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Relations between the EU and Japan in the field of nuclear non-proliferation

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Introduction

Non-proliferation has been on the international agenda for decades. For both the European Union and Japan, how to prevent proliferation, not just of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) like nuclear weapons, but also of their delivery vehicles and other sensitive technologies has always been a problem of high-priority. An increasing number of countries in the world possess ballistic missiles and advanced technologies that can be used for military purposes, if short of the dual-use category, are readily available in international market. One of the characteristics of non-proliferation efforts in the world is that it is impossible to tackle this issue alone – broadest possible multilateral cooperation is always needed to be effective. It is because there are a number of countries that can supply such weapons and technologies as well as those who want to acquire across the world. Recognising the importance of the problem, the EU (and individual EU member states) and Japan have been playing a major role in addressing the issues of proliferation and making international regulatory and normative frameworks in this regard. For instance, Japan and the EU cooperated in the establishment of the UN Conventional Arms Register back in 1993. It constituted one of the earliest concrete examples of EU-Japan political and security cooperation.

After the adoption of the Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation in 2001 - which emphasized peace and security as one of the four basic objectives in the EU-Japan relationship - Brussels and Tokyo committed themselves to promote the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), urging all states to maintain the existing global moratoria on nuclear testing. Moreover, the EU and Japan proposed to exchange information on cooperation with Russia, in the field of non-proliferation, such as the disposition of surplus weapon-grade plutonium. Japan issued its first white paper on disarmament in 2002 (updated in 2004) while the EU adopted its Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in December 2003. The two documents formed the basis of the EU-Japan Joint Declaration on Disarmament and Non-proliferation which, since its adoption in 2004, provides the political framework for Brussels-Tokyo cooperation on non-proliferation.

This paper examines non-proliferation as an agenda in EU-Japan cooperation. The first section examines the levels of threat perceptions on proliferation in the EU and Japan respectively. The second section explores policy responses by the EU and Japan to the problems of proliferation including arms export and export control. The third section examines EU-Japan cooperation so far and prospects for such cooperation both in the bilateral and multilateral contexts.

1. Levels of Threat Perception

The European Union

Since the early 2000s, the EU has adopted a strategy against the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), including nuclear weapons, based on the strong belief – shared by all EU Member States - that a multilateral approach to security, disarmament and non-proliferation is the best means of maintaining international peace and security. The EU has become a staunch supporter of the United Nations and of effective multilateralism since functioning multilateral disarmament regimes are seen as a vital component of an intact

international security framework based on a human security approach. Such a position was reiterated in the EU Global Strategy adopted by the European Council in June 2016.

Europe's approach to non-proliferation has been greatly influenced by the United Kingdom and France - Europe's only nuclear powers – as well as by developments occurred at the Community level in the last decades. For instance, the UK was the first nuclear power in Western Europe, having developed the first nuclear bomb in October 1952 and acquired the hydrogen bomb in 1957. London was also one of the three nuclear powers that initiated the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT). In 1957, concurrent with the signature of the Treaty of Rome creating the European Economic Community (EEC) and of the EURATOM, France, Germany and Italy began discussing the possibility to build up a trilateral nuclear force. This plan was stopped at the initiative of Paris, due to Charles de Gaulle's return to power in 1958. In February 1960, France successfully tested the atomic bomb and became the fourth nuclear weapon state. The French government refused, however, to sign the PTBT in 1963 and continued to develop its nuclear arsenal, adding to it the hydrogen bomb in August 1968. During this period, the member states of the European Community (EC) were also active in exporting nuclear technologies, with little concern for their potential military applications.

On the European continent, nuclear proliferation came to a halt in the 1960s. This was due by a number of factors, including the nuclear guarantees by the United States and NATO to which most of the EC countries were members, plus an additional guarantee by the independent nuclear forces of the UK and France. Moreover, the European integration process was bringing together all EC members to a common defense policy. There was, thus, a three-level game in nuclear proliferation and non-proliferation in Western Europe during the Cold War era: (i) the independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France; (ii) the NATO alliance together with the US nuclear umbrella; and (iii) the European integration process.

Only in the mid-1990s, the European Union began to develop its common non-proliferation strategy, in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In 1995, the EU adopted a Joint Action on the participation in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and on the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. In 1997, the EU adopted a Joint Action on the transparency of export controls in the nuclear field and in subsequent years it adopted a number of Common Positions on: nuclear and ballistic non-proliferation in South Asia (1998); the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (1999); the NPT Review Conference (2000).

The Iraqi war in 2003 triggered a new phase in the EU's non-proliferation approach leading the EU to adopt a comprehensive strategy against proliferation. In February 2003, the General Affairs and External Relations Council agreed to review the EU non-proliferation policy. The June 2003 Thessaloniki European Council paved the way for a new era in the EU non-proliferation strategy (“Basic principles for an EU Strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction”), followed by the November 2003 “Mainstreaming non-proliferation policies into the EU's wider relations with third world countries”; the December 2003 “EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction”; and the Council Conclusions on the ‘European Security Strategy’. In April 2005, the Council of the EU adopted a common position on ‘the universalisation and reinforcement of multilateral agreements in the field of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and means of delivery’.

Since the early 2000s, the EU has actively participated and contributed to the NPT Review Conference in order to strengthen the international system of non-proliferation, to pursue multilateral agreements, and to reinforce a strict implementation and compliance with these agreements. The EU also adopted a Joint Action for supporting the IAEA, including substantial financial contributions. In addition, the EU has become an active supporter of the Geneva Conference on Disarmament - the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body - and to the Geneva Branch of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). The EU is one of the largest donors to UNODA, including voluntary contributions in support of a variety of initiatives: from controlling of small arms and stockpiling of ammunition to strengthening the biologic and toxic weapons convention.

Besides the engagement in international non-proliferation regime, the EU has had different bilateral dialogues on non-proliferation of WMD under the framework of EU Neighbourhood Policy as well as with countries such as India and Pakistan. In order to reduce the nuclear risk on the territory of the ex-Soviet Union, the EU has developed assistance programmes designed to facilitate disarmament and control over nuclear technologies and equipment in those countries. From 1991 to 2006, the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States was the main conduit, and then the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation started from 2007.

The EU regularly addresses the question of non-proliferation in the framework of the political dialogues established with its strategic partners around the world. Finally, the Union has also been actively involved in the multilateral negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme that have led to the agreement signed in Wien by the P5+1 with the Iranian regime on 14 July 2015.

Japan

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of Japan, adopted in December 2013 under the Abe government, calls the proliferation of WMD and their delivery means in general as 'major threats' to Japan and the international community and the nuclear and ballistic missile development of North Korea and Iran as 'grave threats'. In the section on 'global security environment and challenges', the 'threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other related materials' comes as the second item, showing Tokyo's high level of concern on this problem. The Ministry of Defense's annual Defense of Japan 2016 calls the transfer and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles a 'significant threat'.

Arguably the biggest reason why Tokyo regards proliferation as a major, grave or significant threat to Japan has mainly to do with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile development, which represents a clear and present danger. While North Korea poses to Japan various problems and challenges other than proliferation, including the unresolved issue of the abduction of Japanese nationals that is often seen at least as important as proliferation threats in the Japanese domestic context, it is its nuclear and ballistic missile development as well as missile proliferation to other countries from North Korea that cause most international concerns.

Compared to the clear language that Tokyo employs vis-à-vis North Korea, it is still notable that Japan does not officially name China a security threat. Furthermore, while China's increasingly assertive actions in the East China Sea, which are believed to challenge Japan's

control of the Senkaku Islands, attract much attention cause concerns in Japan, the level of attention and alertness to the modernisation and the increase of China's nuclear arsenal remains generally low among Japanese experts and officials. There are few China experts in Japan who constantly follow China's nuclear weapons and strategy and there are few articles in Japanese in this regard. Then Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada (2009-2010) was perhaps exceptional in the sense that he demanded his Chinese counterpart to stop the increase of the number of nuclear warheads, to which Beijing angrily responded. But his call did not seem to be mainly stemmed from his sense of threat from China's nuclear weapons, but it was rather out of his commitment to nuclear disarmament. Whenever Japan – and other countries for that matter – calls for 'multilateralising' the nuclear disarmament process, what it essentially means is the need to include China. In overall terms, again, China's nuclear arsenal is normally not featured as a high-priority security threat facing Japan. This shows where Japan's focus of security concerns lie – it is busy addressing lower level challenges on a daily basis particularly in the East China Sea, also reflecting the fact that China would not need strategic weapons to attach Japan. It has a number of means to do so.

As for Iran, while the December 2013 NSS puts Iran in the same category as North Korea in terms of nuclear development and calls it 'grave threats', the sense of urgency and the level of concerns about Iran was certainly different from those concerning North Korea. First and foremost, it can be explained by geography – a sense of distance matters. That said, Japan is heavily dependent on oil import from the Persian Gulf region and therefore has stakes in the regional stability. On the other hand, however, as Iran for Japan has always been an important source of energy, it is no secret that Tokyo has always been a reluctant player in terms of imposing economic sanctions on the country – therefore, cannot be vocal in expressing security concerns regarding the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile development.

Another notable seeming lack of threat perception related to proliferation is about nuclear security and the threat of nuclear terrorism. The Barack Obama administration of the US championed nuclear security and convened the annual Nuclear Security Summit. Its Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) of April 2010 described nuclear terrorism as the 'most immediate and extreme danger' facing the United States. While Japan shares the importance of nuclear security including the danger of nuclear terrorism and successive Japanese Prime Ministers attended nuclear security summits, it can still be argued that there is a certain gap at least between Japan and the United States (and probably, but to a lesser degree between Japan and some European countries as well) over the level of threat perceptions. To be sure, as a country that possesses a large number of civilian/commercial nuclear reactors throughout the country and maintains a substantial amount of radioactive materials including plutonium, Tokyo has always been a major player in the field of nuclear security, mainly in the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However, it is quite another matter whether it is a national security threat that requires constant attention at the summit level. Tokyo's approach seems to be to deal with the issues of nuclear security from a technical point of view.

Respective Responses to the Threat

The European Union

Besides declarations and contribution to the international non-proliferation regime, the EU was given the lead position in negotiations with Iran, establishing itself as a convener-in-chief and mediator between the group formed of the UNSC P5 - China, France, Russia, The United Kingdom and the United States - plus Germany and the European Union – the so-called P5+1 and the Iranian regime.

On 2 April 2015, a preliminary framework agreement on the Iranian nuclear dossier was reached between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the group of the P5+1. The negotiations took place between the foreign ministers of the countries at a series of meetings held from 26 March to 2 April 2015 in Lausanne, Switzerland. On 2 April the talks came to a conclusion and a press conference was held by HR/VP Federica Mogherini (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and Mohammad Javad Zarif (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran). The framework agreement was embodied in a document published by the European External Action Service titled Joint Statement by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and in a document published by the US Department of State titled Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program.

On 14 July 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - a comprehensive agreement based on the April 2015 framework - between Iran and the P5+1 countries was announced. According to this deal, Iran would redesign, convert, and reduce its nuclear facilities and accept the Additional Protocol (with provisional application) in order to lift all nuclear-related economic sanctions. In addition to the joint statement, the United States and Iran issued fact sheets of their own

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran has undoubtedly been a success for all the participating countries to the negotiations, but in particular for the EU and the office of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Policy and Security Affairs (Catherine Ashton in the period November 2010-October 2014 and Federica Mogherini afterwards). The Europeans acted as mediators within the P5+1 countries, in particular between the positions of the US and China. Washington had traditionally advocated a tougher line towards Teheran, while China would consistently oppose sanctions or a stronger stance against the Iranian regime for both economic reasons and fear of spill-over effects on China's Western provinces. China wants political stability in Western and Central Asia where Iran is a key player. Central Asia is in fact a matter of direct concern for China, the instability of which could be exported to the Chinese north-western autonomous region of Xinjiang. Therefore, Beijing has sought to avoid any military operation against Teheran that could destabilise the region and potentially lead to an outbreak of war.

In a number of occasions, the Europeans tried to reduce the distance between the position of the US and that of China. In addition, the Community level was also instrumental in lessening the differences, on the one hand, between France and the United Kingdom – known for their critical position on the dossier - and, on the other hand, between the Paris-London axis and those EU member states more interested in finding a compromise, such as Germany and Italy.

The framework agreement reached by the P5+1 countries with the Iranian regime in July 2015 stands as an example of the EU's ability to find a compromise both internally as well as externally, something that could be of use in case the EU were given a role in the other major nuclear dossier: North Korea.

Japan

Given the country's unique history that it is the only country in the world which suffered military nuclear bombing and the resultant anti-nuclear sentiment among the public, it is of no surprise that Japan has long pursued and argued for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament (particularly the latter). It is arguably one of the most consistent priority items for Japan's foreign policy. As Japan does not possess nuclear weapons, it cannot directly reduce the number of nuclear weapons that exist in the world, yet Tokyo believes it can help raise people's awareness about nuclear disarmament and facilitate the international public opinion for nuclear disarmament. It was in this context that Japan strongly supported the Obama administration's goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The visit of Obama to Hiroshima in June 2016 as the first sitting US president was hailed in Japan not only as a symbol of reconciliation between the two former enemies in World War II, but also as an invaluable opportunity to galvanise the momentum of nuclear disarmament, which at that time was seen to be dying.

On another front, Tokyo has been taking the lead in the framework of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) since 2010, including hosting a foreign ministers' meeting in Hiroshima in April 2014. Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida under the Abe government is particularly committed to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, partly because he is from Hiroshima and has his constituency there.

As for North Korea's nuclear development, the main pillars of Japan's response have been what is often called 'dialogue and deterrence'. The dialogue part of this mix has been represented by Japan's participation in the Six-Party Talks, but it has almost ceased to function as a viable framework to deal with the nuclear issue as a result of Pyongyang's more assertive and determined position to maintain its nuclear programme and the apparent advancement of nuclear weaponisation, including the delivery vehicles such as its claim to have developed sea-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Few people now believe that the Six-Party Talks could make North Korea abandon its cherished nuclear programme. An increasing number of experts argue that the challenge for Japan and the wider international community is no longer about preventing nuclear proliferation – it is too late – but about how we can still stop North Korea from proliferating its nuclear and ballistic missile technologies to other countries.

As for deterrence (or punishment), Tokyo has stepped up its sanctions against Pyongyang both in the context of successive UN Security Council resolutions and bilaterally. At a more operational level, closer US-Japan cooperation and trilateral defence cooperation between Japan, the US and South Korea in addressing threats from North Korea are also becoming more important, despite the fact that the South Korean domestic political situation is now particularly unstable and unpredictable in the Spring of 2017, and appeared it is likely to remain so for some time. In the meantime, North Korea's nuclear and missile activities have escalated in 2016, which saw two nuclear tests and more 20 instances of missile launches in the vicinity of Japan. Tokyo now deploys its ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability on a rather permanent basis – both SM-3 based on Aegis ships and Patriot theatre missile defence system (including the deployment of the Patriot system in the compound of the Ministry of Defense Headquarters in central Tokyo). It was in this context that US Secretary of Defense James Mattis visited South Korea and Japan as his very first foreign visit since assuming office,

demonstrating US resolve to counter the threat from North Korea and showing the seriousness of the problem.

At the same time, nuclear weapons for Japan cannot be only an object of non-proliferation and disarmament. It is also about Japan's security and defence. After all, US strategic nuclear capability constitutes the core of extended deterrence – Japan is under the so-called 'nuclear umbrella'. Japan's 2013 NSS states that 'with regard to the threat of nuclear weapons, the extended deterrence of the U.S. with nuclear deterrence at its core is indispensable' (emphasis added). In light of North Korea's nuclear development, China's modernisation of its nuclear arsenal, and the shifting conventional balance in the region, the role of nuclear weapons is likely to increase rather than decrease. At least for those who are responsible for the country's security, nuclear disarmament cannot be seen as an end in itself, but needs to be always treated as a means to ensure security. It might be helpful to be reminded that the original formulation of the idea of a world without nuclear weapons actually reflected this – what was sought was not a world without nuclear weapons per se at all cost as an end in itself, but it was 'the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons' that Obama declared he would seek. This distinction is significant – meaning that achieving peace and security is of higher priority.

Japan's position of simultaneously promoting nuclear disarmament and relying on extended nuclear deterrence by the US sometimes invite criticisms both within the country as well as from abroad. Beyond charges of indecisiveness and hypocrisy, it poses a dilemma to Tokyo particularly when dealing with the issues of 'humanitarian impact' of nuclear use, an increasingly topical issue in the world, and the treaty to ban nuclear weapons. Tokyo has been struggling to decide whether or not to support documents related to the humanitarian consequences on various occasions such as at UN conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. Also Washington was reported as forcing Japan to vote against the start of the nuclear weapons ban treaty in 2016. It is Japan that promoted the story of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, showing the inhumane nature of nuclear use, but the argument that nuclear weapons should never be used in any circumstances in light of humanitarian consequences cannot be easily reconcilable with Tokyo's stated position that nuclear deterrence is 'indispensable' – nuclear deterrence cannot work if assuming that nuclear weapons will never be employed. Reflecting strong domestic criticism and Foreign Minister Kishida's apparent commitment to nuclear disarmament, Tokyo argues that it will participate in the treaty negotiations. However, it is highly questionable whether it will really make sense for Japan (or any other country) to join the negotiations while opposing the very merit of the treaty under negotiation. This exemplifies the basic dilemma from which Tokyo cannot escape.

In addressing proliferation threats and challenges, export control is of particular significance and there are three major aspects. The first challenge is how we can prevent and intercept illegal transfer/export of weapons particularly by proliferators such as North Korea. This involves intelligence and physical capability including the militaries, coast guards and customs forces. The international community has stepped up its efforts in this regard in the wake of the 9.11 terrorist attacks against the US in 2001. The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is one of the highlights and Tokyo has been actively participating in it including by hosting in Japan a live exercise involving various countries. In no small part by intelligence cooperation and the development of technical expertise in monitoring illegal flow of weapons, there have been some successful cases of interception of illegal transfer of weapons and related materials and

equipment, including the series of cases of seizures in Thailand and in other places of North Korean shipments.

The second aspect is about how to regulate arms sales and transfer, involving both international regulations like the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and domestic/national regulations and codes of conduct. Japan has been an active member of the MTCR as well as the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and Zangger Commission for nuclear materials, Australia Group (AG) for chemical and biological weapons and the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) for conventional weapons.

As for arms transfer and export control at the national level, there is now a wholly new context within which Tokyo needs to deal with these issues as a result of the relaxation of the ‘three non-arms export principles’, the process of which started in 2011. For a long time since 1976, Japan banned practically all arms export including arms technology transfers and joint research and development (R&D) with other countries. The government led by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda in December 2011 decided to relax this restriction out of concern about the increasing unit cost of defence equipment in Japan and the need to maintain the country’s defence industrial base. The Abe government which succeeded Noda is more committed to arms export and equipment cooperation with an increasing number of countries including major European countries such as the United Kingdom and France. In conducting joint R&D and joint production in the future, one of the most sensitive issues for Japan is how to regulate transfer of technology and products to third countries. Tokyo wants to ensure that technology and products jointly developed with other countries will not end up in the hands of unintended countries – including those which are currently engaged in violent conflict, but the biggest concern that Tokyo has is about China. Put simply, Tokyo wants to ensure that China will not benefit from technology and products that Japan develops with other countries. This represents a challenge for Japan-Europe equipment cooperation as will be discussed in the following section.

The problems concerning China leads to the third, more political, aspect, which is about the relationship between arms export and strategic engagement. We do not normally perceive of legal and legitimate arms export as an issue of proliferation. However, the distinction between what is ‘legitimate’ and what is not is often far from clear and can only be subjective depending on what position one takes. For instance, US arms sales to Taiwan may be legitimate to Americans and Taiwanese, but unacceptably illegitimate for Beijing. As for export control vis-à-vis China, there seems to be a Western consensus (including Japan and Europe) that the country presents a particular challenge. But there does not seem to be a consensus as to why we need to be careful – because China poses direct security threats and challenges? Because China is not a democracy and violating human rights? Because China would copy Western technologies (hence an issue of intellectual property rights)? Because China’s trade and investment regulations and standards are still discriminatory? It is simply impossible in practical terms to have a clear consensus on these issues, but in addressing the issues of non-proliferation, arms export and export control, there needs to be a shared sense of the need, at least, to ensure that arms export aligns with political and strategic objectives.

3. EU-Japan Cooperation in Non-Proliferation

The EU and Japan obviously share the objective of preventing the proliferation of WMD and their delivery vehicles, providing for a basic foundation on which to cooperate. Indeed, Japan and the EU have some successful cases of cooperation in this field, including the establishment of the UN Conventional Arms Register back in 1993. It constituted one of the earliest concrete examples of EU-Japan political and security cooperation.

The Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation adopted in 2001 emphasized peace and security as one of the four basic objectives in the EU-Japan relationship over the following ten-year period until 2011. Regarding non-proliferation, Brussels and Tokyo committed themselves to promote the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), urging all states to maintain the existing global moratoria on nuclear testing. Moreover, the EU and Japan proposed to exchange information on cooperation with Russia, in the field of non-proliferation, such as the disposition of surplus weapon-grade plutonium.

The Non-proliferation Treaty calls for countries with nuclear weapons to work towards disarmament. The United States and Russia have been working jointly to meet disarmament goals through several agreements, one of which is the Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement, or PMDA. Each country will dispose of at least 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium by using it as fuel in commercial power reactors to produce electricity. Combined, this disposed plutonium represents enough material for approximately 17,000 nuclear weapons. By proposing to exchange information on Russia's disposition of surplus weapon-grade plutonium, the EU and Japan would thus give content to their political statements on non-proliferation.

Japan issued its first white paper on disarmament in 2002 (updated in 2004) while the EU adopted its Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in December 2003. The two documents formed the basis of the EU-Japan Joint Declaration on Disarmament and Non-proliferation which, since its adoption in 2004, provides the political framework for Brussels-Tokyo cooperation on non-proliferation. The EU-Japan Joint Declaration on Disarmament and Non-proliferation identifies three priority areas for cooperation:

- Early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT);
- Early commencement of negotiations on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty;
- Universalization of the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguard Agreements and Additional Protocols.

The EU-Japan Troika Working Group was subsequently tasked to revise the above list as necessary, through regular and ad-hoc consultations also taking into account Brussels-Tokyo regular political dialogue. The EU-Japan Joint Declaration on Disarmament and Non-proliferation remains until today the foundation on which the two sides can further develop their bilateral cooperation in support of the multilateral non-proliferation regime as well as for addressing what is possibly the most ominous challenge to the NPT Treaty: North Korea.

In overall terms, however, the level of EU-Japan cooperation in non-proliferation cannot be said to be high – or at least not as high as it could be given the high level of commitment the two partners put on non-proliferation.

One of the main reasons for such a lacklustre nature of cooperation has to do with the fact that the EU is not always seen by Tokyo as a full actor in this regard. Whereas Brussels has an exclusive competence when it comes to imposing economic sanctions to other countries such as North Korea, the process of passing United Nations Security Council resolutions depend on individual members, particularly the two permanent members of the Security Council – the United Kingdom and France. In other related venues like the MTCR, Nuclear Suppliers Group and Zangger Commission, the European Union or the European Commission has only an observer status in addition to individual member states.

While nuclear disarmament is and will remain one of the most important foreign policy and strategic goals for Japan, there is not much Japan and the EU can achieve as it is predominantly dependent on the willingness of the US and Russia. In light of the state of US-Russia relations today, there is little prospect for any substantial progress in this regard. Japan and the EU have little leverage in this regard. Moreover, for both the EU and Japan, Washington is the main security guarantor and as such Brussels-Tokyo relations in the field of nuclear disarmament will always depend on their overall bilateral relationship with the United States.

Furthermore, concerning the debate on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, in addition to Japan's ambiguity and dilemma, there is no consensus within the EU as it encompasses both NATO and non-NATO countries as well as both nuclear and non-nuclear countries. While it may be easy to agree on the importance of maintaining the non-proliferation regime under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the issues of nuclear disarmament are trickier as an item for EU-Japan cooperation.

Instead, export control is arguably the policy area Japan seeks cooperation with the EU most and Brussels has a clearer competence compared to other non-proliferation-related fields, where Brussels has no competence whatsoever or only limited (and often ambiguous) role. It is already often highlighted in various Japan-Europe dialogue frameworks, including the 2+2, foreign and defence ministers' meeting between Japan and France. Tokyo and Paris agreed in January 2014 to establish a new committee addressing the issue of export control. Export control is also one of the most important items in the EU-Japan negotiations on the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), assumed to be signed together with the free trade agreement (FTA) / economic partnership agreement (EPA) between the EU and Japan. While using a seemingly neutral term of export control, Tokyo's aim is clear, which is to prevent the Europeans from selling arms, dual-use and other sensitive technologies and equipment to China. The European side seems fully aware of this and the remaining question is to what extent Japan and Europe share perceptions on China. However, it is significant to remember that the importance of ensuring effective export control measures goes beyond China and European companies are increasingly concerned about the protection of intellectual property right (IPR) in China and beyond.

In a broader context, Japan and the EU as defenders of the rules-based liberal international order have capability as well as interest in consolidating international regimes regulating non-proliferation such as MTCR, NSG and the Wassenaar Arrangement. The latter - also known as The Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods

and Technologies - is a multilateral export control regime with 41 participating states including many former Warsaw Pact countries. The Wassenaar Arrangement was established to contribute to regional and international security and stability by promoting transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies, thus preventing destabilizing accumulations. Participating States seek, through their national policies, to ensure that transfers of these items do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military capabilities which undermine these goals, and are not diverted to support such capabilities. The Wassenaar Arrangement is the successor to the Cold War-era Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls, and was established on 12 July 1996, in Wassenaar, the Netherlands.

Yet, the new element that complicates EU-Japan joint efforts is the UK's impending withdrawal from the EU. Given the country's role, which is still often seen as 'punching above its weight', in international negotiations, not least in rule-making, the EU after the Brexit is likely to be a weaker player on the world stage. From Tokyo's point of view, what is necessary to contemplate, therefore, is how Japan and the EU could keep the UK involved in Japan-EU cooperation not least in the field of foreign, security and defence policy including non-proliferation.

Conclusions

The EU and Japan share the objective of preventing the proliferation of WMD and their delivery vehicles, providing for a basic foundation on which to cooperate. As mentioned above, Japan and the EU have some successful cases of cooperation in this field, including the establishment of the UN Conventional Arms Register back in 1993. Yet, there has not yet been a case of practical cooperation in recent times between Tokyo and Brussels – something akin to the China-EU collaboration on the Iran's nuclear file – that would test their ability to join forces on a major issue. North Korea's nuclear dossier could be such a test, given that it is a matter of concern for both Japan and the EU. The two sides have coordinated their views in the UN framework, in particular in adopting sanctions against Pyongyang, following the regime's repeated provocations in the last years. Were the EU and Japan be able to collaborate more closely on North Korea's nuclear dossier, this would undoubtedly give further meaning and content to the EU-Japan strategic partnership.