Emil Kirchner and Han Dorussen (eds.): EU-Japan Security Cooperation: Trends and Prospects


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“EU-Japan Security Cooperation—Trend and Prospects” is a useful anthology to gain an overview of the current status of EU-Japan security cooperation. The anthology is very timely because the EU and Japan signed the SPA (Strategic Partnership Agreement) in July 2018 and both parties are planning how to implement actual security policies.

Many readers may not be familiar with EU-Japan SPA compared to the EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement), which is de facto a Free Trade Agreement directly related to economic and commercial interests. The SPA states that

“the agreement will serve as a legal basis for promoting cooperation on matters of mutual interest in a wide range of areas, between Japan and the European Union as well as its Member States which share values and principles of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for strengthening the long-lasting strategic partnership between them.”

The SPA lists more than 40 agenda headings of bilateral cooperation such as crisis management, counterterrorism or cyber issues. In this context, the anthology provides a concise analysis of ten security cooperation areas, which covers almost all of the agenda agreed in the SPA. It presents the rationale for the necessity of an EU-Japan security cooperation, despite geopolitical differences. Co-editor and author, Emil Kirshner explains the incentives of the two parties in a persuasive way. First, the international community has, over time, pressed both the EU and Japan to match economic strength with international security responsibility. Secondly, both have perceived threats arising within the neighborhood such as Russia, North Korea and China and have strengthened their internal and external security ability. Lastly, in such a difficult period, both the EU and Japan share uncertainty over US President Trump’s defense commitments on alliances, on which both parties have been heavily reliant.

A combination of European and Japanese authors on each chapter has been successful in providing accurate and updated analysis on both EU and Japan security policy, and their convergence and divergence. Yet, some readers may wish more consistency in the essays. Practically, however, it would not be easy to find
appropriate authors, who are familiar with both EU and Japanese policies across the multi-dimension of security area.

Following from the introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 focuses on regional security cooperation. Japan focuses on China whereas the EU does on Russia. The EU’s core strategy is regional integration whereas it does not play a major role in Japan. The authors conclude that there is a “continuing divergence” between the EU and Japan, even though the “rise of traditional military and great power security conception may suggest a certain degree of convergence.” The authors also see Japan’s continued nationalism rather than regionalism in security, partly due to its heavy reliance on the US security umbrella with their bilateral security treaty, in contrast to the EU’s regionalism in security thinking. However, they suggest the EU and Japan ought to continue to engage in both European and Asian security frameworks such as ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) and ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum). They predict that Japan may eventually need a regional security mechanism in order to deal with China’s assertive military growth, or North Korea’s nuclear weapon development. EU-Japan cooperation can lay the foundations for future regional integration if the chance arises. This aspect could inspire Japanese security policy thinkers, who tend to be preoccupied only with bilateral alliance management with the US.

Chapter 3 focuses on EU-Japan military relations. Authors do not see an immediate and robust military cooperation between the two parties, due to a limitation of politics and capability. Japan’s participation in military missions is still constrained by the Japanese Constitution. However, they state that it would be wrong to dismiss the potential for further military cooperation with like-minded democracies to embrace a regional security role. In reality, Japan’s evolving international security policy has gradually made it possible to participate in more international security missions with the EU, such as anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden since 2009. Japan’s MSDF (Maritime Self-Defense Forces) provided two escort vessels and P-3C maritime patrol aircraft to the Combined Maritime Force (CMF). In addition, Japan provided a grant aid for Mali’s national police academy, the provision of information technology, and other equipment.

Chapter 4 focuses on the non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and their delivery vehicles and technology. Compared to the previous chapters, EU-Japan cooperation has more potential to implement substantial practice including nuclear security, container security and export control. There is a growing convergence between the EU and Japan in overall terms on proliferation. The EU has been working on non-proliferation of WMD with a non-proliferation regime, in the form of assistance programs for controlling nuclear technology in the former Soviet Union countries. Japan has been in a position to maintain and strengthen the non-proliferation regime threatened by North Korean nuclear development, although their reliance on the US nuclear umbrella may be seen as creating a weak position to promote nuclear disarmament. However, the authors see an existing threat perception gap between the EU and Japan on regional prioritization: the EU focuses on Iran, while Japan focuses on North Korea. In spite of this gap, Japan supports the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreed with Iran, and the EU has joined UN sanctions against North Korea. As far as these two major issues are concerned, the two parties share more convergence than with their critical security partner, the United States.
Chapter 5 focuses on terrorism and organised crime. Threat perception is very different between the two parties. The EU is intensifying cooperation on information exchanges and border security in response to the threat from Islamic State (IS) and the refugee crisis. Japan does not share this urgent threat perception with the EU. However, Japan has supported US-led anti-terror military operations with logistic support. Japan, alongside ASEAN, has engaged in financial and diplomatic support to Afghanistan as a response to the return of extremists to the country following weakening IS activity in the Middle East. The EU and Japan have maintained a lengthy cooperation on crime and terrorism, since the 1970s. Japan was considered as one of the first possible international partners of the newly founded Europol, although to date no agreement has been reached. The authors expect that Japan’s further steps for cooperation with the EU, which has data and experience of terrorists and crimes, will be when Japan faces security challenges in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Chapter 6 focuses on climate change and energy security. Both the EU and Japan recognise the security threat arising from climate change and energy dependence, although the EU’s sense of urgency is not as widely adopted in Japan. Recently, Japan has been reluctant to set ambitious domestic GHG (greenhouse gas) emission reduction targets, whereas the EU has been a driving force in international climate change negotiations. Still, the authors conclude that similar perceptions would build a good basis for cooperation unlike with the US. The EU-Japan EPA supports cooperation to achieve the purpose of the Paris Agreement, and the SPA includes provisions on climate cooperation and security policy.

Chapter 7 focuses on human security. Human security was first mentioned in the United Nations 1994 Development Programme Report, and was developed in the UN framework, focusing on individual human rights, in particular freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to take action on one’s own behalf. The authors point out that human security constitutes diplomacy, defense and development issues and instruments. They see an undeniable value in EU-Japan cooperation in human security and both share an advantage: third countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan or Myanmar seem to them to be less threatening than is the case with the US. In practice, the EU and Japan have collaborated on the human security concept as a reciprocal cooperation: with Japan’s contribution to post-conflict development in Balkans and the EU’s contribution to exchanging weapons for development project in Cambodia. This area of cooperation shows much higher levels of success, due to lower political and legal constraints, in comparison with military cooperation as discussed in Chapter 3. A more inward-looking attitude from the US would provide an opportunity for both parties: cooperation in this area would definitely be mutually beneficial.

Chapter 8 focuses on civil protection. This concept includes many examples of protecting civilians from natural disaster, terrorism or military conflict. The authors point out that there are clear differences in the specific threat perception and policy responses from the EU and Japan. Japan tends to be concerned with natural disasters and potential North Korean missile launches, whereas the EU identifies political instability in the Middle East and North Africa as a threat. In addition, the EU has developed civil protection as a transnational policy area, with an all-hazards approach rather than threat-specific across EU. In contrast,
“Japan's legislative and operational framework are fragmented with not only separate laws for different types of natural disasters, but also a clear distinction between external man-made threat (civil protection) and internal man-made and natural threat (civil management and regulation).”

In spite of these differences, both the EU and Japan share similar incentives for providing assistance to enhance their “soft power” given historical constraints on applying “hard power”. Ultimately, EU-Japan SPA agreed on HA/DR (humanitarian assistance/disaster relief) coordination for assistance at the bilateral, regional and international levels.

Chapter 9 focuses on cyber-security cooperation. This is the most urgent area where cooperation is required between the EU and Japan: both share a clear threat perception in the emergence of rapid cyber-threats in the world. The issue is relatively free from the “tyranny of distance” between Europe and Japan. Japan has already developed bilateral cyber-cooperation with EU member states such as the UK, France and Estonia. The EU-Japan Cyber Dialogue has been a coordination mechanism between two parties since 2014. However, this dialogue is still in a relatively formative stage, compared to the more mature cyber dialogue with US. The authors conclude that EU-Japan cyber security cooperation is in an upward trajectory if the focus is on process and normative convergence rather than outcome. How the dialogue would evolve in the strategic level will depend on resources and institutional capacity. They propose increasing EU CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team)-Japan CERT cooperation at the technical level.

Chapter 10 focuses on economic security. Economic relations between the EU and Japan have never been as strong as they are now. Economic security policies are maintaining economic growth by safeguarding citizens’ property and well-being, macroeconomic stability, production capacity, competitiveness, market outlets and access to resources. Both the EU and Japan share a common threat perception on the negative consequences of Brexit, political tensions and the US withdrawal from the growing East Asian market. Their ground-breaking cooperation is the EU-Japan EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement), which was signed in 2018. They are expected to assure a free trade regime, against long-standing protectionist tendencies in the US including the current Trump administration. Beyond trade, the EPA is expected to maintain broad economic security such as the global financial system and the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change. Another challenge for the EU and Japan is how to address China, which is increasing its influence over the world economy with its controversial assertive, and occasionally aggressive military posture. The authors foresee that the EU and Japan will face tougher challenges in an increasingly volatile and challenging global environment, although they have demonstrated their strong cooperation in response to the threat to their economic security.

Chapter 11 is different from the others. It focuses on the EU-Japan security dialogue on migration. There is little common ground in bilateral cooperation, although Japan and the EU cooperate in multilateral fora. Since Japan is not a source country of migration to Europe, there is no cooperation scheme. The authors describe the highly contrasted situation between the EU and Japan on the issue; however, they wish that EU-Japan’s shared concerns over refugee problems in their development
aid policies could provide an innovative path for cooperation on migration in the future.

Overall, this edited book is useful not only for practitioners of EU-Japan policy cooperation, but also for strategic thinkers. It will be of interest for all those who are wondering how to maintain the current international liberal order, being eroded by current trends such as rise of China, the resurgence of militant Russia and an inward-looking United States. Here, EU-Japan security cooperation is definitely a missing link, to be rediscovered in a time of crisis.