



**JAPAN-EU SECURITY AND DEFENSE
PARTNERSHIP: A STRATEGIC PIVOT
IN GLOBAL SECURITY**

BY ERIK LENHART AND MICHAEL
TKACIK

Erik Lenhart (erik.lenhart1@gmail.com) holds an MA in political science from Charles University and is a former Deputy Chief of the Mission of the Slovak Republic in Tokyo.

Michael Tkacik (mtkacik@sfasu.edu) holds a PhD from the University of Maryland and a JD from Duke University. He has published articles in a variety of journals. Tkacik's current research interests include the implications of China's rise, China's behavior in the South China Sea, and nuclear weapons policy across Asia. He is a professor of government and director of the School of Honors at Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas.

The unveiling of the [Japan-EU Security and Defense Partnership](#) on Nov. 1 marks a significant shift in the global security landscape. This historic agreement, forged between two of the world's most advanced economic regions, signals deepening strategic ties that will reshape the dynamics of international cooperation in the face of emerging threats.

The joint press release by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan outlined the core elements of this partnership, emphasizing a shared commitment to peace, security, and the rule of law. The partnership is not a symbolic gesture but a robust framework aimed at addressing contemporary security challenges through collective action and mutual support.

The EU and Japan reaffirmed the need to enhance their engagement in ensuring economic resilience and economic security globally while maintaining and

improving the international rules-based system and preserving an open economy.

Multidimensional challenges

Both the EU and Japan face a deteriorating security environment in Europe and the Indo-Pacific caused by the ongoing Russian aggression in the Ukraine and North Korean advances in its unlawful nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. Moreover, China continues to escalate its destabilizing activities across a spectrum of issues, including gray zone operations in the East and South China Seas, as well as challenges to global economic security. Japan experienced this multidimensional challenge during the Senkaku crises of 2010, when China drastically curbed its rare earth materials supply as a form of economic coercion; similarly, the EU faces difficulties with China-made electric vehicle (EV) dumping. On Oct. 4, EU member states decided to impose countervailing duties on EVs made in China. In swift retaliation, China imposed its own tariffs on European goods, targeting dairy products, cognac, pork, and large-engine gasoline-powered vehicles.

The instability in the Middle East, coupled with the escalating tension between Iran and Israel, presents a significant headache for the EU and Japan. Japan, which relies on the Middle East for 90% of its oil and gas supplies, faces potential disruptions that could severely impact its economy. Regional instability and the activities of groups such as the Houthis in Yemen threaten critical sea lines of communication, particularly through the Suez Canal and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. These vulnerabilities underscore the importance of secure maritime routes for Japan's energy security.

Connectivity issues between Europe and the Indo-Pacific region pose another challenge, as efforts to enhance digital and physical infrastructure are crucial for maintaining trade and security.

In the face of these challenges, the EU and Japan will further develop their cooperation on security and defense, including exploring opportunities for coordination of capacity building and support to other partners and using their programs, such as the EU-

funded Critical Maritime Routes in the Indo-Pacific and “Enhancing Security Cooperation In and With Asia” projects.

Strategic objectives and areas of cooperation

At its heart, the partnership focuses on several key areas:

- **Cybersecurity:** In an era where cyber threats can paralyze nations, the collaboration on enhancing cybersecurity measures is both timely and crucial. Japan and the EU are set to pool their expertise to safeguard critical infrastructure and digital economies.
- **Maritime security:** With a significant portion of global trade traversing through critical waterways in Asia, ensuring the security of these maritime routes is paramount. The partnership aims to enhance maritime situational awareness and coordinate responses to potential threats.
- **Counterterrorism:** The ever-evolving landscape of terrorism requires innovative and unified approaches. By sharing intelligence and best practices, Japan and the EU can bolster their counterterrorism capabilities and mitigate risks more effectively.
- **Space security:** As outer space becomes an increasingly contested domain, the collaboration on space security will ensure that both regions can protect their assets and interests against potential adversaries.

A new era of bilateral relations

This partnership also represents a broader strategic pivot for Japan and the EU. For Japan, it is a step towards a more proactive stance in global security affairs, reflecting its evolving security policy in response to regional challenges. For the EU, it signifies a strengthening of its strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific region, underscoring its commitment to maintaining stability and upholding international norms. This commitment is even more important considering the upcoming second Trump presidency. Trump's transactional approach and mercurial

personality could add more volatility to the Indo-Pacific region.

The release of the joint document further elaborates the practical steps both regions will undertake to implement this partnership. From joint exercises and training programs to enhanced diplomatic engagements, the document lays out a comprehensive roadmap for deepening bilateral ties.

Borrell's legacy in the Indo-Pacific and challenges for the new EU commission

The unveiling of the Japan-EU Security and Defense Partnership cements Josep Borrell's legacy as the outgoing EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy. Borrell has been instrumental in shaping this partnership. His recent visit to Japan and South Korea underscores his commitment to strengthening the EU's ties with key partners in the Indo-Pacific region. During his visit, Borrell co-chaired strategic dialogues with his counterparts, emphasizing the importance of security and defense cooperation.

In Japan, Borrell's discussions focused on aligning geopolitical strategies and advancing shared values. He addressed the ongoing severe security environment, highlighting the need for collaboration in areas such as cybersecurity, space security, and maritime security. Notably, he emphasized the importance of responding to hybrid threats, which further solidified the partnership's relevance in today's world.

Japanese Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi expressed deep condolences to the victims of the recent floods in Spain, Borrell's home country, and extended sympathy to those affected. Iwaya also expressed delight as Japan became the first Indo-Pacific country to announce a security and defense partnership with the EU. Both leaders concurred on strengthening concrete cooperation and dialogues in the security field, with the Japan-EU security and defense partnership and the Japan-EU SPA at their foundation.

In South Korea, Borrell addressed common security challenges, particularly in response to North Korea's

military assistance to Russia. His visit to the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas highlighted the need for continued investment in peace and stability.

As Borrell's tenure comes to an end, this partnership stands as a testament to his legacy of fostering international cooperation and addressing global security challenges. His efforts have paved the way for a more secure and collaborative future, demonstrating the EU's commitment to multilateralism and collective security.

As the new EU Commission under Ursula von der Leyen's second mandate takes shape, it faces a myriad of challenges that will be pivotal in the upcoming EU-Japan summit. Moreover, the potential instability of Prime Minister Ishiba's minority government in Japan (since WWII, there have been only two short-lived minority cabinets in Japanese politics: Hosokawa's and Hata's, from Aug. 9, 1993, until June 30, 1994) could hamstring the scope and ambition of its outcomes. This government needs to seek consent from part of the opposition and independents on a case-by-case basis in the parliament for its policies. Key issues include enhancing digital sovereignty, ensuring economic resilience, and addressing climate change. The Commission's ability to navigate these challenges will be crucial in maintaining and strengthening the EU-Japan partnership.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.