strong and determined.

On the other hand, in Europe, Russia has emerged as a clear and present danger. What happened in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine may happen again in the Baltic states or Central and Eastern European countries. The cyber-attack on the Estonian network, which was the first large scale incident of cyber-warfare,<sup>5</sup> was believed to be conducted by Russia. There is a lot of evidence proving that Russia was involved in meddling during the recent elections in the Netherlands, France and Germany by promoting fake and politically motivated information.<sup>6</sup> The Russian threat is imminent and it has to be contained. Thus, the EU has continued to impose sanctions on Russia despite its economic relationship and energy dependence on Moscow.

<sup>3</sup> Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: *Northern Territories Issue*, 1 March 2011, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/overview.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Japan Prime Minister, *Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 168th Session of the Diet*, 10 September 2007, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/abespeech/2007/09/10syosin\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/abespeech/2007/09/10syosin_e.html).

<sup>5</sup> "How Estonia Became a Global Heavyweight in Cyber Security", in *e-Estonia*, June 2017, <https://e-estonia.com/?p=1122>.

<sup>6</sup> Rick Noack, "Everything We Know So Far About Russian Election Meddling in Europe", in *The Washington Post*, 10 January 2018, <http://wapo.st/2mgOW2y>.

Japan and the EU appear to be on the same page with regards to Russia. Both have a significant degree of economic and energy interests with Moscow, and both have condemned Russian actions that disrupt the international order. Nevertheless, the way each looks at Russia presents differences.

Japan sees Russia as an inevitable negotiating partner, while many European states, with some differences due to geography and history, consider Russia to be a threat. Japan has imposed sanctions on Russia, but only at a minimum level to demonstrate its willingness to be a negotiating partner with Russia while being a Western ally. When seen in this light, it appears there is little room for Japan and the EU to work together to change Russian behaviour.

Finally, there is one last issue that deserves to be addressed: the role of China.

While China has long been Japan's largest trading partner, Tokyo views Chinese actions in the South and East China Sea and its hegemonic One Belt One Road project as a threat to its security and economic interests. Europe, on the other hand, tends to see China as a new "El Dorado" and has displayed little concern over Chinese investments and trade expansionism. However, since the Chinese takeover the German robotics company Kuka,<sup>7</sup> the EU has displayed more caution as to the potential threat posed by Chinese

economic penetration of Europe. Thus, the European Commission has proposed regulation to welcome foreign direct investment while protecting European essential interests.<sup>8</sup>

This new trend towards China makes it possible for Japan and the EU to work together to promote their national interests through international trade and investment regulations and norms. This would provide an opportunity to establish a joint management protocol for another global governance domain, while limiting the potential damage done by the Trump administration's declining global leadership and commitment to internationalism and the liberal order.

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<sup>7</sup> Pamela Barbaglia, Rene Wagner and Arno Schuetze, "Germany Sets EU Tone with Tighter Curbs on Foreign Takeovers", in *Reuters*, 12 July 2017, <http://reut.rs/2tKM9SR>.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, *Welcoming Foreign Direct Investment while Protecting Essential Interests* (COM/2017/494), 13 September 2017, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52017DC0494>.

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