

Japan-Europe Security Cooperation

The role of Europe in the field of security cooperation for Japan since the 2000s

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the evolution of the Japan-EU and Japan-NATO bilateral relationships over the last two decades from the Japanese point of view. I used the International Relations theories of Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism to explain why and how these actors engage in cooperation. Thus, I tackled various topics such as trade, security, defence, technology, norm-making, and ideology.

Therefore, I analysed in a thematic and in a comparative way official Japanese documents regarding bilateral relations with the EU and NATO. A qualitative analysis of various documents over 20 years was conducted to follow the evolution of the relationship. The data was coded based on a codebook designed in an inductive/deductive fashion and interpreted with the method of Thematic Analysis.

This thesis concludes that bilateral cooperation has greatly expanded. Japan-EU/NATO relations are more than ever based on common interest, shared values, and mutual trust. I argue that the defence of an international rules-based liberal order in front of growing protectionism and undemocratic practices is the common ground on which their cooperation take place. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement when taking in consideration how much closer Japan and the US are despite occasional tensions.

Keywords

Japan, EU, NATO, IR, Thematic Analysis, Cooperation, Shared Values, FOIP, Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism

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Abbreviations

ASEAN	→ Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CAQDAS	→ Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CSDP	→ Common Security and Defence Policy
DDR	→ Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Ex-combatants
DFFT	→ Data Free Flow Trust
EPA	→ Economic Partnership Agreement (between the EU and Japan)
FOIP	→ Free and Open Indo-Pacific
JSDF	→ Japanese Self-Defence Forces
ICBM	→ Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IPCP	→ Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (between Japan and NATO)
IR	→ International Relations
ISAF	→ International Security Assistance Force
ITPP	→ Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (between Japan and NATO)
LDP	→ Liberal Democrat Party (of Japan)
MoD	→ Ministry of Defence (of Japan)
MOFA	→ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of Japan)
NATO	→ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NK	→ North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)
PKO	→ Peacekeeping Operations
Quad	→ Quadrilateral Dialogue
SPA	→ Strategic Partnership Agreement (between the EU and Japan)
UK	→ United Kingdom
UN	→ United Nations
US	→ United States
WWII	→ World War II

1. Introduction

a. Issue and purpose

In 1947, Japan adopted a new constitution in which pacificism became a part of the Japanese identity. After the end of World War II (WWII), the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) were created to exercise the right of self-defence and the United States (US) was in charge of the defence of Japan in times of aggression by the 1951 Mutual Security Treaty. Although Japan is to this day, constitutionally not allowed to have an army, the JSDF have slowly but steadily gained autonomy and funding so that today many consider it as much as a regular army.

In fact, in a world of competing values and constant competition, not having an army poses risks to sovereignty. Japan's ruling party, the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) knows it well and has slowly shifted Japan from a pacific nation to a country able to defend its interests not only regionally but also globally within the framework of multilateral coalitions. Furthermore, following the principle of collective self-defence, Japan today reaffirms its legitimacy to defend not only its territory but its allies' as well. This has led some to argue that Japan effectively harbours a full-fledged army. As a matter of fact, the military's liberties have kept expanding since the end of WWII. This tendency is nonetheless mostly attributed to the American influence. The US has considered Japan as a reliable ally and pushed for Japanese remilitarisation in the midst of Cold War calculations and pursued later on in the scope of international coalitions.

In truth, the American factor is major to understanding Japanese defence policies of the last decades. Japanese defence is since WWII framed around the US-Japan security partnership because the US is by legal definition Japan's greatest ally. However, during periods of weakened American support, such as the Trump administration from 2017 to 2021, Japan recognizes the need to diversify its security partnerships to ensure its own survival. As a result, Japan has sought alliances with like-minded regional countries such as Australia, India, some Southeast Asian nations, and South Korea – particularly since Yoon Suk-Yeol assumed power in 2022 and resumed dialogue with Tokyo. As a consequence of diversification, Japan has led numerous defence discussions with a multiplicity of actors. On the one hand it seems logical that Japan engages in multilateral frameworks operating in Japan's vicinity: the Quad, ASEAN, the Malabar drills, or the Camp David drills are examples. On the other hand, Japan extended its partnerships way farther than the Indo-Pacific region. In this case, two partnerships have

caught my curiosity. The security partnerships with countries of the European continent which are geographically remote and at first glance not relevant to the Japanese security environment: the EU and NATO.

b. Research Question

Therefore, the questions that I asked myself first are: what is the nature of the Europe-Japan defence cooperation? Why would Japan reach out to countries located on the other side of the world for security cooperation?

Here, I understand 'Europe' as a geographical area far from Japan and not part of the Indo-Pacific region. It can include countries, alliances, and institutions such as the UK, NATO, the EU, France, and Switzerland for instance. This definition excludes countries geographically closer to Japan. With this, I aim to figure out why Japan, a self-proclaimed pacifist nation with its defence guaranteed by the US, is enhancing its security ties with distant actors. Thus, my research questions can be framed that way:

In which ways is the European continent relevant to Japanese defence? How has the role of European supranational organisations as strategic partners evolved for Japan since the 2000s?

There are two questions. I am going to answer the first question at the end of the following section, the literature review. I then tackle the second question later on in my analytical part to find out how the European multilateral organisations have become more important partners for Japan, in which ways and to which extent.

c. Academic contribution

Academics concerned with Japanese defence are mostly focusing on the US-Japan partnership because the US is *de facto* Japan's greatest ally and also because it influences very much Japanese behaviour on the international stage. That is why I chose to follow a different path where I am looking at more minor partnerships at the age of a declining US hegemon.

Moreover, I ground this thesis in International Relations which is a field that is in constant evolution. Therefore, considering new information and new developments can bring a fresh eye to the topic regardless of how much it has been covered in the past. This is why, I consider

in this thesis the recent history of Japanese security from the early 2000s up to early 2024 with the newest security threats like the war in Ukraine for instance.

d. Time frame

Regarding the time frame, my thesis is concerned mostly with the post-Cold War period when the collapse of the Soviet Union brought a new unipolar world order which slowly broke down into a complex multipolar order. Around this time, the European Union was created with the Maastricht treaty signed in 1992 and has become a major actor of the European region. Additionally, I focus mainly on the post-2001 period because it was a turning point for Japan, NATO, and the EU. Concerning Japan because of the 2001 terrorist attack in the US which led to the adoption of the counter-terrorism bill and later on the first deployment of Japanese troops abroad in Iraq in 2003. For NATO, because of the US initiated the war on terrorism and used NATO to conduct operations in concert with European powers. And for Japan-EU relations because they drafted the Japan-EU Joint Action Plan which encompassed more than 100 topics related to security cooperation (MOFA, 2001).

2. Background information and literature review

The following section brings background information regarding the Japanese approach to security and maps out the relevant literature that tackled the issue. Hence, the objective of this section is threefold:

In a first part, I aim to summarise how the security policies have evolved through the last decades in Japan. For this, I look at the shifting attitude of the Japanese government regarding its interpretation of Article 9 of the constitution. I pay special attention to the Koizumi and Abe period which saw the most proactive behaviour from the government to bring change. In turn, this asks to address the attitude of Japan towards the UN, multilateralism, and Peacekeeping Operations (PKO).

Secondly, I shed light on the ways Japan has traditionally perceived the US as a major ally and how Japan especially under Abe to lead an initiative for democratic cooperation with the FOIP. And also, how Japan is supporting American initiatives with the Quadrilateral dialogue encompassing India and Australia.

Finally, I map out the literature that has tackled the Europe-Japan partnerships highlighting the main arguments for strategic cooperation with such actors and to which extent these are relevant for Japan. I do not tackle bilateral relations between Japan and other European countries and focus exclusively on alliances and multilateralism because I assume that mechanisms are different regarding bilateral discussions between States.

a. Article 9: (re-)interpretation

As referred to earlier, Japan does not possess a regular army and is forbidden to do so by its constitution because it “forever renounce[s] war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.” (Constitution of Japan, Chap. II, Art. 9). The article was imposed on Japan by the US as the winner of World War II (WWII). In fact, the US largely participated in the drafting of the new Japanese constitution that entered into force in 1947.

Two elements interest us most in the post-1947 Japanese defence: the creation of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) in 1954 as US troops were deployed in Korea in 1950 to contain communist expansion and left Japan. Also, Japan showed docile cooperation since the end of WWII which established mutual trust. The second is that, beforehand, in 1951 the ‘Security Treaty between the United States and Japan’ ended American occupation and positioned the US in charge of the defence of Japan and therefore became an inescapable variable of Japanese security (Hughes 2020).

As the Cold War opposition got stronger over the years, the newly forged US-Japan asymmetrical relation of dominant-dominated led the US to enhance Japanese remilitarisation that would alleviate the pressure on the US in the region. In this direction, the conservative LDP which had an almost full monopoly over Japanese politics for decades since 1955 steadily kept increasing the JSDF’s missions and budget. There, one common reading is that LDP’s most right-wing prime ministers were the ones breaking taboos. Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe had strong ideals and are considered to be the architects of Japanese remilitarisation of the last decades (Ma, 2023).

i. *The Koizumi era: opening the door to remilitarisation*

Junichiro Koizumi was the first one who gave momentum to Japanese remilitarisation during his Cabinet (2001-2006). One reason explaining that his Cabinet was bolder is that the 2001 September 11th terrorist attack in New York had repercussions on threat perception and insecurity in Japan as well. This way, the same year, Koizumi passed a controversial anti-terrorism bill despite public criticism. It was the opportunity for Japan to make up for the criticism it received after the non-deployment of troops in the 1990s Gulf War and to show Japanese support to its greatest ally: the US (Midford, 2003:331).

After the Koizumi Cabinet, the remilitarisation process is said to have remained stagnant until Abe. Nonetheless, Hughes (2009) argues that the path to ‘normalisation’ of the army in Japan as a regular military force has steadily progressed under the following Cabinets as well. Hence, there has always been a continuity in the proactive Japanese position to enhance national security capabilities. The Koizumi period was nonetheless more ‘spectacular’. Also, the process of modernisation has kept going without consideration for budget constraints or political machinations according to Hughes and Liff (2009; 2015). In fact, there were never real barriers preventing the LDP from furthering military spending as long as it was for the JSDF which is not a regular army.

But this does not justify by itself why the LDP was pushing for remilitarisation although it was not a popular policy to carry out. One argument here is the role played by the US (Liff, 2015). Indeed, the Japanese government’s eagerness to rearm is also imputable to Washington who pushes to enhance their military alliance. Henceforth, Liff tells us that exogenous factors, especially the position of the US are crucial to analyse Japanese policies in the Koizumi period. We will tackle this aspect later in this part.

When Koizumi deployed the Japanese troops in Iraq in 2004, it was seen as the turning point in breaking Japanese anti-war doctrine. Nevertheless, the public opinion mostly supported US action in Iraq. In accordance with polls at that time, three-fourths of the opinion supported Koizumi because they thought that Japan did not have another choice but to help the US against terrorism (Izumikawa, 2010:152). There was in Japan a strong sentiment of faith towards US actions, thus the war on terror was mainly accepted and supported by a big part of the population although it was far from being unanimous. In sum, the Koizumi period affected Japan by changing its international image as a country which shifted from internal to external actions. Although in reality, the remilitarisation process was steady according to both Liff and Hughes.

ii. Abe, a new step towards normalisation

Turning a few years later, defence reforms under Shinzo Abe were even more transformative in comparison to previous Cabinets. In fact, Abe's Cabinet was openly pushing for constitutional change (Maslow, 2015:762). But it was done following the customary trend of self-restriction combined with slow and steady change. Indeed, Abe's efforts "build on and accelerate this now decades-long trend" (Liff, 2015:81) of incremental changes. Likewise, Hughes qualifies the remilitarisation process as a "dynamic process over time" (Hughes, 2020:682). It is a gradual movement resulting in multiple reinterpretations of Article 9 of the Constitution to bypass legal constraints one by one. The successive governments justified a narrative of self-defence through the discourses of peace promotion and mitigation of regional threat emergence (Pyle, 2018:80). Hence, one main argument of the LDP is to insist on the necessity for Japan to contribute to global peace (Gilson, 2007). The consistency of the process is also assured thanks to the LDP's grasp on the political sphere over time allowing coherent long-term policies (Hughes, 2020).

Abe expanded the JSDF's freedom of action ensuing the entry into force of the 'Legislations for Peace and Security' bill in 2015. The bill had 3 major measures: Firstly, to allow the JSDF to use weapons to a certain extent when undergoing rescuing missions. Secondly, extending self-defence rights to threats towards any of Japan's allies. That is to say, collective self-defence. Finally, the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) framework was expanded so that Japan could participate in missions other than relief operations and election observation (Ma, 2023:107). Nonetheless, back then, opposing voices to remilitarisation argued that the law was a "threat to regional peace" and a "war legislation" (Liff, 2015:89). The public opinion's resistance got stronger in the face of such major changes in interpretation.

In sum, the 'Peace and Security Preservation Bills' were a way for Abe to shift from an anti-war posture to what he called proactive pacifism. The bills entail that the government has the discretion to decide if a foreign power is a threat to Japan and if troops should be preemptively deployed abroad. In a discussion with Friday, Okuda and Suzuki explain that with the reinterpretation of Article 9, Japan is shifting to a relativist rather than an absolutist anti-war stance. In other words, from then on, there are good and bad wars in relation to morals (2018:26). Hence, Japanese pacificism does not renounce every war but only 'bad' ones. Additionally, the US and Japan had negotiated a defence cooperation agreement encompassing

collective self-defence in 2015 before the bill even passed. This shows again how that the US is a major factor and exercise pressure on Japan to advance their own agenda regardless of popular opinion. Okuda and Suzuki (*ibid*) insist on the unconstitutional aspects of the 2015 law and are critical of the way the governments dismissed critics at that time. They claim that because Abe could not modify the constitution, he decided to ignore it.

iii. The UN and the promotion of PKOs

Japan joined the UN in 1956 with the belief that the institution was an efficient way to pursue pacifist policies and contribute to global peace. In the early years of UN-led operations, the Japanese population and mostly left-wingers were against any type of deployment of troops abroad. The more conservatives had other priorities like economic development on their agenda. It resulted in decades of non-participation to UN mandates although Japan financially supported UN Peacekeeping Operations, but any mandate requiring Japan to deploy forces was directly dismissed (William, 1999:8-14). Still, a few missions of mediation or election observations were carried out in the 1980s.

The pivotal moments occurred during the Persian Gulf crisis in the 1990s as Japan failed to send troops and was heavily criticised by the US and European countries. Japan was accused of ‘chequebook diplomacy’ because it refuses to send troops when most UN countries contributed on the field (William, 1999:19; Gilson, 2007). As a result of this public shaming and also because it had a long-standing wish to take a more active part in multilateral cooperation, in 1992 the LDP passed the ‘Law Concerning Cooperation for United Nations Peace-keeping Operations and Other Operations’. The latter allowed the overseas deployment of Japanese troops for a larger number of missions like providing logistical support, transportation, medical assistance, and humanitarian aid as long as it did not encompass the use of force.

Another turning point took place when under the Koizumi Cabinet Japanese troops were deployed in 2004 in Iraq outside of the UN framework, under a US-led coalition. This action was strongly criticized and judged unconstitutional (Gilson, 2007:32). Due to the public opinion’s divide over the deployment of troops and the increasing danger of the situation, Japan ended up withdrawing its forces in 2006, the same year Koizumi Cabinet ended.

Finally, in the 2015 bills passed by the Abe Cabinet, Japan was no longer restrained from engaging in PKO operations of a diverse nature. Indeed, the concept of ‘collective self-defence’ was the new norm for Japan, allowing the JSDF to opening fire in case of attack on Japan’s allies. Hughes highlights how the society was divided by this new set of liberties although the government claims that the exercise of self-defence is still limited, has clear breaks, and promotes peace (Hughes, 2017:95). In reality, Hughes argues that the collective self-defence framework was inescapable as the US exercised continuous pressure on Japan to commit to the alliance (*Ibid*).

To sum up, regarding multilateral operations, post-war Japan has always been supportive of the UN as a relevant platform to ensure global peace. In the first place, because of constitutional restrictions, it could only provide funds. But as years went by and despite opposition, LDP Cabinets succeeded in extending the scope of JSDF freedoms. These transformations were encouraged by the US especially when Japan underwent strong criticism during the 1990-91 Gulf War for not sending troops. From then on, LDP Cabinets slowly implemented changes. On the one hand, the government needed to keep good relations with the allied countries by supporting the peacekeeping efforts and remilitarise. On the other hand, it needed to implement changes slowly enough not to spark heavy criticism from the population and opposing parties.

b. The US partnership and other regional actors

i. *The US-Japan alliance*

In terms of security partnership with Japan, the main actor is without a doubt the US. Many agreements and treaties ensuring the strength of bilateral relations have been signed over the years. As briefly mentioned above, the 1951 US-Japan Security Treaty, the Mutual Security Assistance Act of 1954 and the revision of the Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty in 1960 lay the basis of the security alliance. It ensures cooperation and commitment to maintain peace in the Indo-Pacific region. The US hoped that Japan would take a more important role in the Cold War with these treaties. Nonetheless, the government which followed the Yoshida doctrine and gave priority to economic rebuilding over the rest, advocated for Japanese pacificism and resisted entering collective self-defence obligations (Hughes, 2017:100; Pyle, 2018).

In 1978, the Guidelines for US-Japan Defence Cooperation were first agreed on to answer the gaps that the previous treaties did not address. It concerned bilateral military cooperation such as various security scenarios, contingencies, and peacetime activities. These Guidelines have since been revised in 1997 and 2015. The major changes are concerned with the areas in which Japan is legitimate to conduct operations. In 1978, these areas were vaguely designated the 'far east'. In 1997 'areas surrounding Japan without geographical constraint'. Finally, in 2015 it extended to the case where the United States or a third country other than Japan was attacked which effectively enabled collective self-defence (Hughes, 2017:102; Ma, 2020:53). Nevertheless, collective self-defence is a risk for Japan who is closely associated to US positions opening a scenario of the alliance becoming detrimental to Japan who can suffer much from strong entrapment with the US ally (Cha, 2000). This is why Japan made sure to create legal breaks in case of the happening of conflicts going against the country's interest, especially regarding its threatening neighbour: China (Envall, 2017:29).

Moreover, for Japan, several other matters are concerning regarding the US-Japan alliance. First, Japan has no guarantee that the US will defend Japan in case of an attack despite the mutual security treaties. For instance, the North Korean intercontinental nuclear threat is worrying because thanks to their newest technological advances the dictatorship is potentially able to hit American cities as well as Japanese ones and the US would prioritise its own territory over Japan (Pyle 2018:89). One even greater concern is that reliability on the US to defend Japan depends on the incumbent president's commitment. For instance, in 2016 Donald Trump questioned the mutual defence treaty during the presidential campaign which caused many worries to Japan during his following mandate (Bacon and Burton, 2018:45; O'Shea and Maslow 2021:198). Trump's unpredictability shook the foundations of the so far unquestioned US-Japan partnership. Regarding the US-North Korean heated exchange in 2018, Abe feared that the US might go too far, and Japan did not want to get entrapped in a conflict because of its closeness with the US (Liff, 2019:3). Although Abe managed to get close to Trump, the latter was extremely critical of the Japanese economy and withdrew from a painfully reached Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement in 2017 (Zakowski, 2019:90). Moreover, American militaristic hegemony is increasingly contested by rising antagonist powers (Liff 2019:6). One last friction with Japan is the controversy around the American bases in the Okinawa prefecture with occasional scandals regarding American soldiers' behaviour. For instance, when a US serviceman raped and killed a Japanese woman in 2016 (Zakowski, 2019:91). Thus, we see that despite being Japan's greatest ally, the US may be a source of complication as well.

ii. The FOIP and the Quad

Generally speaking, we can say that the US-Japan alliance has strengthened over the years. Both countries share the same ideals that can be summarised through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. This term was first employed by Abe in 2016 to promote openness, freedom, and peaceful cooperation in the region. Although it was not openly displayed, the countering of a growing undemocratic Chinese influence was part of the initial thought behind the initiative. Nonetheless, in 2017 the US Trump administration forthrightly adopted the term FOIP to counter China which they see as an “existential threat” (Calabrese, 2020). Whereas, when it was used by Japan first, it was a “set of initiatives designed to promote Japan’s economic prosperity through maintaining a rules-based order” (Rossiter, 2017:114). The vision is mostly used when referring to promoting democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law in the region. (Rossiter, 2017; Kitaoka, 2019). Although the FOIP vision was first mentioned in 2016, its content is widely inspired by the 2006 “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” of Aso Taro’s Cabinet which was already rather vague (Rossiter, 2017; Hosoya, 2019).

Interestingly enough, when the US use the term FOIP it is mainly employed to refer to a tool designed to counter Chinese influence in the region. Consequently, other countries of the region like Southeast Asian countries view this initiative as a way to polarise the relations rather than maintaining peace. Hosoya makes the argument that in the face of such critics, Japan revised the FOIP’s purpose to make what he calls a FOIP 2.0 that is less polarising. With time it became a “cooperative strategy rather than a competitive strategy toward China” (Hosoya, 2019:24). Then on, the FOIP initiative became a wide concept of regional prosperity promotion without much content, goal, or policy and with a differing definition between Japan and the US. Therefore, scholars now rather describe the ‘strategy’ more like a ‘vision’ because it does not provide policy actions (Rossiter, 2017:114). What is certain though, is that Japan tries to be an entrepreneurial power which seeks to create norms. Japan engages and balances with other countries of the region with the status of a secondary power exercising influence rather than trying a major power which imposes on others its vision (Envall and Wilkins, 2022:20).

The FOIP as a strategy faces challenges partly because the Quadrilateral Dialogue (Quad) already is a cooperation framework for key democratic powers in the region: Australia, India, Japan, and the US. The Quad can be characterized as ‘minilateralism’, which is the

coordination of a small number of countries (Koga, 2022). The Quad's history has been rather discontinuous since its inception in 2004 but gained momentum during 2012 with the rise of Chinese maritime presence and Abe coming to power before fading again. In fact, Abe is one of the strongest promoters of the Quad to draw American attention to counter Chinese rise especially as Trump's America First policy reinforced Japanese insecurity sentiment (Chanlett-Avery, 2018:2). But the framework was not really institutionalised, and it only regained traction in the 2020s under the name 'Quad 3.0' in face of a shifting regional environment. While not solely focused on defence, the Quad addresses strategic issues like the COVID and climate crises for instance. It nonetheless drew closer the four countries leading Japan and Australia to participate in the Malabar maritime exercise respectively from 2015 and 2020 (Koga, 2022:30). The latter started in 1992 under the US-India bilateral partnership conducting diverse types of joint naval drills, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief. China is very much opposed to this development which it interprets as a growing threat (Pyle, 2018:85), and some go as far as saying that it represents the "Indo-Pacific NATO" (Koga 2022:32).

c. Europe – Japan security cooperation

i. *Japan and NATO*

Mentioning the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) can be surprising given that Japan is not located near the Atlantic region. Notwithstanding, Japan is a member of NATO's 'Partners around the Globe'. Moreover, regardless of geographical position both actors share a lot of interests (Bacon and Burton, 2018; Scott 2016). As NATO lost its main *raison-d'être* when the Soviet Union collapsed, it expanded its activities and changed its core to respond to diverse crises such as in Kosovo, Afghanistan, the Balkans, or to address counter-piracy (Ohtomo, 2003). Japan, as the closest American ally in the Indo-Pacific region, saw value in cooperating with NATO to bolster the US-Japan alliance. In addition to strategic convergence, shared values further enhanced this partnership (Bacon and Burton, 2018:41). In 2013, when Abe was looking to further Japanese defence, NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen made a step by calling Japan a 'natural partner'. Bacon and Burton identify it as a strategic narrative created by NATO that Abe gladly accepted and endorsed (2018:41). Beforehand, Japan had become a designated 'Contact Countries' of NATO in 2004. Their bilateral relation kept on growing since (Scott, 2016:328).

Furthermore, the ‘strategic parallelism theory’ defended by Bacon and Burton posits that defending freedoms and democracy in Europe has implications for the Indo-Pacific region, prompting Japan to act globally to uphold these values. This is what Taro was already praising with the previously mentioned ‘Arc of Freedom and Prosperity’ and Abe with the FOIP vision. Abe himself said that NATO is an alliance that “transcends the Atlantic Ocean to connect the United States and Europe, espousing the principle of ‘an alliance based on values’” (Abe in Bacon and Burton, 2018:42). Moreover, NATO is believed to be a dependable well-established institution that has significant normative and political power to exercise its influence in the Indo-Pacific region according to most of the interviewed Japanese elites in the same paper (*Ibid*).

Regarding practical cooperation, notwithstanding the implementation of the biannual Japan-NATO security conference in 1990, bilateral discussions were limited (Scott 2016:327). The 9/11 attacks marked a turning point as NATO gave itself the mission to fight terrorism outside of its designated area. The same year, Japan passed an anti-terrorism bill to support the US. Thus, the common factor in both cases was the US which succeeded in fostering its allies’ support. In turn, it drew NATO and Japan closer (Scott 2016:327). This led to Japan-NATO cooperation in Afghanistan and from the 2010s Japan-NATO counter-piracy cooperation in the Horn of Africa. Another area to which both actors are turning to is cyber-security (Bacon and Burton, 2018:47). This cooperation emerged as another area of collaboration as it can be carried out disregarding space barriers.

In 2014, their cooperation stepped up with the signing of the ‘Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme between Japan and NATO’ (IPCP) signed in 2014 and renewed in 2020 which serves as a mechanism for deepening cooperation between Japan and NATO across various security-related domains (NATO, 2014;2020). Nine years later, in 2023, the signing of the ‘Individually Tailored Partnership Programme’ (ITPP) came to reinforce cooperation to promote practical cooperation and enhancing interoperability (NATO, 2023). Although practical applications remain rather scarce, these papers assess the fact that Japan and NATO are growing closer.

Beyond practical cooperation, NATO serves as a platform for Japan to garner support from like-minded countries regarding the security situation in Asia (Tsuruoka, 2023:619). Japan's enhanced cooperation with NATO aims to seek support regardless of geographical constraints, yielding results as NATO acknowledged China as a challenge in 2019 (2023:619).

In addition to these actions, NATO member countries like France, the UK and the Netherlands have increased their presence in the Indo-Pacific region (Tsuruoka, 2023:621).

Finally, the 2022 Russian aggression of Ukraine has strongly resurrected NATO's purpose which was increasingly questioned since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, the war in Ukraine abruptly changed the perception of NATO from a dying instrument to a powerful shield and even resulted in its enlargement with the admission of Finland and Sweden to the alliance. Far from its original goal, NATO sells itself as the embodiment of a democratic front to which Japan belongs against threatening countries which disrespect the rule of international law and shared democratic values.

ii. Japan and the EU

Japan has forged closer security ties with the European Union (EU) as part of its commitment to multilateralism. Despite the EU's geographical distance from the Indo-Pacific region and lack of direct involvement in Japan's security environment, it shares similarities with NATO as a democratic entity, allowing for strategic parallelism. However, there are two main differences with NATO. First, the US is not part of the organisation which is an important factor regarding the above-mentioned Japanese entrapment worries and also because the EU is way less polarising and seen as more neutral than the US (Tsuruoka, 2011:41-42). Secondly, the EU is a political actor which was formed around economic and political purposes without encompassing a common and coherent military aspect that is still under member states' authority. Consequently, NATO and the EU have fundamentally different missions, with potential for complementary roles.

Although often overlooked, The EU has a defence-oriented organ known as the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), established in 1993 and expanded in the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. It aims to promote international peace and security, with missions similar to Japan's Self-Defence Forces (JSDF), focusing on crisis response, human rights, and civilian missions rather than armed operations (Tsuruoka, 2011:39). There has been Japan-EU cooperation regarding counter-piracy around Djibouti and Japan is considering the dispatching of personnel to CSDP missions as well, which effectively brings the Japan-EU cooperation to life. However, this cooperation may be seen as more diplomatic in nature compared to NATO, which involves deeper cooperation.

The Japan-EU partnership was first mentioned in 2001 under the 'Japan-EU Joint Action Plan,' aiming to strengthen political and security cooperation (Tsuruoka, 2011:38). However, a decade later, few common policies were implemented, resulting in disappointing outcomes according to the EU Commission (Berkofsky, 2012:266). The major issues included the broad variety of topics and inadequate resource allocation to tackle them. Cooperation focused mainly on non-military security issues such as missions in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and counter-piracy. Conversely, the EU's security contribution to Japan was minimal, except for influencing the lifting of the weapon embargo on China – which was first implemented in response to the 1989 Tiananmen massacre – in 2004 (Berkofsky, 2012: 271). All in all, in the 2000s and early 2010s, the Japan-EU security cooperation was overly ambitious, vague, and lacked capabilities.

In 2019, a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) was enacted between the EU and Japan and gave new momentum to the partnership. The latter focuses on the intensification of the out-of-area security challenges and therefore fosters joint operations targeting non-traditional security fields like cyber-security, climate change, civil protection, or sustainable connectivity (Kirchner and Dorussen, 2021:40). Nonetheless, when it comes to the Japanese security environment, if tensions continue to heighten in the region as Japan continues to follow the US, it is hard to tell whether the EU would further its cooperation with Japan to the risk of losing China (*ibid*).

Finally, in 2021 the European Council adopted conclusions on an 'EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific'. This initiative provided 7 priorities for the EU in the Indo-Pacific region: sustainable and inclusive prosperity, green transition, ocean governance, digital governance and partnerships, connectivity, security and defence, human security (European Commission, 2021). These themes show the core areas of concern for the EU in the region. Although, this initiative is not mentioned in bilateral relations with Japan, it is a valuable partner to achieve these goals, although more concrete actions are still awaited.

In conclusion, although the Japan-EU cooperation has been on both actors' agendas for decades, it took some time for actions written on paper to materialise. Amidst shifts in US foreign policy, particularly during the Trump era, Japan seeks to diversify its partnerships with like-minded European countries. This aligns with Japan's broader initiative to strengthen ties with democratic nations, reflecting the strategic parallelism theory found in the FOIP and 'Arc of Freedom' visions. Also, individual European countries like France Germany and the UK are significant actors, but they will not be tackled in this thesis.

Let's now provide an answer to our first question: 'How is the European continent relevant to Japanese defence?'. As we saw, the concept of strategic parallelism states that regional issues have an impact on the global scale. Today, globalisation has made it important for Japan to find like-minded partners all around the globe because geographical distance can be overcome easier than ever before. Moreover, participating to discussions with European counterparts is a way for Japan to draw their attention to the Indo-Pacific which has shown to be successful. Additionally, common values are the glue sticking democratic countries together across the globe. Also, NATO is a military alliance encompassing the US which is a vital actor of Japanese defence. Thus, enhancing cooperation with NATO is for Japan a natural choice.

3. Theoretical Framework

The previous part focused on the evolution of Japan's position on the questions related to security and international cooperation. These issues can be discussed in an infinite number of ways based on the point of view, beliefs, and biases of the one who analyses them. Therefore, this part is dedicated to the theories which are constituting the lens under which the author aims to interpret the data. Consequently, the reader can understand the approach that was used during the writing process of this thesis.

This thesis grounds itself under the field of International Relations (IR) and therefore uses the grand theories' assumptions that have been developed in this field to explain and make sense of the international order. Theory here can be defined as an explanation of observed regularities that serves to provide a general framework under which phenomena are understood and the findings interpreted (Bryman, 2012:21). As a main approach, this thesis focuses on a mix of three grand theories of IR: Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism.

Regarding the IR general background, the main assumptions of this thesis unfold as follows. Firstly, Realism is a theory that emphasises relations of power between States which are seen as the most important if not the sole relevant actors to understand IR. The behaviour of States is driven by considerations of power competition and security in an anarchical world. Following Morgenthau (1948), States' behaviour is dictated by self-interest and the pursuit of power on the model of human nature. One major concept in Realism is the 'balance of power', a concept emphasizing stability in the international order explaining that States seek to balance against potential threats by increasing their own military capacities (Waltz, 1979). However,

the realist assumptions are often criticized as being limited to explaining more specific events or outcomes of international politics. In fact, this grand theory is more fitted to analyse general patterns.

Then, Constructivism is a framework that is way more flexible in the range of actors and objects that it considers. The assumptions of Constructivism value intersubjective meanings and shared understanding to explain States' behaviours (Wendt, 1999). Accordingly, interstate relations are influenced by a variety of existing social constructions and relations. The relationships do not exist in a vacuum and common history, culture, language, norms, or values influence the actor's behaviours (Katzenstein, 1996). Thus, for our topic, institutions such as international law, NGOs, national and international political institutions, and international norms, are all interesting to understanding Japan's security policies, threat perception, alliances, and military strategies.

Finally, Liberalism is interested in economic interest, interdependence, and the benefits of trade in contributing to peace and stability. It acknowledges States as important actors but also international institutions which promote cooperation and dialogue. Influential liberal academics like Keohane and Nye argue that complex webs of interdependence influence State's behaviour so that traditional power politics is less relevant in certain cases (1977). For us, this framework is insightful in regard to the historical economic ties between Japan and the US and the growing ones between Japan and Europe. They are fundamental to grasp bilateral relations and bring light to issues unattended by Realism and Constructivism.

The reason behind this mixed lens approach is that not only do the three approaches take a different angle on the same case, but they are complementary. When one fails to give insightful reasoning, the others can take over with a different rationale to explain and make sense of phenomena. In practice, they have different visions of power, norms, the state of the world, relevant actors, actors' incentives and so forth. This is why several IR scholars have used this mixed-lens approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of a topic.

Moreover, Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer are two references to contemporary IR which bring useful thoughts to this thesis' topic: cooperation and alliances in IR. In fact, Mearsheimer's 'Tragedy of Great Power Politics' emphasizes realist notions of power politics and interstate competition, while acknowledging the role of shared norms and identity in shaping state behaviour (Mearsheimer, 2001). Walt's work on alliances in 'The Origins of Alliances' explores how shared identity or norms are crucial for alliance durability. For instance,

he analyses the formation of alliances based on the realist concepts of ‘balance of power’, ‘bandwagoning’ and ‘buck-passing’ following realist assumptions of anarchy. Nonetheless, he highlights how domestic politics, political institutions and public opinion can also alter alliance-making, and governments are not the sole relevant actors (Walt, 1987).

Finally, this thesis tries to emphasize on what Peter Katzenstein calls ‘analytic eclecticism’. It is the usage of different theoretical perspectives in relation to a topic (Katzenstein, 1996). This pushes for not only a multi-theory approach like with Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism but also encompassing an inter-disciplinary approach. This is why insights and influences from Public Diplomacy and Area Studies which are relevant to some extent to this thesis’ topic are insightful.

4. Methodology

Now that the theoretical framework on which this thesis is grounded has been developed, this part addresses the research methodology used to analyse the Japanese perception of the Japan/Europe common security concerns and partnerships. In the first part, the ontology and the epistemology of the thesis will be tackled. Secondly, the research design adopted to answer the research question will be specified and justified. In a third moment, the selected methodology will be explained in accordance with the literature which established it as a consistent and scientific method. Then, the selection of the material and the way it is processed is tackled and debated. Finally, the limits and the ethics related to scientific bias and self-awareness will be highlighted.

a. Ontology, epistemology

In terms of ontology, or the nature of reality, depending on the IR assumption that we adopt, the ontology can shift as well. For instance, in the case of Realism and Constructivism, two ontological sets are in opposition. Indeed, objectivism for Realism and constructionism for Constructivism are in tension. On the one hand, objectivism implies that “social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors.” (Bryman, 2012:33). On the other hand, constructionism posits that “social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision” (Ibid). Nevertheless, even though both theories traditionally have their own ontology, I do not think

that they are unique. Several ontologies can be adopted within a same grand theory. In reality some Constructivist academics like Alexander Wendt do not use constructionism as an ontological commitment and adopt a realist approach with a Constructivist lens (Wendt, 1992).

In fact, the main factor in determining our ontological approach lies in our research question. In our case, the question is interested in describing the nature of the Japan-Europe relationship in relation to security. This is why we are concerned about perceptions of actors and therefore the nature of the object that we study is not permanent and constantly changes in function of the actors and their agenda. As a result, the constructionist ontology appears to be the most relevant concerning the research question that we are considering. What we call ‘partnership’, ‘alliance’, or ‘relation’ between Japan and these other actors is always subject to change and is not pre-given.

When it comes to epistemology, the nature of knowledge, one framework stands out as a middle ground between the ontological tension explained above. This framework is called critical realism and recognizes a pre-existing natural order but also stresses that social realities generate events and discourses (Bryman, 2012:29). In other words, this approach grants more flexibility and allows social realities to be provisional and subject to interpretation. Critical realists also emphasize the role of context because it exercises influence on actors’ decision-making process and its interpretation (*Ibid*). This is why extensive justification of the context around Japan was provided in the literature review. The context needs to be fully understood to grasp in the best way the social realities which shaped the concerned actors’ reality. According to Jackson (2011), critical realism requires us to look into our knowledge to go beyond the experience and interpret the things or events that we observe. By doing so, we can ground our thoughts in previously built-up frameworks (Jackson, 2011:156-157). In other words, the rigidity of classical positivism is set aside to give room for subjectivity and interpretation. Thus, understanding realities applying to Japan must be grounded in a larger understanding of issues related to the country. It is therefore the role of the researcher to pay attention to social realities which are endogenous to the culture and avoid misunderstandings based on exogenous influences.

Finally, the two last theories that interest us in processing the data are deductivism and inductivism. Deductivism is a theory where conclusions are drawn from premises using logical inference and hypothesis-making in a top-down way. By contrast, inductivism is conducted in a bottom-up fashion where data and facts are gathered to build up laws based on empirical

observations (Bryman, 2012:26). This combined approach is fitted for the qualitative analysis of the data that I adopt in the analytical part of this thesis.

b. Research Design

The research question and the method are intrinsically intertwined and ask for a discussion or an exchange to be coherent and consistent. As Jackson says, “methodology is always a means toward another end.” (Jackson, 2011:191). Hence, methodology is important but needs to produce valid knowledge. Thus, the method must be based on the question that we want to answer, and the question needs to be formulated in a way to be methodologically coherent, relevant, and realisable.

i. Research question

Thus, I will justify the choice of my research question here. In the part two of this thesis, I provided historical background to answer the first question: “In which ways is the European continent relevant to Japanese defence?”. This question is the first one that I provided an answer to while I was going through the literature. The purpose of the question was mostly to give a frame the research within specific terms. As I went through the literature, I figured that in addition to bilateral exchanges with countries on security, Japan was engaging in multilateral conversation with supranational European actors whose main region has historically been Europe: the EU and NATO. From this, I started to wonder why Japan engaged in security dialogue with these two actors and it led me to wonder: “How has the role of European supranational organisations as strategic partners evolved for Japan since the 2000s?”.

ii. Method

This thesis aims to find out how the links between Japan and the EU/NATO have changed through time for Japan with a focus on the security aspects. Several methodologies have been considered. The most relevant in terms of result validity would have been the qualitative analysis of a substantive number of interviews of high-level Japanese officials who have in the exercise of their functions taken part in the Japan/Europe exchanges concerned with security cooperation like Bacon and Burton (2018) conducted. Nonetheless, in regard to the

difficulty to realise such large-scale research which requires network resources and time, I had to find another way. The ‘official’ aspect of the material was a pre-requisite to be treated as valid data that informs on Japanese position vis a vis Europe. This is why, I came up with a totally different approach based on available official resources. The websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) harbour a substantial amount of compiled data on the cooperation between Japan and the EU/NATO. This offered a great alternative to the high-level officials’ interviews.

c. Data collection

i. Data

The data available on the MoD website is interesting because exhaustive whitepapers on Japanese defence are published annually. Nonetheless, the material related to Europe is rather scarce in face on the US-Japan defence partnership. Moreover, the document is focusing on objective fact-gathering and thus less interesting for our research based on the Japanese view of the relationship with Europe. This is why I turned myself towards to the MOFA material which has more substance to analyse. When looking at the ‘Japan-Europe Relations’ tab and dismiss bilateral relations with countries, it only remains four webpages: ‘EU’, ‘ASEM’, ‘OSCE’, and ‘NATO’. This thesis focuses on supranational organisations which are relevant in policymaking and as substantive security partner. This is why I chose to dismiss ‘ASEM’ (Asia-Europe Meetings) because it is an organ of the EU. I dismissed the ‘OSCE’ (Organization for Security and Co-operation) as well because due to its number of members, it does not constitute a coherent actor but rather a larger framework with few policy implications. Hence, I was left with ‘EU’ and ‘NATO’ webpages where all the documents of the last decades’ interactions with Japan are gathered. Around 150 documents of various dates and format can be found. 48 documents for NATO from 2006 to March 2024 and 102 concerning the EU from 2012 to February 2024. The nature of the documents is various and can be found in the Annex (1,2).

ii. Data processing with Nvivo

As mentioned earlier, this research asks for a qualitative analysis of the data. Hence, with the amount of data, the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was chosen. The tool allows to efficiently code an important amount of data and

find patterns. The software which was chosen is Nvivo, a CAQDAS allowing the organisation and visualisation of any kind of data with the creation of codes “that are developed in terms of ‘trees’ of interrelated ideas” (Bryman, 2012:593).

The realisation of a codebook is necessary to ensure the reliability of the coding process, so that someone else can check and assess the coding method (Braun and Clarke 2017:6). For this thesis which adopt a mixed inductive and deductive method, the code book needed to be created before and changed during going data processing. The task always requires back and forth between the codes and the research question to find the most substantive themes related to security. This is why, the use of thematic analysis appears to be a suited type of analysis for purposes of clarity and logic.

d. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a method that goes “beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes”. (Guest *et al.*, 2014:11)¹. My interpretation of this method is that it allows to analyse and break down the data into common themes. This model gives room for subjective interpretation based on thorough background research. Hence, it grants the possibility to interpret and compartmentalise the data under common themes. Here, the subjectivity of the researcher is an integral part of the analytical process (Braun and Clarke, 2017:6). This thesis uses qualitative analysis because it follows an approach to TA characterised by an organic and flexible process of coding and theme development (Braun and Clarke, 2017:7). The mixed inductive/deductive approach to coding is ‘organic’ because the code book is not fixed and expands alongside the data in an empirical fashion. Therefore, from a common base, the codebook attributed to NATO and the codebook attributed to the EU are different due to their specificities.

In practice, the following analytical part will be compartmentalised in a few themes in which the Japan-Europe relation has undergone noticeable changes over the last years or decades and tells us much about the global direction of Japanese-Europe bilateral relations.

¹ The page numbers are taken from the online version on a chapter-basis and do not match the physical version of the manual.

Before this, the following last subpart addresses the limits and the ethics surrounding the framework, the methodology, and the analysis.

e. Limits and Ethical Considerations

i. Limits

Regarding the limits, as I mentioned above the interview of high-level Japanese officials would have been more relevant because it adds the value of encompassing professional opinions in addition to the author's interpretation.

Moreover, the collected data is not constant in terms of chronological repartition. The more we go back in time, the fewer documents are available which creates asymmetry for comparison purposes. In addition, the nature of the document was too wide to have clear patterns. This is why the quantitative comparison was dismissed in the early stages of the research. Nonetheless, qualitative interpretation of the data is subjective and can end-up yielding biased or false deductions. Therefore, more regularly published data would have authorised a mixed approach yielding reliable results.

As I touched upon just before, the nature of the documents can vary very much, some are less relevant than others. For instance, a 'congratulatory message' to the appointment of a new president has less relevant information than the overview of a G7 summit. For transparency purposes, I have regrouped the documents under general categories and displayed them in the annex part in order to have a more precise idea of the nature of the analysed documents (Annex 1,2).

Additionally, the topic that I am tackling is concerned with high-level politics and I had to accept that a large pool of data would not be available. This is why I chose to enlarge my topic from defence alone to a larger security-related frame. In fact, few data was reachable because defence is a sensitive matter. Furthermore, the data is limited to the online-available data due to physical constraints.

Also, it must be specified that the Japanese and English versions of the websites are not exactly the same. Although the author compared both versions to make sure that the English version was reliable in comparison to the Japanese one. Therefore, one of the limitations is the use of data in English rather than the Japanese version because it makes data-processing easier.

ii. Ethical considerations

Now regarding ethics, one of the main criticisms regarding the study of other countries can be found in area studies literature. Sato and Sonoda's (2021) critique of the Western bias through the concept of 'inside-out' is important to understand how being an outsider can be a handicap to fully grasp realities in another country. Cultural differences cannot be fully grasped when one's identity has not been forged in the country (Sato and Sonoda, 2021:212). Consequently, we need to be as aware as possible not to impose one's own beliefs on others. Also, the methodologies of this thesis are mainly taken from the occidental literature. Even though some of the literature used in the thesis was written by Japanese scholars, the writing language was English and therefore the transmission of ideas is not optimal and may overlook language peculiarities.

5. Analysis

The following analytical part has been divided in two sections: data presentation, and thematic analysis broken down in four subparts.

a. Presentation of the data

In this section, the codebooks are presented (see Appendix 1, 2), and the choice of the themes is justified. As we discussed in the methodology part, the data was retrieved from the MOFA of Japan^{2,3}. The data time frame begins in the 2000s and goes until nowadays (March 2024). Nonetheless, whether data comes from the EU or NATO cooperation makes a sensible difference. This is why data has been processed separately, data from the Japan-NATO side have been processed first and data from the Japan-EU side in a second time.

Both actors (the EU and NATO) are often present at the same meetings, summits, or events and are deeply entwined which leads to overlapping data. In the case in which the data was the

² The MOFA website where the documents regarding NATO were retrieved:
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/nato/index.html>

³ The MOFA website where the documents regarding the EU were retrieved:
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/eu/index.html>

same document for both NATO and the EU as it can be the case with G7 meetings for instance, the most relevant actor was given the priority, and the document was not treated twice.

Additionally, documents that were irrelevant to the topic of security were discarded at the discretion of the author. This process reduced the documents from 140 to 101 for the EU and remained almost the same for NATO from 50 to 48. Both codebooks are similar but not identical because the themes debated in Japan-EU and Japan-NATO meetings are not necessarily the same (see Appendix 1, 2).

The codes which appear in the most documents for NATO are in this order: Shared Values, Ukraine, North Korea, Piracy and Maritime Security, Afghanistan, Cyber and Digital, FOIP, and Joint Exercises.

The codes which appear in the most documents for the EU are in this order: EPA and FTA, North Korea, FOIP, Ukraine, SPA, Cyber and Digital, Shared Values, and China.

As I wanted to tackle equally convergences and divergences between the Japan-EU and Japan-NATO dialogues, I chose to create 2 themes addressing their divergences and 2 themes their convergences. One theme focuses on the Japan-NATO dialogue and one theme focused on the Japan-EU dialogue. Then, when considering the abovementioned codes coming from both NATO and EU codebooks, five are common: Shared Values, Ukraine, North Korea, Cyber and Digital, and FOIP. Based on these five codes, I decided to create the 2 last themes regarding threats and shared values. The themes are shown in the following figure:

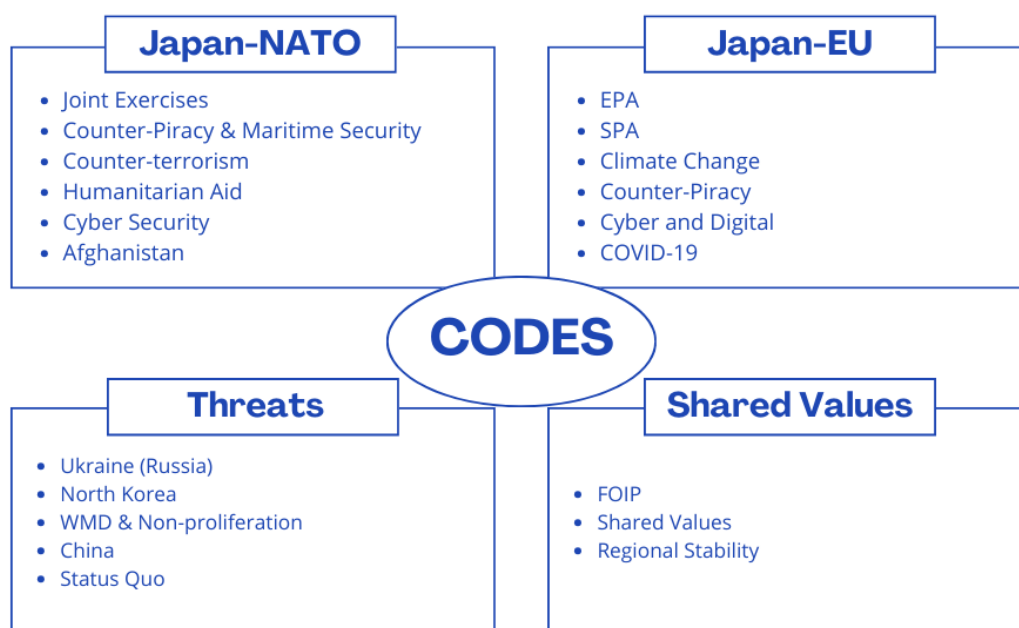


Figure 1. The four themes of the Thematic Analysis based on codes connections.

In sum, the themes unfold as follows:

- The first theme tackles Japan-NATO cooperation, more focused on defence.
- The second theme tackles Japan-EU cooperation, more focused on broader security cooperation and trade.
- The third part discusses Japan's actions to face regional challenges by engaging in a dialogue with Europe.
- Finally, the fourth addresses the evolution over time of the narrative of the free and open liberal order based on the rule of law and shared values between Japan and Europe.

Moreover, I have selected three case studies which are relevant to compare the Japan-EU and Japan-NATO relation. These case studies often appeared during the analysis of the documents: the case of Afghanistan, COVID-19, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

b. Analysis

i. **Theme 1: the Japan-NATO partnership**

In the literature review, I shed light on the background of NATO and the EU in relation to Japan and we understood in which way both differed. The description from Tsuruoka (2011) is extremely relevant to understand the distribution of roles between the EU and NATO for Japan. Indeed, both are relevant in their own way and have complementary competences. On the one hand NATO deals with a defence aspect of security as a military alliance. On the other hand, the EU is an economic union which is relevant because of its market, its political and norm-maker role.

1. Joint-exercises, Maritime Security and Counter-Piracy

As a defence preoccupied alliance, NATO's codebook holds the code 'Joint Exercise' which does not exist in the EU codebook. In 'Joint Exercise', the first code mentions NATO Operation 'Ocean Shield' conducted with the JSDF in September 2014 in the Gulf of Aden for counter-piracy purposes (Document 26/09/2014). This marked the inaugural joint exercise between Japan and NATO, following the signing of the IPCP that same year. Subsequently, in March 2015, Japan participated in the Crisis Management Exercise (CMX), focusing on

humanitarian assistance and maritime security cooperation with NATO and non-allied partners like Australia and South Korea (Document 03/03/2015). Later on, NATO was an observer of the Japan-US joint field Training in 2022 as ‘symbolic participation’ which aimed at showing that Japan and NATO want to appear as close partners (Document 31/01/2023). This symbolic is furthered by the organisation of common symposiums (Document 20/11/2020), by announcing that they want to hold exercises more frequently or extend cooperation to other defence-related sectors (Documents 29/06/2022; 31/01/2023; 22/11/2023).

When it comes to Japan-NATO relations, counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, maritime defence, cyber-security, nuclear non-proliferation, and humanitarian aid are the principal fields of cooperation. Historically, maritime security and piracy have been the main sectors of assistance between NATO and Japan. Since the JSDF dispatch in 2001 in the Arabian sea, maritime collaboration with NATO in providing support for counter-terrorism operations or in counter-piracy operations has continued (Document 04/05/2006). Japan has always been an ally of NATO up until today where maritime cooperation is still at the core of their relations (Document 26/02/2024).

2. Counter-terrorism and Humanitarian Aid

Along with maritime cooperation, missions of counter-terrorism and humanitarian aid have historically been the backbone of the partnership. I noticed that the theme of counter-terrorism is strong after the 09/11 moment and through the 2000s. This coincides with the time when JSDF troops were dispatched in Afghanistan. But it slowly fades away with time and is not mentioned in Japan-NATO documents after 2015.

In terms of humanitarian aid, the JSDF conducted missions in Cambodia, Mozambique, East Timor, the Indian Ocean, and Iraq in the early 2000s. This was pointed out in a Japan-NATO document stressing that Japan is active in the field of humanitarian aid and is a relevant partner to work with for NATO. Hence, disaster relief was conducted in Pakistan side by side with NATO forces (Document 12/01/2007). In fact, the argument of Japanese know-how in terms of disaster relief especially in times of earthquakes is often pointed out. Nonetheless, humanitarian aid collaboration with NATO is rather punctual and depends on the gravity of the situation. For instance, in 2023 when an earthquake hit Türkiye, Japan dispatched troops and cooperated with NATO forces on the ground (Document 13/03/2023).

In 2013 is first mentioned the idea of cyber-security cooperation as a new security field (Document 15/04/2013). With the evolution of new technologies and the critical importance of cyber-defence, Japan and NATO decided to cooperate on this field. This was reiterated several times in the documents and is part of the IPCP. Further actions came in 2023 when both actors decided to expand cooperation in science and technology to operate activities between Japan and the NATO Science and Technology Organization (STO) (Document 31/01/2023). In addition, in 2023 a Japan-NATO cyber dialogue was held for the first time bringing concrete actions to words (Document 24/11/2023).

3. Case study: Afghanistan

Historically, the first operation that implies both Japan and NATO relates to Afghanistan. In fact, most documents from 2007 to 2013 mention Afghanistan as an area of bilateral cooperation. From 2002 when the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan was held, Japan invested in the country's reconstruction. Indeed, in total Japan donated 5.4 billion USD for reconstruction efforts (Document 06/05/2014). Also, Japan implemented 144 projects across the country to help the local people with medical care and education (*Ibid*). In addition, Japan conducted the DDR programme (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Ex-combatants) aiming at the disarmament of the former National Army to reintegrate them into the civil society.

At the same time, in Afghanistan NATO was in charge of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to which 30 non-NATO-member countries like South Korea, Singapore or Mongolia sent troops when Japan did not because of constitutional barriers. This is why, in spite of the actions that Japan undertook around Afghanistan's rebuilding, its contribution is not mentioned in NATO's mission. Thus, it appears as a dark spot in the strong commitment narrative that Japan depicts in the documents. Here, the argument of constitutional hindrance of article 9 justifies the lack of military support but nonetheless hurts the image of Japan. Nevertheless, NATO's Secretary General praised Japan's commitment to Afghanistan, and it remained a central topic in Japan-NATO relations (Document 15/04/2013). The reason is that instead of thinking of direct cooperation in Afghanistan, the Japanese efforts in Afghanistan can be understood as indirect support role of NATO's efforts. Japanese leaders use the term 'synergy' to qualify the complementarity of the DDR and the ISAF (Document 04/05/2006; 13/12/2007).

ii. Theme 2: The Japan-EU partnership

1. EPA and SPA

Contrariwise, collaboration with the EU is less directly focused on defence but on trade and international politics. Therefore, security cooperation with the EU came later than the one with NATO. The topic which appeared the most during the analysis was regarding the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), a free-trade agreement between Japan and the EU. In fact, from 2012 to 2018, most of the data is concerned with the discussions around the establishment of the EPA and is rather irrelevant to more strategic analysis. The EPA is signed in July 2018 at the occasion of the 25th Japan-EU and enters into force the 1st of February 2019. This made Japan and the EU closer allies as their trade ties grew bigger. Nevertheless, in parallel to the EPA, they also negotiated the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) which was ratified the same year. As described in the literature review, the SPA encompasses many critical fields such as data protection, climate change, or counter-terrorism for instance. These matters are related to security in an indirect way and can be understood as out-of-area security challenges. This kind of strategic fields are nonetheless not assimilable to concrete defence cooperation like joint exercises done with NATO.

2. Security cooperation

In Japan-EU security relations, cyber and digitalisation, climate change, sciences and health, and maritime security are the primary areas of cooperation. The field which gathers more coding reference than the others is the topic of cyber and digitalisation. In 2014, the first Japan-EU cyber dialogue was held preceding NATOs by nine years. The dialogue tackled cooperation on measures, policies, strategy, norms and rules regarding cybercrime and digital capacity building (Document 03/10/2014). Japan and the EU mentioned a diversity of fields linked to cyber in which they look to promote bilateral research such as artificial intelligence, cloud, quantum computing, blockchain, semi-conductors, and fighting disinformation (Documents 27/09/2019; 17/12/2021). In addition, Japan and the EU have been working during the Japan-EU Cyber dialogues, Japan-EU High-level Economic Dialogue and the G7 summits to reach an agreement on the Data Free Flow Trust (DFFT) project which is also a sensible

strategic issue regarding digital cooperation. These efforts demonstrate both actors' commitment to establishing global infrastructures and common norms.

More recently, climate change is also often discussed between the two actors, although concrete actions are lacking. The topic is often raised during economic discussions. For instance, the UN Sustainable Development Goals⁴ are repeatedly mentioned and increase in occurrences. It demonstrates that the topic is growing in importance. Both actors discuss the need to accelerate realistic energy transition to tackle climate change (Document 25/10/2022). In fact, Prime minister Kishida expressed ambitions to lead global efforts and that “he will work with the EU to tackle global issues such as climate change and to realize a new form of capitalism.” (Document 29/11/2021). While these ambitions are yet to be verified, there is a shared willingness to enhance cooperation on this global security issue, emphasizing the need for multilateral action.

The last relevant field of cooperation is counter-piracy and maritime security. Indeed, as pointed out above, the security of supply chains is a key challenge for both countries and they collaborate to ensure the safety of maritime trade routes. On this matter, the joint exercises conducted under NATO flag serve the EU member-states which are mostly member of both organisations. Other strategic sectors such as spatial science cooperation, fighting disinformation, or humanitarian aid appear in the Japan-EU documents but because they are scarce, there is no data substantial enough to make them appear as major cooperation fields.

3. *Case Study: mutual assistance in times of crisis*

Finally, one sector that I have not referred to yet is the health sector. Cooperation around health issues was extremely relevant when the COVID-19 crisis broke out in 2019. The first mention of COVID-19 in the Japan-EU data is in May 2020. We can see that the release of documents on the website of the MOFA sharply decreases during 2020-2021 due to the pandemic (Table 1).

⁴ The Sustainable Development Goals of the UN available here: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

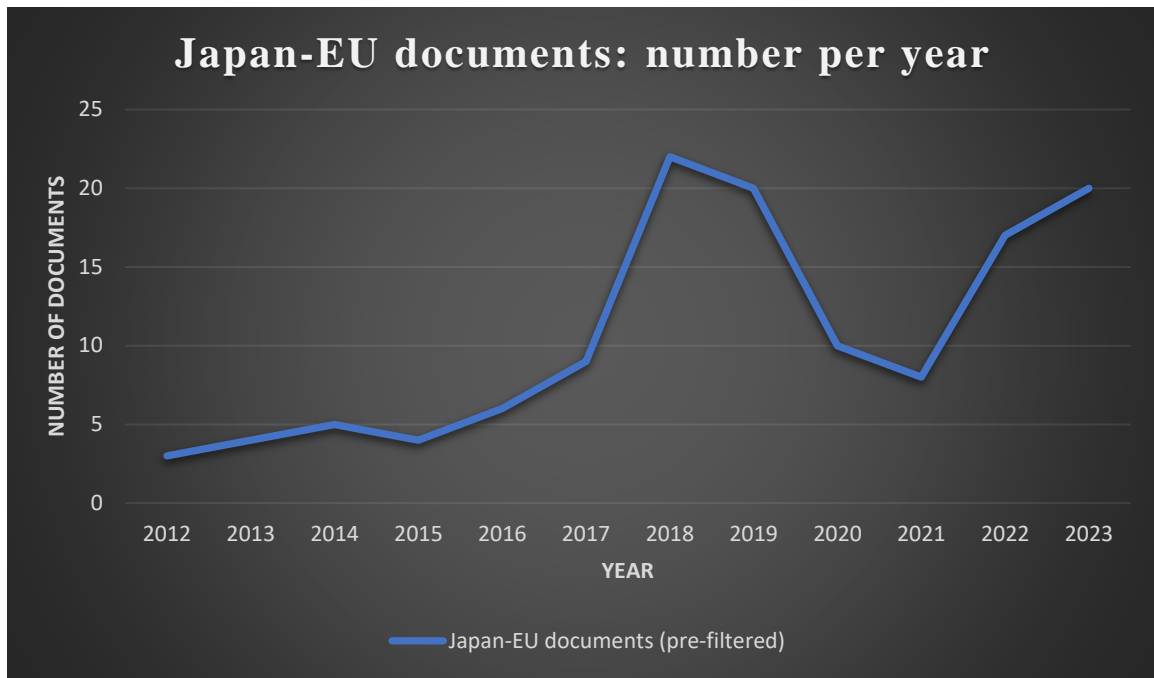


Table 1. Japan-EU documents number released per year (pre-filtered data). Total amount of documents:129.

This translates a diminution of interactions during the pandemic. Nonetheless, during these years most documents are concerned with COVID-19-related cooperation especially regarding the implementation of measures and policies to contain the spread of the disease and the question of vaccines research (Document 19/03/2020). Later on, when a vaccine was found, the EU was one of the main providers of vaccines for Japan. The political ties between the EU and Japan surely helped to put Japan at the top of the list of countries to which send vaccines in a race against time like the COVID-19 period was.

Reversely, during the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the following sanctions imposed by the EU countries on the aggressor. An energy shortage was threatening the EU as Russia stopped the export of gas to the EU in retaliation. At that time, Japanese companies which possessed a surplus of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) shipment decided to change its course to Europe where it could alleviate the pressure caused by energy penuries (Document 15/02/2022). This contributed to ensure energy security in Europe. Again, in times of crisis, because they share close economic and political ties both actors help each other contributing to each other’s security without necessarily touching upon the topic of defence.

iii. Theme 3: Threats to Japan

1. Russia-Ukraine war

Mentioning the war in Ukraine, it became central to both Japan-EU and Japan-NATO relations especially since the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The code Ukraine appears for the first time in 2014 for Japan-NATO documents following the invasion of Crimea by Russians (Document 06/05/2014). For the Japan-EU documents, it appears first in 2016 at the occasion of a Japan-Baltic seminar regarding a growing worrying environment in Europe (Document 20/01/2016). Japan and the EU who both attend G7 meetings condemn Russia. They stated that they “cannot accept changes to the status quo by force or coercion” (Document 06/05/2014). This sentence is interesting because it can be regarded as a double warning for China which we will discuss later in this subpart.

Following the 2022 invasion, both European countries and Japan imposed sanctions on Russia in a concerted way along with the US and other countries. The democratic countries denounce Russia’s defiance of international law as regard to territorial integrity of sovereign states as well as international humanitarian law (Document 07/04/2022). In January 2023, in a Japan-NATO document, both denounce the irresponsibility of Russia of threatening to use nuclear weapons. This goes in the sense of long-standing nuclear non-proliferation as an important topic of the Japan-NATO relation.

In terms of actions, Japan contributed 30 million USD to the CAP Trust Fund of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) supporting Ukraine in providing nonlethal equipment in early 2023. Also, the G7 summit of 2023 which took place in Hiroshima, emphasized the anti-nuclear stance of G7 countries. The G7 countries all condemned Russia with sanctions, nonetheless, this had barely any consequence on Russia’s behaviour *vis a vis* the disrespect of international law.

The code ‘Ukraine’ appears in 30 different documents within Japan-NATO and Japan-EU data after the beginning of the invasion early 2022. Also, when taking a look at Japan-NATO number of documents issued through time (Table 2), it clearly appears that the Japan-NATO communication frequency was enhanced from the year 2022.

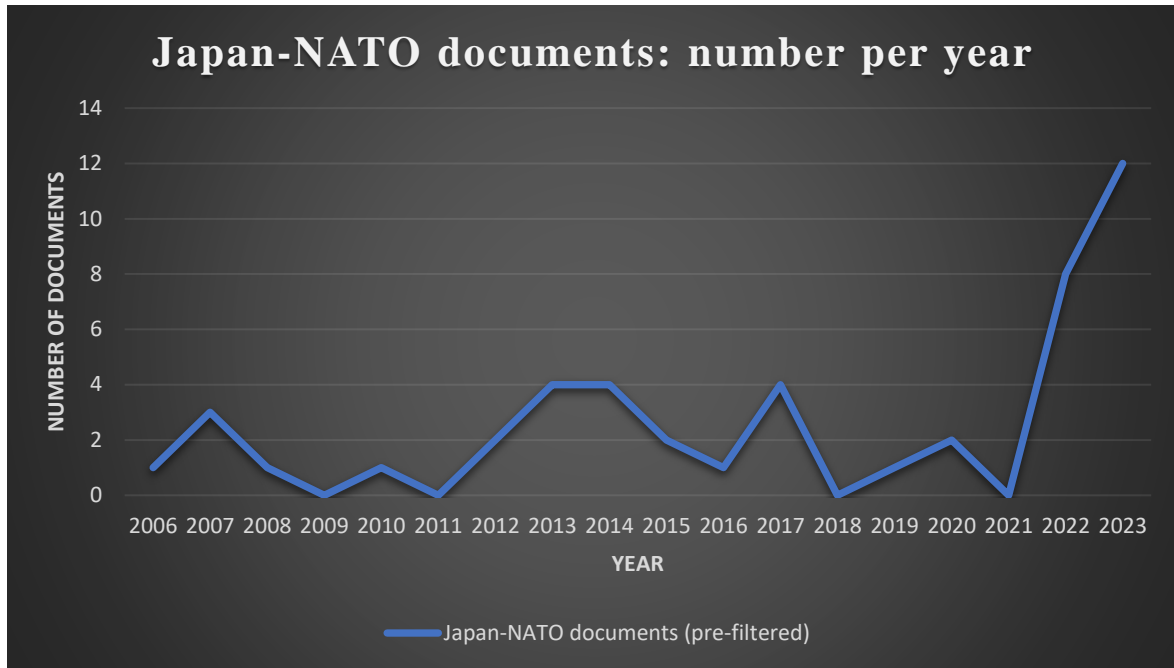


Table 2. Japan-NATO documents number released per year (pre-filtered data). Total amount:48.

In fact, it goes in the sense of saying that NATO which was considered irrelevant in a post-Cold War world became vital again for European security. Hence, the war in Ukraine drew closer Japan and its European counterparts under a common flag of the respect of international law and democratic ideals. We will tackle this idea in the next part with the FOIP.

2. North Korea

North Korea (NK) is a crucial focus in Japan-EU/NATO relationships. Japan seeks allies who back its security interests. It reaches to the EU and NATO particularly due to the importance of sanctions imposed on NK by both organisation’s member-states. The main concerns for Japan regarding NK include nuclear non-proliferation, ICBM development, and the abduction issue. The EU and NATO serve as venues for Japan to garner European support in defending democracy globally and therefore in Asia as well (Tsuruoka, 2011:30). While NK has been mentioned in NATO documents since 2006, it wasn't until 2016 that it appeared in Japan-EU relations (Documents 04/05/2006; 01/06/2016). The turning point is when North Korea claimed to have detonated its first hydrogen bomb. Japan condemned it strongly and called for condemnations from the EU in order to put more pressure on NK. Recent years (2022-2023) have seen an increase in mentions of NK in documents, likely reflecting the rising frequency of North Korean nuclear and ICBM tests.

Hence, the North Korean threat has steadily grown for Japan over time and as NK capabilities improved. Eventually, NK capabilities improved to the extent that the US – which is the greatest enemy of NK according to its leaders – have become in reach of the ICBM range. Thus, more than helping the Japanese ally, the issue has also gained in urgency for NATO as a member-state became directly threatened by NK. This reinforces the claim that regional issues are becoming global in today’s world under the strategic parallelism theory (Bacon and Burton, 2018:41).

In addition to the nuclear tests conducted in the Sea of Japan that Japan systematically condemns, Japan also frequently denounces the abductions conducted by NK on Japanese citizen in the late 80s- early 90s. The topic has never been settled and Japan keeps mentioning it in documents up to 2023 (Document 31/01/2023). This argument has no influence over North Korean behaviour, but it contributes to the demonisation of NK and is symbolic in showing the victims that the government still fights for them.

In the end, we arrive at the same issue than with Russia, no matter sanctions whether they are unilateral, multilateral, or even carried out by the UN. None has had positive political effects on the regime.

3. China

The case of China is sensibly different because it is a powerful country to which Japanese and the European economies are intertwined giving less room for manoeuvre. In the Japan-EU Joint Press Statements of the 2000s, China is mentioned as a rising power with whom there is a need to cooperate. Nonetheless, the discourse changes in the 2010s as China becomes more assertive. At first, the mentions of China as a threat have been rather shy. The issue came up first in Japan-NATO documents when Prime Minister Abe made a speech in 2014. He touched upon the growing Chinese military expenditures and incursions in the East China Sea around the Senkaku Islands *de facto* managed by Japan (Document 06/05/2014). Except in this speech, any condemnation is implicit only mentioning regional issues in the East and South China Seas.

For Japan, the early Japan-EU discussions around China were for a long time only aimed at ensuring that the EU kept their arms embargo on China decided after the Tiananmen massacre because some EU countries pushed to lift it. Regardless, the first time that a Japan-EU document directly addresses China as a threat is in 2021 (Document 05/04/2021). From then on, a specific formula is used when referring to China’s assertiveness: “unilateral attempts

to change the status quo” (*Ibid*). As I touched upon above with Russia, the question of ‘status quo’ is vital. Under this idea, any attempt to use force at the expense of another sovereign state is encompassed. It is a convenient term which allows to condemn Chinese incursions inside Japanese EEZ around the Senkaku/Diaoyu, as well as around Taiwan or in the South China Sea where ASEAN countries oppose China. Moreover, going back to the ‘Ukraine’ code, the condemnations stated that “Unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, such as Russia’s war against Ukraine, must not be tolerated anywhere in the world” (Document 05/04/2023). This statement feels as a warning addressed to China as well. Moreover, the word ‘Taiwan’ appears for the first time in January 2023 in a Japan-NATO document (31/01/2023). It is referred to as a strategic partner which must not be attacked by China showing that in face of the threat, Japan and NATO are making their positions clear on the Taiwanese topic. This growing attention to the case of Taiwan happens as China is becoming more and more oppressive towards the island.

iv. Theme 4: Shared values and the FOIP

1. ‘Natural partners’ and ‘shared values’

This last part is concerned with the Japan-EU and Japan-NATO relations themselves in terms of narrative and how they want to be seen on the international stage. I insisted over the last parts that with time Japan got closer to both the EU and NATO. This is verified in terms of increased meeting frequency, enhanced joint programmes and closer political positions. In the documents it is conveyed by specific formulations which we can see evolve through time constituting a compelling proof of the rapprochement. In the beginning, the terms ‘like-minded partners’ (Document 04/05/2006) and ‘partners that share fundamental values’ (Document 15/04/2013) are used to justify Japan-NATO cooperation. Prime Minister Abe in 2014 re-employs Secretary General Rasmussen’s term ‘natural partner’ to qualify their relation (Document 06/05/2014). This element of language will then on be used in every document along with the word ‘reliable’ (Document 26/09/2014). Abe’s formula sends a strong signal because it makes one look at the relation as if it was evident. But in the first place, both had few in common because NATO used to be an Atlantic-focused regional organisation. This proves that NATO had to and did change after the Cold War in order to tackle contemporary issues and shifted from a regional to a global organisation.

For the Japan-EU relations, in 2014 the EU was described as a ‘global partners sharing fundamental values and principles’ (Document 01/11/2014). Even before, in the Joint Press Statements of the Japan-EU summits, the elements of language have always been the same emphasizing ‘shared values’ since 2002⁵. Every document mentions this aspect often along mentions to ‘free and international order’, ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, ‘human rights’, or ‘the rule of law’. Their normative close-mindedness wants to be the justification to lead more bilateral actions. Moreover, the EU which was at first mostly an economic partner has become more and more politically entwined with Japan, but more generally, both are part of a ‘Western’ democratic bloc. The partnership has slowly drifted from purely economic ties with a like-minded partner to a political ally which shares values with Japan and support Japan regarding a threatening regional environment.

2. *The FOIP and the international order*

All in all, Abe’s vision of the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ or Taro’s ‘Arc of Freedom’ are enhanced by this polarisation effect. Countries belong either to the democratic bloc or not. As a matter of fact, the term FOIP also appears in Japan-EU dialogue. The EU has even affirmed its intention to pursue the FOIP vision in 2020 (Document 16/09/2020). It became clearer as the European Council adopted in 2021 the EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. It concluded that the EU needs to reinforce its “strategic focus, presence, and actions” in the region going in the same sense than the FOIP (European Council, 2021). For Japan, the growing interest of Europe in East-Asia contributes to the realisation of the FOIP and contributes to regional stability. Nonetheless, as we highlighted in the literature review, the FOIP as it is nowadays, is a catch-all term with vague meaning. Moreover, in the Japan-EU data the FOIP is quoted as a goal to achieve but no policy or measure is mentioned. Therefore, quoting the FOIP does not imply anything other than fostering democratic norms. This is why I believe that having the EU and Japan agreeing on ‘realising’ a FOIP (Document 13/05/2023) does not bear many consequences. Now that this is said, in the language and in the relationship, the EU seems closer than ever to Japan thanks as both share a common vision for the Indo-pacific, a region in which European countries had less or even no interest years ago.

⁵ 11th Japan-EU summit, accessible at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/eu/summit/joint0207.html>

Nonetheless, it difficultly translates in concrete actions. The result is also similar for Japan-NATO where the idea of the FOIP was mentioned first in 2020 as well (Document 20/11/2020). In 2023 Prime Minister Kishida announced a plan concerning the FOIP to enhance cooperation rather than “division and confrontation at this turning point in history” (Document 05/04/2023). Again, Japan wants to have a leading role in promoting the free and open international order with its allies and this does not resonate with Chinese, Russian or North Korean or even ASEAN plans. The FOIP remains a utopia to the same extent than the UN resolutions or international sanctions: they cannot change a country’s behaviour against its will.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

a. Discussion between IR theories and the recent international developments

Contrary to what Fukuyama (1992) or Doyle (1986) were predicting some decades ago, the world order has not changed into a pacific realm where democracies are the norm. Anarchy still rules and the heightening of tensions in the Indo-Pacific region or the war in eastern Europe show that it is still bound to continue. Democracy, rather than constituting the regime-type that every country embraces, is one among other types of regimes towards which countries can improve or slide back. In recent years, dictatorship in countries such as Russia and China have reduced their citizen’s individual liberties and rights which goes against core democratic values. Henceforth, in the following paragraphs, we have a discussion regarding Japan and Europe within the larger framework of global politics and the democratic/undemocratic divide.

China has become the second most powerful country in terms of military and economy and does not share the same values than the other superpower: the US. Hence, China challenges the rule-based system of the last decades established under American hegemony. It is therefore very critical of a NATO who decides to expand its scope of operations. Created under American impulse, NATO is a tool whose designated area has shifted to preserve American interests not only in the Atlantic but at the global scale. Besides, Japan and the EU find their place in this US-led rules-based order. This is why we saw in the previous part how much both actors insisted on preserving a ‘status quo’ which is beneficial to them. Likewise, they aim at expanding the FOIP framework which represents the democratic expansion.

At the other end of the spectrum, a country such as North Korea is totally out of this democratic framework. Hence, its behaviour can be interpreted in different ways depending on the theory we adopt. Under a Structural or Neorealist lens, the reason why NK is developing nuclear capacities and ICBM is because it feels threatened by the structure of an international order dominated by the US. Hence, Japan is also an existential threat because it is closest ally of the US. The more NK nuclear and ballistic capabilities increase, the more they feel secure. Nevertheless, NK goes against nuclear non-proliferation which triggers more criticism from the democratic bloc. These critics and sanctions put pressure NK which feels more threatened, and it goes on. In the Neorealist theory, this is a typical pattern of security dilemma (Waltz, 1979). For Neorealist scholars, it has nothing to do with the fact that NK is an authoritarian regime but is due to the anarchical nature of the world.

In opposition, a Neoclassical realist lens puts emphasis on the key role of the regime-type such as dictatorships and their leader's perceptions of the world to understand States behaviour. It encompasses political dynamics to explain States' interactions and is closer to a form of Critical Realism. The role of the leader and the narrative of the formation of NK in opposition to a threatening West in 1953 plays a large part in internal politics. Taking a similar example, the fighting of Western influence or 'propaganda' with the implementation of the 'great firewall' in China follows the same narrative-construction process. Democratic influence is dangerous for the dictatorship's survival. Thus, the government keeps a firm hand on information.

When it comes to dictatorships, I believe that the Neoclassical realist lens is more convincing because the democratic/undemocratic antagonism provides more specific answers than explaining general behaviours through State survival. In turn, there is a fundamental difference in how these States should be approached. From our analysis, the strategy that the EU, the US (through NATO) and Japan adopted is the one of multilateralism and the use of international law or international organisations to put pressure on 'Rogue States' as Reagan qualified them in 1985. Nonetheless, as we said previously, these methods yield no result because the targeted countries do not comply to international rulings. Although we must nuance here that they are not the only ones refusing international rulings and democratic countries like the US are also often challenging the rules-based order. Again, the rules-based liberal order is a double standard concept depending on the case.

Moreover, the Western bloc is imposing sanctions on North Korea, China, and Russia. But these have not proved to be efficient in provoking internal political change and end-up straining the citizens instead. In reality, in recent years the use of trade as a weapon has expanded and I believe that it can be perceived as a change in the liberal order which we knew until now. The 2022 war in Ukraine was the turning point as the regime of sanctions which was imposed on Russia overnight is unprecedented in scale. Trade was weaponised, especially because it targets such a large country in every sector of its economy. Classical Liberals like Kant in his work on “Perpetual Peace” take the state of peace as the normal state of international affairs. Therefore, the weaponisation of trade goes against the Liberal thoughts.

Additionally, trade wars like the US banning Huawei and recently Tik Tok from its territory bolster protectionism and weaken the liberal order. Likewise, the race for vaccines during COVID did not follow traditional liberal patterns because it was driven by politics. These examples show how the liberal tradition has recently curved. In fact, strategic sectors have become major security concerns for countries that control what they export and to whom. The most telling example is the case of microchips shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic in face of a booming demand around 2020. Countries have become extremely reliant on them without realising how disturbances in the production chains would affect every sector of their economy. Since then, State inference in trade has become more common and trade is the continuation of politics at the disposal of governments rather than uniquely profit-driven.

As we saw in the last part, the EU and Japan have excellent trade relations. Moreover, the signing of the EPA is a symbol of the mutual trust they share. One could argue that the traditional liberalist framework applies between democratic countries as tariffs and barriers are still fading between democracies (Burchill *et al.*, 2013:66). Although, this assumption has been challenged with recent protectionist turns as we saw with the Trump administration hostile to free trade agreements and favourable to imposing tariffs on those “who can afford it” like Japan (O’Shea 2021:198). Nevertheless, cooperation on matters such as scientific research in strategic sectors both with the EU and NATO is further evidence of mutual trust. This comes along the idea of ‘friendsurance’, a term created off friend and insurance. In today’s polarised world, strategic industries are not relocated in countries that do not share the same values. Therefore, relocation and investments in crucial sectors are prioritised in friendly countries. Shifting away from the profit-driven doctrine, companies in strategic industries are incentivised to open new plants in like-minded countries to maximise risk-mitigation.

Finally, I would like to tackle the democratic/undemocratic divide on ‘values’ that we briefly addressed both in the Neoclassical Realist and the Liberalist frameworks. The most suited lens is Constructivism because it takes in account normative and ideational structures such as shared ideas and beliefs (Burchill *et al.*, 2013:224). As we mentioned above, democratic norms fostered by the multilateral institutions like the NATO, the G7 or even the UN, follow a pro-democratic stance. It bloomed between the collapse of the Soviet Union and our contemporary multipolar world under American hegemony. Therefore, today’s authoritarian regimes pay them no credit on the claim that the international order itself is biased and outdated.

Also, tools such as mass disinformation and mass surveillance are widely used in dictatorships to enable mass control and prevent any rebellion. In parallel, undemocratic countries develop new technological cyber-tools to attack other countries on the cyber-space. These attacks take a multiplicity of forms. For instance, disinformation techniques are employed to influence voters in democracies which constitutes a major strategic concern for democracies. In response, we saw that in the last decades cyber and digital cooperation both in the Japan-NATO and the Japan-EU dialogue have increased. Democracies show a common front to preserve what they have in common. It is hard to categorise these actions under the old IR frameworks. The manipulation of information and populations at the individual level can change the outcome of an election. Should it be considered as an attack from an enemy under a Realist lens or is it a question of diffusing norms and ideas under a Constructivist scope? In any cases, the importance of identity and ideational manipulation on the cyber-space which undermines other countries sovereignty must not be diminished.

In a nutshell, the Japan-EU/NATO security cooperation is relevant under many different angles and lenses. The liberal order is changing towards protectionism in vital sectors such as high-technology or health adding to polarisation. Moreover, the democratic/undemocratic divide is growing stronger as belligerent countries are becoming more aggressive and question the established world order based on the rule of law. Additionally, the role of the cyber space is critical to analyse countries’ behaviour. It explains how at the age of the internet, dictatorship use digital tools to generalise mass surveillance and disinformation and maintain any rebellious spirit. Cyber-attacks are also a convenient way to assault other countries without using physical and visible attacks. In face of these new types of threats, following the concept of

‘friendsurance’ and, because they share common values, Japan and Europe do appear as logical partners under Realist, Liberalist and Constructivist scopes.

b. Conclusion

In conclusion, now that we have been through the analysis and the discussion, it is time to provide a direct answer to our research question: **How has the role of European supranational organisations as strategic partners evolved for Japan since the 2000s?**

This study has looked at how Japan’s perception of NATO and the EU has shifted since the 2000s and to which extent cooperation with European organisations can benefit Japan. I found that Japan’s perception of both actors has improved over time but in different ways. The frequency of their exchange has improved over time for both the EU and NATO. The war in Ukraine has allowed Japan and NATO to grow closer than ever before. Therefore, whereas at first NATO was for a Japan a venue to foster interest for the East Asian region and seek political support from European countries, it became a partner with whom to conduct joint exercises and humanitarian missions.

The nature of the Japan-EU relations has historically been based primarily on economic ties. As time passed, both actors began to discuss about international political matters as well. Both actors are economically linked to China and allied with the US. The two superpowers’ tensions putting them in a similar peculiar situation. Hence, they cooperate on less cleaving matters such as trade, climate change, scientific research, or industrial cooperation. Furthermore, as the EU becomes more interested in the Indo-Pacific, Japan sees it as an important ally which shares common values and with whom it can create norms.

Analysing Japan-EU/NATO documents thematically and by interpreting them with IR lenses, I have been able to provide a multi-faceted answer as to why Japan engages in strategic dialogues with European supranational organisations. First, I found that since the 2000s, the dialogue frequency between Japan and both the EU and NATO increased. Also, economic ties have grown stronger between Japan and the EU making them more interconnected along a traditional Liberalist assumption. From a Constructivist approach, we observe in the bilateral relations a common front against undemocratic powers like North Korea, China, and Russia, driven by shared security, as well as common concerns over human rights and the rule of law. Moreover, these three countries are specifically mentioned because of their geographical

proximity with either Europe and/or Japan. Following a Realist stance, we understand that countries seek to mitigate the danger of their threatening environment by seeking support from like-minded partners.

Besides, I found that enhanced cooperation between Japan and Europe is the fruit of mutual trust based on shared values. Consequently, the Western 'democratic bloc' is growing closer, and I argue that it serves as an excuse for undemocratic countries to further their aggressive posture. Nevertheless, it is legitimate to wonder whether it is democratic countries' cooperation which drives undemocratic countries to be more aggressive or the other way around. Regardless, at the moment Japan-Europe cooperation mainly remains based on heightened trade ties and common values. Hence, if a military cooperation dimension was to be considered it would likely have for origin their common ally: the US.

Appendices

Code Name	Number of Documents	Number of quotes
Collective defence	Files: 3	Reference: 5
Joint Exercises	Files: 9	Reference: 11
Cooperation Topics	Files: -	Reference: -
Climate Change	Files: 1	Reference: 1
COVID-19	Files: 1	Reference: 1
Cyber and Digital	Files: 11	Reference: 13
Disinformation	Files: 2	Reference: 2
Humanitarian aid and Peace	Files: 9	Reference: 19
Piracy and Maritime Security	Files: 13	Reference: 17
Terrorism	Files: 6	Reference: 8
WMD and Non-Proliferation	Files: 7	Reference: 11
Countries	Files: -	Reference: -
Afghanistan	Files: 12	Reference: 18
AP4	Files: 3	Reference: 5
China	Files: 8	Reference: 15
Status Quo (Taiwan)	Files: 9	Reference: 10
North Korea	Files: 16	Reference: 20
Ukraine	Files: 17	Reference: 21
Policies	Files: 7	Reference: 10
Regional Stability	Files: 5	Reference: 6
Shared Values-Natural Partners	Files: 21	Reference: 29

Code Name	Number of Documents	Number of quotes
FOIP	Files: 9	Reference: 14

Appendix 1. Codebook for the Japan-NATO documents showing frequency of occurrence.

Code Name	Number of Documents	Number of Quotes
Agreements	Files: -	Reference: -
EPA and FTA	Files: 30	Reference: 35
SPA	Files: 20	Reference: 23
Cooperation Topics	Files: -	Reference: -
Climate Change	Files: 11	Reference: 12
COVID-19	Files: 9	Reference: 10
Cyber and Digital	Files: 20	Reference: 23
Defence Cooperation	Files: 1	Reference: 1
Disinformation	Files: 1	Reference: 1
Humanitarian aid	Files: 1	Reference: 1
Piracy and Maritime Security	Files: 5	Reference: 5
Space	Files: 1	Reference: 1
WMD and Non-Proliferation	Files: 6	Reference: 8
Countries	Files: -	Reference: -
Afghanistan	Files: 1	Reference: 1
China	Files: 14	Reference: 16
North Korea	Files: 30	Reference: 32
Palestine	Files: 3	Reference: 5
Ukraine	Files: 20	Reference: 24

Code Name	Number of Documents	Number of Quotes
Miscellaneous	Files: 4	Reference: 4
Policies	Files: 5	Reference: 5
Regional Stability	Files: 1	Reference: 1
Shared Values	Files: 19	Reference: 21
FOIP	Files: 25	Reference: 29

Appendix 2. Codebook for the Japan-EU documents showing frequency of occurrence.

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Annex

NATO documents nature	Number of documents
Practical Actions Reports	6
Joint Statement	3
Diverse Meetings	24
Diverse Press Releases	2
Round of Talks	4
Seminars, Conferences, Forums	11
Speeches	9

Annex 1. Nature of the Japan-NATO analysed documents (post-filtered data). Amount: 48

EU documents nature	Number of documents
Phone Calls Overview	29
Joint Statement	2
Diverse Meetings	36
Message	1
Diverse Press Releases	6
Round of Negotiations	9
Seminars, Conferences, Forums	11
Speeches	2
Working Lunches	6

Annex 2. Nature of the Japan-EU analysed documents (post-filtered data). Amount: 102