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Abstract: Why is Japan vital to NATO? Transatlantic relations are currently being challenged by Moscow's aggression and the rise of China in Asia. Furthermore, the difference in the security concerns between Europe and the US creates a dangerous situation. This article will examine the potential mutual benefits and pitfalls of a closer relationship between Japan and NATO, and the reasons behind the existing relationship. The article seeks to do this by exploring the relations' background and finishing with the possible solutions to enhance the ties between Japan and NATO.

What makes Japan's situation so unique? Firstly, since the end of the Second World War, Japan has not threatened any of its neighbours. Secondly, since the end of the Cold War, the Japanese defense budget remained stagnant between 1990 and 2012.¹ Thirdly Japan has worked to strengthen its diplomatic relations with its neighbours, particularly with China. Despite these efforts, China has continued to undermine Japanese sovereignty and interest in the East China Sea. There is no doubt that whether Japan is cooperative, China will continue to pose a threat to Tokyo.² This unique situation diminishes the uncertainties, forcing Japanese elites between a rock and a hard place. The two options that Japan must decide between are whether to become a more active military presence in the region, or let China become the dominant power in Asia.

Background

There is no doubt that the relationship between Japan and NATO did not develop in a linear line. The first phase of their relationship drew upon post-Cold war experience. The second period started with the 9/11 attacks. The third and final phase began in 2009 when Japan decided to participate in Operation Ocean Shield.

In 1994, during the Brussels Summit, Japanese and NATO leaders acknowledged that they face the same security issues even though they are geographically distant. Japan and NATO realized that the end of the Cold War does not mean that the problems have disappeared.³ Both Japan and NATO figured out that they could benefit greatly from close cooperation. Both the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949 and the Japan-US security treaty in 1960 made it explicitly clear

¹ “防衛省 Ministry of Defense Defense Programs and Budget of Japan Overview of FY2020 Budget Request,” August 2019, https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_budget/pdf/191112c.pdf.

² Thomas J. Christensen, “China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia,” *International Security* 23, no. 4 (April 1999): 49–80, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.23.4.49>.

³ “NATO and JAPAN : COMMON CONCERNS FOR WORLD ORDER,” December 1994, https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/3/137916/0363_NATO-Japan_Security_Conference_1994_ENG.pdf.

that parties of both treaties wished to promote free and democratic institutions. Accordingly, in 1993, the Japan-NATO High-Level Consultations framework was founded to improve convergence between Japan and NATO states. In 1996, Japan was invited to become an observer at the Council of Europe and at NATO's Parliamentary Assembly. Yet these were timid and short-dated rapprochement.⁴ The Taiwan Strait crisis in 1996 drew the attention of Japanese policy-makers. The crisis started when China deployed 150 thousand troops in Fujian Province (near the strait) and conducted three military drills in a row in March 1996. Chinese actions triggered the most serious escalation of conflict since the 1958 Kinmen crisis.⁵ Furthermore, the rumors that North Korea is developing long-range missiles distracted Tokyo's attention from NATO to regional problems.⁶

9/11 changed the course of world history.⁷ The events of 9/11 began deeper cooperation between Japan and NATO. NATO and its member states realized that NATO could no longer rely on Cold War strategies, and they realized that threats were no longer coming from one center. NATO realized that in order to fight against these new threats, it needs reliable partners around the globe.

The aftermath of the events of the 9/11 attacks changed Japan's traditional views. Tokyo realized that it is no longer feasible to heavily rely on American deterrence. Although it is always

⁴ Masashi Nishihara, "Can Japan Be a Global Partner for NATO," in *NATO and Global Partners: Views From the Outside* (Washington DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006), 34–43.

⁵ Chen Qimao, "The Taiwan Strait Crisis: Its Crux and Solutions," *Asian Survey* 36, no. 11 (November 1996): 1055–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645635>.

⁶ "Chronology of North Korea's Missile Trade and Developments: 1996-1998," James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, August 17, 2008, <https://www.nonproliferation.org/chronology-of-north-koreas-missile-trade-and-developments-1996-1998/>.

⁷ The September 11 attacks (often referred to as 9/11) were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda against the United States on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001. The attacks resulted in 2,977 casualties, over 25,000 injuries, and substantial long-term health problems for many. 9/11 is the single deadliest terrorist attack in human history. It changed views and policies against terrorism and started the War on terrorism led by the US.

the center of Japanese defense policies, Washington's war on terrorism created a power gap in Asia.⁸ 9/11 and its aftermath gave the necessary motivation to Tokyo to adapt its outdated security prospects. For example, in 2001, Prime Minister Koizumi decided to send a naval flotilla to the Indian Ocean. In 2003, Tokyo decided to deploy ground forces in Iraq. The deployment of these troops was largely symbolic, as it was meant to demonstrate Japan's support to the US. During his praised visit to NATO headquarters, in 2006, Taro Aso stated, "Japan and NATO continue to deepen mutual understanding beyond policy coordination."⁹ By keeping the US as a main security partner and participating in US led operations, Tokyo shows its support to Western ideas via supporting NATO's operations. Thus, Japan's approach should not be surprising. There is no doubt that having the US as a major security partner is beneficial to Japan. However, through Japan's efforts with NATO it is able to further expand its number of allies and deepen its political ties with other Western countries.

2008 marked a new era of relations between Japan and NATO. The escalation of pirate activities around the Horn of Africa disturbed the navigational freedom in the Indian Ocean. In August 2009, NATO launched Operation Ocean Shield to restore peace and secure navigational freedom around the Horn of Africa. Japan contributed to NATO's operation by sending a P-3 Orion (a maritime patrol aircraft) and two destroyers (JDS Sazanami and JDS Umigiri) to the region to provide direct escort to Japanese flagged ships. Furthermore, Tokyo softened constraints on its involvement in military operations. Tokyo wanted to increase Japan's footprint in international affairs beyond its participation in humanitarian operations. In order to do this,

⁸ Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Re-Emergence as a "normal" Military Power* (New York: Routledge For The International Institute Of Strategic Studies, 2005), 41–66.

⁹ "MOFA: Speech by Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan at the NAC Meeting in Brussels, Belgium 'Japan and NATO in a New Security Environment,'" www.mofa.go.jp, May 4, 2006, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0605.html>.

Japan alleviated constitutional constraints regarding Japan's ability to participate in military operations outside of the Japanese archipelago. In 2013, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the former Secretary General of NATO, praised Japanese commitments and stated that Japan and NATO are natural partners.¹⁰ This was reiterated one year later by Shinzo Abe during a speech at the North Atlantic Council, Shinzo Abe said, "Japan is a 'natural partner' of NATO. This was what Secretary-General Rasmussen has stated. I agree wholeheartedly."¹¹

This was a clear sign that Tokyo will continue to be involved in NATO's future operations for two reasons. Firstly, Japan does not have sufficient means to eliminate all threats to its interests. Secondly, NATO helped Japan to be visible in global affairs. For instance, in 2014, Japan and NATO conducted their first joint-counterpiracy exercise in the Gulf of Aden.¹² 2016 was an interesting year for US allies. Donald J. Trump, who criticized American commitments during his campaign, became the 45th US President. Although European capitals exercised caution, Japan embraced the new president. There are several reasons that Japan's approach to the new administration was warmer than other allies. Firstly, Tokyo cannot afford to offend the US and strain its ties to Washington. After the crushing defeat in the Second World War, Prime Minister Yoshida faced critical issues. Firstly, how is it possible to erase Japan's aggressive image? Secondly, how can Japan secure its economic growth? As a result, Yoshida constrained military buildup and replaced it with the Japan-US alliance. During the Cold War, this policy helped Japan to restore its image and economy, but it also made Tokyo dependent on

¹⁰ "NATO and Japan – Natural Partners" - Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Japan National Press Club, Tokyo, Japan," NATO, April 15, 2013, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_99634.htm.

¹¹ H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, "Japan and NATO As 'Natural Partners'" (May 6, 2014), <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000037774.pdf>.

¹² "NATO and Japan Conduct First Ever Joint Counter-Piracy Drill," NATO, October 3, 2014, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_113373.htm?selectedLocale=en.

the US military. This was a pragmatic choice for Japanese policy-makers. Although the alliance is indispensable for Japan, the relations suffered heavily during the Koizumi government. In February 2017, Shinzo Abe decided that Japan needs to strengthen its ties with the US. Abe said, "there is no other choice than to cultivate a close relationship with Mr. Trump and display it to the world."¹³

Shinzo Abe was the first foreign leader to visit Donald Trump before his inauguration. Although it is not always wise to personalize relations, there is no doubt that personal ties play an essential role in Donald Trump's perceptions.¹⁴ Another reason is that the Abe government has the majority in the Diet.¹⁵ Abe does not face any ardent criticism about his close ties with Donald Trump within his own government.¹⁶ Despite Japan's warm welcome, the US-Japan alliance suffered from Trump's criticisms. Trump held that Japan should pay 100% of the cost of US troops stationed in Japan, or the US will leave the country. Even though many Japanese disliked Trump's approaches, Tokyo decided to increase its budget of HNS (Host Nation Support). The Trump administration appeared to be satisfied with Japan's burden-sharing within the alliance. James Mattis, the former Secretary of Defense, praised Japan saying that, "Japan has been a model of cost-sharing."¹⁷ Yet Japan still faces uncertainties. This, however, has not ensured a

¹³ Reiji Yoshida, "Deflecting Criticism of Trump Ties, Abe Says 'no Other Choice' but Close Japan-U.S. Relationship," *The Japan Times*, February 14, 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/>.

¹⁴ "Comment by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Following the Meeting with President-Elect Donald Trump (Speeches and Statements by the Prime Minister) | Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet," *Kantei.go.jp*, 2016, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201611/1220021_11019.html.

¹⁵ The National Diet is the supreme organ of the bicameral legislature of Japan. It consists of the House of Representatives, and the House of Councilors. Both houses of the Diet are directly elected under parallel voting systems.

¹⁶ Yoichi Funabashi, "Opinion | Japan, Where Populism Fails," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2017, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/opinion/japan-where-populism-fails.html>.

¹⁷ "Joint Press Briefing by Secretary Mattis and Minister Inada in Tokyo, Japan," U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, February 4, 2017,

stable relationship with the US. Tokyo cannot be sure that the Trump administration would stop criticizing its allies, nor could Tokyo know how committed the US will be in the event of a hot conflict arising. Japan continues to suffer from insufficient military capabilities, making it unable to pursue its own interests alone.

Key challenges to Japan

Japan faces several important issues. Firstly, Japan has a hyper-ageing society. Japan has been witnessing its population ageing at an unprecedented rate, with 27% of Japan's population over the age of 65 years old. It is estimated that by 2030, one in every three people in Japan will be over the age of 65. The increase in the proportion of the elderly in Japan will also increase the social security burden. Additionally, the hyper-aged community and shrunk labour force will likely hamper economic growth in Japan. Sooner or later, Tokyo will not only struggle to find additional resources to compensate for the burden caused by its ageing population, but Japan will also have a shortage of human resources to replace its retired military personnel. Secondly, Japan has self-imposed constitutional constraints. Since 1947, Japan's judges have presided over many civil and criminal cases involving constitutional challenges to Japan's security agreements with the US and the existence of SDF (Self-Defense Forces). For example, in 2004, Noboru Minowa, former minister of posts and telecommunication, filed a suit to stop SDF deployment to Iraq. Noboru Minowa claimed that the deployment of SDF to Iraq violated Article 9.¹⁸ Thirdly, Asia is passing through a torrid time. India and Pakistan almost went to war. Terrorists targeted

<https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/1071436/joint-press-briefing-by-secretary-mattis-and-minister-inada-in-tokyo-japan/>.

¹⁸ "Ex-Posts Minister Sues over SDF Dispatch to Iraq, Demands 10,000 Yen," The Japan Times, January 30, 2004, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2004/01/30/national/ex-posts-minister-sues-over-sdf-dispatch-to-iraq-demands-10000-yen/>.

churches in the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Hong Kong's autonomy is continually being trampled by China. The current pandemic, Covid-19, amplified things for many regions around the world, including Asia.

Throughout history, having well trained and equipped uniformed personnel has been a significant challenge to any country, and Japan is no exception. Yet Japan's hyper-aged society and its military past makes the Japanese situation unique. For example, in March 2019, 10 % of open-positions remained unfilled in the SDF. The 2019 National Defense Program Guidelines described this issue as an "imminent" challenge for the SDF.¹⁹ Japan's ageing society is a severe problem not only for the SDF, but also for the health care and social systems in Japan. It is estimated that Japan's population will shrink from 126 million to 88 million by 2065.²⁰ There is no doubt that this decrease will have a considerable impact on the working-age segment of society. To answer the possible staff shortage, the SDF and the MoD (Ministry of Defense) decided to increase the upper age limit for both entrance and retirement. For example, the SDF increased the upper age limit for enlisted soldiers from 26 to 32.²¹

Although the extension of the retirement age and increase in the upper age limit are important improvements, they depend on one crucial precondition; that the people are still going to be healthy. While evidence shows that humans are statistically living longer and remaining healthier for longer durations, this is still a gamble, as this is not always the case. Being army

¹⁹ "Section 1 Human Foundation and Organization That Supports the Defense Force," 2018, https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2018/DOJ2018_3-3-1_web.pdf.

²⁰ Tomoko Otake, "Japan's Population Projected to Plunge to 88 Million by 2065," The Japan Times, April 10, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/10/national/social-issues/japans-population-projected-plunge-88-million-2065/>.

²¹ See note 17.

personnel, particularly an officer, does not necessitate only physical endurance, but also mental capabilities.

The second type of challenge that Japan faces is constitutional constraints. Article 9 renounces war and the use or threat of force to solve international problems.²² As a result, the 1954 Self-Defense Forces Law built SDF only for the defense of Japanese territory.²³ Furthermore, successive governments used Article 9 to prevent Japan from exercising the right of collective defense.²⁴ Although the current Abe government addressed this challenge, attempts to ease off restrictions are not new.

Table I shows the efforts of previous governments,

Year	Name of Legislation	Content
1992	Law Concerning Cooperation for United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations and Other Operations	SDF can be deployed outside of Japan and participate in peace-keeping and humanitarian operations under the UN mandate. ²⁵
1999	Guidelines for the Japan-US Defense Cooperation	Expanded operational cooperation scope between JSDF and the US forces beyond Japan's territory. ²⁶

²² "THE CONSTITUTION OF JAPAN," Kantei.go.jp, 2019, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

²³ "Japan Self-Defense Force," Defending Japan, 2011, <https://defendingjapan.wordpress.com/tag/japan-self-defense-force/>.

²⁴ "Report of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security The Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security," 2014, https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/anzenhosyou2/dai7/houkoku_en.pdf.

²⁵ "Japanese Law Translation - [Law Text] - Act on Cooperation with United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations," www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp, June 19, 1992, <http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail/?id=3529&vm=04&re=02>.

²⁶ Ryu Yamazaki, "Review of the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation: A Japanese Perspective," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 9, no. 2 (December 1997): 27-44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10163279709464369>.

2001	Act on Cooperation for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations; Antiterrorism Special Measures Law	SDF personnel can use weapons to protect non-SDF personnel. ²⁷ This is the first time the SDF was allowed to support activity with foreign forces other than the US army. ²⁸
2003	Iraq Special Measures Law	The first time SDF was present on foreign soil under temporal administration by foreign forces to conduct humanitarian assistance. ²⁹
2004	National Defense Program Guidelines FY2005	This document emphasized the importance of multifunctional and effective defense forces for Japan's security. ³⁰
2009	The Act of Punishment and Countermeasures against piracy	Authorized Japanese naval vessels to be deployed around the Gulf of Aden. ³¹
2010	National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2011 and beyond	Japan should embrace a dynamic defense approach. ³²
2015	International Peace Support Act	Enabled JSDF to conduct support operations in the UN operations to address situations threatening world peace. ³³

Although Japan made substantial efforts to circumvent its constitutional constraints, there is still a lot to do. One of the main challenges that future governments will face is that the previous improvements used vague language that is open to interpretation. For instance, the Act

²⁷ “Act on Cooperation for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations,” accessed July 08, 2020, http://www.pko.go.jp/pko_j/data/law/pdf/law_e.pdf

²⁸ Mark Fenwick, “Japan’s Response to Terrorism Post-9/11,” in *Global Anti-Terrorism Law and Policy*, ed. Victor V. Ramraj (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 390–419.

²⁹ See note 20.

³⁰ “NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM GUIDELINES, FY 2005” (Ministry of Defense of Japan, December 10, 2004), https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/national_guidelines.pdf.

³¹ “Japan’s Actions against Piracy off the Coast of Somalia,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, February 15, 2016, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/piracy/ja_somalia_1210.html#:~:text=enacting%20%E2%80%9CAct%20of%20Punishment%20and.

³² “NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM GUIDELINES for FY 2011 and beyond Approved by the Security Council and the Cabinet” (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2010), https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/guidelinesFY2011.pdf.

³³ See note 20.

For Development of the Legislation for Peace and Security underlines that Japan can only use force when there are no other appropriate means available.³⁴ Within this context, there are two questions. First, what does the document mean by saying ‘other ways’? Are they the policies embedded in the Fukuda doctrine? The second question is, what are the limits of the minimum extent? There is no doubt that a future government can interpret this narrowly and diminish Japan's operational capacities.

The third challenge is China. The current situation in the Indo-Pacific and the East China Sea is sometimes described as Thucydides’ Trap to Japan and its allies.³⁵ For the last twenty years, Beijing has continued to modernize its army and seek expansionist policies regardless of what Japan does. For example, while Japan’s defense expenditure was 0.9% of its GDP in 2019, China spent 1.9% of its GDP on defense.³⁶ As a result of its larger military, China has been able to exert itself more forcefully in Asia than Japan has.

On the other hand, there is an apparent decline in American dominance in Asia. The rapid modernization and increase in China's military capacity put the US in a hard position. As the primary US ally in the region, this has greatly impacted Japan. There is little evidence that this situation will change anytime soon. Yet, Washington can dissuade Chinese expansion through the use of innovative policies and a more inclusive security network in Asia. Challenging China will be harder than challenging the Soviets during the Cold War. Firstly, the Cold War had

³⁴ “Japan’s Legislation for Peace and Security Government of Japan Seamless Responses for Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016), <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000143304.pdf>.

³⁵ The term was established by American political scientist Graham T. Allison. According to Allison, the term refers to an inevitable conflict that occurs when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power.

³⁶ “Military expenditure by country, in constant (2018) US\$ m., 1988-2019,” SIPRI, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932019%20in%20constant%20%282018%29%20USD.pdf>.

apparent ideological differences between the two sides. Secondly, the US and its allies were able to create NATO and contain Moscow's ambitions. Thirdly, both sides were aware of the likelihood of mutual destruction if a hot conflict were to arise. Fourthly, the Soviet's relatively weak presence in Asia made things easy for the US and its allies. Today, the US cannot be a leader in both the Atlantic and Pacific. As a result, American policy-makers are facing a dilemma: where should the US put its focus? There is no doubt that the US cannot make everyone happy, either Europe or Japan needs to step up to share a greater burden. Fifthly, the situation with the Soviets was a stalemate. There were only a few occasions where both sides made concessions, a primary example being the Cuban missile crisis. Yet, the Chinese case is an example of strategic bargaining. Neither Japan nor the US wants to contain China because China is still a valuable trade partner for the Western states. In June 2019, at the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, President Trump said that the US and China could potentially be strategic partners.³⁷

However, it would be equally naive to wait for Beijing to go by the book. As a result, it is not surprising that Japan changed its perception of China. For example, in 2015, Diet allowed conditional collective defense and enlarged the scope of the alliance between the SDF and US forces. According to SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) data, China's defense spending in 2019 was \$261 billion, while Tokyo spent \$47.6 billion.³⁸ There is no doubt that unchecked and unbalanced China will become the undisputed dominant power in Asia. Like other superpowers throughout history, sooner or later, China will gaze upon other regions.

³⁷ Jessie Yeung et al., "Trump: US and China 'Can Help Each Other,'" CNN, June 28, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/politics/live-news/g20-june-2019-intl-hnk/h_2a7b9595e9eac445fb0e9da9f698e076.

³⁸ See note 33.

Is a Japan-NATO partnership feasible?

As authoritarian regimes gear up, both NATO and Japan are looking at each other more than ever. Tsuneo Watanabe, a senior fellow at Sasakawa Peace Foundation, explained Japan's motivation, "NATO lends legitimacy to Japan's growing efforts to play a larger role in regional and global security."³⁹ Bilateral relations, however, have not yet reached the desired level. The question then becomes, do NATO and Japan need to address China together? In other words, is China a threat to both of them? Lee Kuan Yew,⁴⁰ one of the most renowned scholars of Chinese studies, boldly stated that China is aimed to displace the US. He said, "Of course. Why not? They have transformed a poor society through an economic miracle. The Chinese will want to share this century as co-equals with Americans."⁴¹ Of course, there is nothing wrong with China's ambitions. The world should welcome the change if we deny that Beijing is an authoritarian revisionist state. There are, however, two types of obstacles that stand in front of better Japan-NATO cooperation. First, their threat perceptions are different, and second, NATO's treaty was not designed to accommodate any non-European country.

May-Britt Stumbaum, an expert on EU-China relations, argues that, "Europe does not and will probably never share Washington's hard power perspective on Asia-Pacific. For Europeans, and particularly for Germany, the Asia-Pacific region and relationship with China is shaped by the tyranny of distance."⁴² How can the EU claim to be a global power, yet it ignores

³⁹ Tsuneo Watanabe, "A NATO-Asia Partnership Would Ease Japan's Regional Security Cooperation Dilemma | Research," The Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research, January 28, 2015, <https://www.tkfd.or.jp/en/research/detail.php?id=585>.

⁴⁰ Lee Kuan Yew was a Singaporean politician and lawyer who served as the first Prime Minister of Singapore from 1959 to 1990.

⁴¹ Graham Tillet Allison et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master's Insights on China, the United States, and the World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Mit Press, Cop, 2013), 2–6.

⁴² May-Britt U. Stumbaum, "Transatlantic Cooperation on China: More than an Ocean Between," AICGS, December 8, 2014, <https://www.aicgs.org/publication/transatlantic-cooperation-on-china-more-than-an-ocean-between>.

the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific? Olivier Bräuner, a researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, explains that EU-China relations will continue to be dominated by commercial concerns. The economic interests of member states prevent Brussels from taking a harsh tone towards Beijing's human rights abuses.⁴³ Although many European capitals have urged China to obey international rules, they prefer to solve disputes peacefully. Yet, China poses a threat far more dangerous than Europeans think. China not only represents an economic or military threat, but Beijing also opposes the liberal market model and advocates for an authoritarian regime.⁴⁴ This is widely accepted, but it is neglected by many European capitals. Although some have raised their concerns, Europeans commonly assumed that the EU can shape China's assertive policies by using its normative power.

There is no doubt that the EU and its members have the norm-setting ability. The EU members, however, ignore the fact that China will not remodel its regime according to European standards. There are several reasons for this lack of coherency in Europe. Firstly, the EU and its members are more occupied with Covid-19 reforms and the crisis created by it than on China. Secondly, not every member state shares the same opinion regarding China. For example, in 2017, Greece blocked the EU-US joint statement concerning China's human rights abuses.⁴⁵ Thirdly, transatlantic solidarity has been strained by the Trump administration. European countries will not follow Washington's policies as before, without mediation with the US.

⁴³ Oliver Bräuner, "Beyond the Arms Embargo: EU Transfers of Defense and Dual-Use Technologies to China," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 3 (December 2013): 457–82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1598240800008304>.

⁴⁴ Stefan A. Halper, *Beijing Consensus : How China's Authoritarian Model Will Dominate the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Basicbooks ; London, 2012), 79–112.

⁴⁵ Robin Emmott, "Greece Blocks EU Statement on China Human Rights at U.N." (Reuters, June 19, 2017), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-un-rights/greece-blocks-eu-statement-on-china-human-rights-at-u-n-idUSKB N1990FP>.

Fourthly, since 2014 Annexation of Crimea and a growing Russian military presence in Kaliningrad made Russia the first and foremost security threat to many European countries, such as Poland and the Baltic states. The sanctions against Russia and US-China trade disputes, however, push Moscow closer to Beijing. Although it is not a honeymoon, a closer friendship between these two nuclear powers is not desirable for the Western states in the long-term.

Some could ask where NATO stands in this situation. There is no doubt that NATO could play an important role. At the London Summit in 2019, Jens Stoltenberg stressed for a collective response to China. He underlined that China's footprint is growing in NATO's influence area, such as the Arctic, Africa, and Europe. Indeed, it is hard, if not impossible, for NATO to avoid China.⁴⁶ Yet some European countries such as France, Germany, and Italy have been reluctant to discuss China within the frame of NATO. The reason is that many European capitals still think China is not a military threat to Europe's security. Also, discussing China within the framework of NATO could offend Beijing and hinder economic relations between Europe and China. However, Article II of the North Atlantic Treaty can bring the NATO framework into service to address China's growing influence.

On the other hand, NATO has been continually plagued by challenges since the end of the Cold War. For example, since 2008, the Southern European countries have decreased their defense spending by 34%.⁴⁷ Inadequate spending by European NATO members weakens NATO's position in Europe and other parts of the globe. This would not cause a problem in a bipolar world, yet it produces a difficult puzzle to solve in the multipolar world after the Cold War. As a result, Europeans' consistently low defense expenditure creates a security vacuum that

⁴⁶ Ian Brzezinski, "NATO's Role in a Transatlantic Strategy on China," Atlantic Council, June 1, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/natos-role-in-a-transatlantic-strategy-on-china/>.

⁴⁷ See note 33.

thins out the resources that the US could have used to address China's challenge in the Pacific. Furthermore, in 2015 and 2017, Russia and China exercised joint naval drills in the Mediterranean and Baltic Sea. This was the first time that China's naval forces were in the backyard of NATO. Although the scale of joint exercises was small, the maritime partnership between Russia and China is of great concern to Western powers.⁴⁸

To conclude, the problem is not only incoherent policies but also the perception shared in Europe. European states continue to think that they can persuade China to respect liberal norms by using their economic leverage on Beijing. This is a typical example of trying to reason with a bully by giving him more money and expecting him to play the game by its rules. European states are creating the perfect conditions to be exploited by China. Thus, China is continuing to build artificial islands in the South China Sea and intimidating its neighbours, such as in the case of the Spratly Islands dispute.⁴⁹ China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei all have competing claims. Although the islands are largely uninhabited, they have reserves of natural resources, such as oil and natural gas. Although the Hague Court rejected China's claim in the region, Beijing rejected the ruling.⁵⁰ Despite all that is going on, European countries still refrain from taking a hard attitude towards China.

Under these circumstances, Japan does not count on European muscle to solve any direct military dispute in Asia. What does Tokyo want? All in all, Japan desires two things: strategic cooperation and a mutual and shared perception of potential threats. Europe, especially the UK

⁴⁸ Michael Paul, "Partnership on the High Seas: China and Russia's Joint Naval Manoeuvres," *SWP Comment*, no.26 (June 2019): 1-8.

⁴⁹ "Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea," Global Conflict Tracker, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>.

⁵⁰ Keith Johnson and Dan De Luce, "Hague Court Strikes Down Beijing's South China Sea Claims," *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy, July, 2016), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/12/hague-court-strikes-down-beijings-south-china-sea-claims/>

and France, are crucial since they are permanent members of the UN Security Council. Although Japan intensified its diplomatic efforts, it is not a novel tactic for Tokyo. Even before the 9/11 attacks, Japan followed active diplomacy, but it does not mean that Tokyo became more assertive. Yet the Abe administration indeed sees parallelism between NATO and Japan. According to him, both are threatened by authoritarian powers, and both share liberal ideals and norms. In 2014, during a joint press conference with Rasmussen, Shinzo Abe stated, “We will not tolerate any change of status-quo through intimidation or coercion of force.”⁵¹

Japan supports the Western system, but what makes it unique in Asia? Tokyo wants to increase its political power in the region by developing a close relationship with NATO, but this alone cannot be considered a reason in the full sense. Perhaps it is better to ask a different question: why should Japan be supported? Japan is the third-largest economy in the world, and its development model is widely appreciated between ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries. It is the first Asian country that reached the economic level of Western states. By the end of the 1980s, Japan escaped the middle-income trap, and its model is not only feasible, but more liberal.⁵² This is one of the apparent reasons that Japan is crucial for NATO and the order that it advocates. Another reason is that Japan is perceived positively by ASEAN nations. This continuous support helped Japan to increase its blueprint in its region. For example, according to a survey of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 93% of participants support the proactive Japanese regional and global policies. 87% think JSDF (Japan Self-Defense Forces) should be more active in upholding regional peace, stability, and prosperity.⁵³

⁵¹ See note 9.

⁵² Lee Poh Ping, “Changing ASEAN Perceptions of Japan,” in *Presence and Perception: The Underpinnings of ASEAN-Japan Relations*, ed. Charles E. Morrison (Tokyo: JCIE, 1986), 1–10.

⁵³ “Opinion Poll on Japan,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 18, 2020, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002784.html.

Additionally, Japan stepped up to temper China's mercantilist policies in Southeast Asia. For example, in 2015, Japan initiated the Partnership For Quality Infrastructure to help Southeast Asian countries to modernize their infrastructures. Shinzo Abe summarized this initiative by saying, "We should seek quality as well as quantity."⁵⁴

What can be done?

The first and least likely scenario for Japan's continued relationship with NATO is that Japan will become the 31st member of NATO. It is highly unlikely because Article X of the North Atlantic Treaty makes it explicitly clear on potential members' geographical location, "the parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty, and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty."⁵⁵ Thus, it would be hard to accept any Asian country as a full member. In addition to this, several member states that have strong bilateral relations with China will oppose it. There is also concern that by accepting Asian countries, it would spread NATO resources too thinly around the world.

The second possible scenario is integrating Japan in Enhanced Opportunity Partners (EOP). This is a more promising proposition than trying to amend Article X. It has the potential to circumvent endless debates about whether Japan can be a member state or not. The program sets forth regular consultations, information sharing, and greater cooperation. There is no doubt that this option will improve Japan-NATO relations. Yet it is still a risky plan. For example, Hungary stultified unilaterally the NATO-Ukraine talks regarding Ukraine's participation in

⁵⁴ "Full Text of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Speech," Nikkei Asian Review, May 21, 2015, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Full-text-of-Prime-Minister-Shinzo-Abe-s-speech>.

⁵⁵ "The North Atlantic Treaty," NATO, April 10, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

EOP.⁵⁶ It is easy to assume that NATO member states used their membership to advance their own interests instead of seeking policies for the greater good. As a result, there is no guarantee that Japan will not face the same fate.

The third scenario is what Japan can do to improve its ties with NATO. Article 9 of Japan's constitution is the biggest obstacle to Japan's policy-makers.⁵⁷ This article limits Japan's operational and political capacities and withholds Japan to implement a more comprehensive security doctrine. Even if Japan became a full member of NATO, Article 9 prohibits Tokyo from exercising the right of collective self-defense. In other words, the famous Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty will be practically useless for Japan.⁵⁸ In 2020, Shinzo Abe voiced that Article 9 should be changed. Although it was not well-timed, Abe did not turn away from accomplishing his goal before the end of his term in 2021. The recent opinion polls showed that the Japanese nation does not want any drastic changes to Article 9. The survey revealed that 75% of Japan's population thinks that the Diet should not rush the debate over constitutional changes.⁵⁹

In sum, the relationship between Japan and NATO will take time to reach the expected level. Although there is no doubt that Japan and NATO share the same liberal ideals and can benefit greatly from a closer relationship, both sides still have obstacles that they must overcome. Japan needs to find a way to circumvent its constitutional constraints, while NATO should face

⁵⁶ Péter Krekó and Patrik Szicherle, "Why Is Hungary Blocking Ukraine's Western Integration?," Atlantic Council, January 16, 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-is-hungary-blocking-ukraine-s-western-integration/>.

⁵⁷ Japan's Constitution, Article 9: "*Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.*"

⁵⁸ See note 20.

⁵⁹ "Asahi Survey: 72% Say No Rush for Diet to Revise Constitution," The Asahi Shimbun, May 3, 2020, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13347656>.

the disunity within the Alliance. Before resolving these issues, it is almost impossible for them to have a better relationship. Still, there is no need to be pessimistic. Japan and NATO have the will and ability to overcome these problems.

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