

Strategic Independence as a Strategy for European and Asian Connectivity and as a Global Strategy

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Europe's "Indo-Pacific" strategy as part of its global strategy

It has been announced that the British aircraft carrier "Queen Elizabeth," a German frigate ship, and a French aircraft carrier will be dispatched to the East China Sea. The atmosphere that has stirred up major European countries' sudden launch on the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" led by Japan with the US, India, and Australia together has been intensified as a strengthening of the "encirclement of China." However, fostering excessive expectations and speculation should be warned. I would like to support the further efforts of Japanese authorities of foreign affairs to strengthen and revitalize Japan-Europe cooperation, and the continuation of that policy in the future. However, it is important to note that if domestic public opinion is diverted toward the ongoing implementation of the "encirclement of China" by Japan, the United States, India, and Australia including Europe, it might lead to misreading the European strategy and misleading Japan's diplomacy.

In March 2021, the United Kingdom revised its "Strategic Defence and Security Review," which was published in 2015, and announced a "Global Britain in a Competitive Age, the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy." Prior to that, France announced its comprehensive strategies: "Security in France and the Indo-Pacific" in June 2018, "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific" and "French Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific" by the Ministère de la guerre (Ministry of Defense) in May and June 2019, and "France's Strategy in the Indo-Pacific: Seeking an Inclusive Indo-Pacific" by the Minister of European and Diplomatic Issues (Quai d'Orsay, MEEA) in June of the same year. In September 2020, Germany announced the "Indo-Pacific guidelines" as pushed by France (for details, see my manuscript, JFIR World Review Vol. 4, How to Look at Europe: Europe's "Strategic Independence" and a New "Global Strategy" (scheduled to be published in June 2021).

I think it would be better to position the series of constructive policies for East Asian diplomacy regarding the UK, France, and Germany not only as a shift in the "Indo-Pacific" of major European countries, but also as a part of the "global strategy." The UK, Germany, and France view the "Indo-Pacific" region as a potential region for economic development, as well as an unstable region due to terrorism, human rights persecution, and power politics, etc. They place great importance on Europe's role as a conflict mediator and arbitrator in the region. Europe's commitment to the Indo-Pacific extends to the political realm. I think it must be noted that there are other points that should be noted—not only the positive aspects of Japan's policy toward China and Eurasia, but also that discrepancies may arise between Japan's diplomacy with China and Russia. In territorial and maritime issues, it is the traditional European claim that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea should be respected. In addition, the major opinion is that Europe should be neutral towards the conflict between the United States and China.

First of all, China is included as a central country in the string of the Indo-Pacific region of the UK, France, and Germany, rather than being surrounded by them. Second, Europe has a multi-polar view of the world, and it does not recognize the view of the world regarding the conflict between the United States and China. This is because there is the idea that "such a confrontational composition will never be for us or the world." Thirdly, as the background to said stance, Europe's orientation of

"strategic independence" is intensifying amid the confusion of the U.S.-Europe relations since the birth of the Trump administration, and Europe has started to consider that it should naturally commit to Asia because of concerns that it will be behind the United States and China in Asia where further development is expected. Fourth, in that sense, Europe's "strategic independence" is a goal for the development of regional integration through digital transformation in the region and the improvement of international competitiveness in terms of environment (green deals), etc. and at the same time, it seems to also have the meaning of a global strategy, which is an international policy as a global player and the establishment of an external presence.

Power shift and loss of confidence in Europe: Strategic independence in a multi-polar world

The background to this is a major transformation of the international order and European self-awareness.

Since the early 2010s, Europe began to be very aware of the multipolarization and rise of China. Long after the end of the Cold War, France and other countries began to make claims about multipolarization. This was a strategic objective in response to the single-pole rule of the United States, but it has become a reality since the beginning of the 21st century as China emerged. While multipolarization has a number of meanings, the difference from Japan's perception is that it emphasizes the shadow thrown on the influence of the United States.

Although there were high expectations from Europe for the Obama administration, unlike the Bush administration, expectations changed to disappointment partway through. In the Trump era, the US-Europe relationship became unstable, including the conflict over NATO's defense budget burden rate, the tariff war, and the Iran agreement, and Europe no longer has any expectations for a major shift following the Biden administration. On the other hand, the rise of China not only covers the economy, but also politics, military, and security.

The second point is the reduced influence of Europe. In particular, at the Copenhagen conference on climate warming in December 2009, Europe was preparing a bold proposal, positioning the conference as an important conference to discuss the "post-Kyoto Protocol." But as a result, the United States and China—the two largest carbon-emitting countries—indicated their reluctance, and the claims made by Europe were not accepted. The so-called "G2 (US and China)", an international system, impressed people. On the other hand, it amplified the so-called "European skepticism." In addition, a meeting was held just before the summit in London in the same year, and an agreement was reached for the creation of the "US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue," which was a significant blow to Europe.

Europe's confidence has been significantly shaken in front of the so-called world's "power shift," namely the rise of China and an increase in economic weight to Asia, including India and East Asia. According to Hasnale, a well-known international political scholar in France, Europe was led to have the pessimistic view that "Europe is no longer one pole of the multipolarized world." Another prominent China researcher, Godement, set up the concept of a pair of opposites, "winner" and "loser," and put Europe and Japan as the "losers."

Such a view was also shared in the 2010 EU Institute for Security Studies report¹¹. Although China is still a developing country, it is a "major developing country," and it has already turned from a revolutionary power to a status quo power. In addition, it seemed that such changes in the identity of China had begun to change China's pattern in international behavior. Rather than being competitive

against the United States, China became more cooperative and encouraged itself to participate in regional cooperation, rather than having hopes for a change in the regional power structure. The report developed a somewhat optimistic argument that affluence would lead to peaceful action.

This loss of confidence in Europe will lead to the search for its own policy on China and Asia as "strategic independence" in the 2016 "Global Strategy," following the period of weakened trust towards the United States in the Obama and Trump eras.

The EU's bilateral policy on China

After the end of the Cold War, times when there was an intimate relationship between China and Europe alternated.

After the end of the Cold War, the European Commission announced a "New Asia Strategy" in 1995, and adopted "A Long Term Policy for China-Europe Relations" in 1998, which clarified a long-term strategy for the relationship with China in the same year, and a communique "Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China" in 1998. The latter was a practical starting point for today's policy on China. In 2002, the EU announced the "Country Strategy Paper: China 2002-2006," and in the next year, China announced the first white paper on EU relations. In September 2003, the European Commission adopted a policy paper called "A maturing partnership - shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations." In this year, the aforementioned "Comprehensive Partnership," was concluded in the form of a "more strategic partnership," started in earnest. The 1st EU-China Strategic Dialogue (London) was launched in December 2005. In October 2006, the European Commission adopted the communique, "EU-China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities" and "A Policy Paper on Trade and Investment."

The EU's multipolarization orientation was clearly demonstrated by its approach to China. To be specific, first of all, China participated in the EU-led global navigation satellite system development plan (Galileo program), which competes with the U.S. Global Positioning System (GPS). China has provided a large amount of financial assistance for this project. Second, EU member states supporting China's participation insisted on lifting the ongoing embargo on arms exports to China that has been in place since 1989. Third, China supported the euro while stimulating trade with the EU at the same time. Challenging the international monetary system which is the dollar system, China has increased its foreign currency reserves of euro and enhanced the diversification of foreign currencies. In other words, China attempted to drive a wedge between the Western system of the United States and Europe by participating in the Galileo program and supporting the euro. The EU, on the other hand, was in line with China's multipolarization orientation to some extent.

However, friction between the EU and China has surfaced since the late 2000s. At that time, the EU was opposed to China's unfair trade practices, depreciation of the yuan, political barriers, and on the other hand, China was opposed to the EU's lack of considering China as a market economy country in the WTO framework. As a result, the EU-China High Level Meeting was inaugurated in April 2008. In July of the same year, the European Commission removed Chinese contractors from the second phase of the Galileo program, and the EU was antagonistic to China by pointing out China's unfair trade practices, neglect of intellectual property rights, and lack of mutual respect in open bidding, and so on. In addition, for China, the extension of the EU's coverage to the former Eastern European countries in 2005 meant that the EU was aligned with the US strategy of incorporating the Eastern European countries to the west. In December of the same year, the

"Strategic Dialog" was established between the EU and China, as previously pointed out, in order to restore the situation. It also revealed the contention over human rights issues. In March 2008, the riot control in Lhasa in Tibet was a big shock to the world. In the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing in the same year, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Chancellor of Germany, and the Prime Minister of Italy were absent, and consequently the EU-China Summit, which was scheduled in November, was postponed.

However, the friction between Europe and China has been alleviated during the euro crisis since 2009. China purchased a large amount of non-performing euro loans to put Europe under an obligation, and wanted the EU to be the balancer of the U.S. hegemony along with China by supporting the euro. The approach of EU countries toward China has once again become more pronounced.

Such a view started to change significantly after Xi Jinping took office in the Chinese government in 2012ⁱⁱⁱ. This was because Xi Jinping spoke about the "Chinese Dream" and began proposing the "Belt and Road Initiative." This meant China's expansion strategy in Eurasia. A major explicit policy change was the announcement of the EU's strategy for China in March 2019, called "EU-China – A strategic outlook." In the strategy, China was characterized as (1) a negotiating partner, (2) an economic competitor, and (3) a system rival. In particular, the fact that China has been characterized as a "system rival" has gained great attention. On March 22, 2021, the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted sanctions against four government officials and one organization in the Xinjiang Uighur area for human rights violations. The EU's sanctions against China have been the first in about 30 years since the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Square incident. Already in December of 2020, the EU has introduced a system that is easy for the member states to agree on in the form of a "global human rights sanctions system" and has strengthened its actions in this area.

China in the "Eurasian connectivity"

However, that does not mean that China has been isolated in the EU's policy towards "Eurasia." The EU adopted the "Europe-Asia connectivity strategy" in September 2018, which advocates the connection of transport networks, the connection of digital networks including common standards and infrastructure development, the connection of energy networks focusing on renewable energy, human exchange, bilateral cooperation, multilateral cooperation, and international cooperation, and aims to invest in infrastructure in cooperation with international organizations. The principle of the strategy in Asia emphasized market efficiency, transparency, and adherence to international rules. In the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in the next month of the same year, Mr. Juncker, President of the European Commission, and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang agreed to ensure the exertion of multiplier effects of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative concept and EU's Europe-Asia connectivity strategy. The aforementioned sanctions imposed by the EU against government officials in March 2021 cover not only officials from China, but also those of Russia, North Korea, South Sudan, Libya, and Eritrea, and military officials who are the principal architects of the Myanmar military coup. Rather than only targeting China, the sanctions take on a comprehensive form, which take into account the universality of the EU's humanitarian position.

In addition, the EU and China concluded a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) at the end of last year. In short, Europe's attitude toward China contains both "vigilance" and "approach" strategies. Europe has strongly expressed its "neutrality" in relations between the United States and China with the EU's serious view that it is only a matter of time before China surpasses the United States. At the end of last year, a survey conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)^{iv} also found that 60 percent of people in Europe support "neutrality" regarding the U.S.-China conflict. Europe's true intention is that it does not want to get involved in the U.S.-China bilateral conflict, called the "New Cold War."

The EU's envisaged solution to the dispute between Japan and China

In light of this, it is better to consider the dispatch of ships to the Indo-Pacific Ocean by England, Germany, and France which was introduced at the beginning of this paper as a part of the Eurasian and global strategy to include China, rather than as a "containment of China."

Europe is refraining from commenting on the territorial conflict and historical issues in East Asia. The report of the European Union Institute for Security Studies, "Pride and prejudice: maritime disputes in Northeast Asia," proposes a solution based on the basic theories of European integration, the idea of "neofunctionalism"^v. In other words, it is a way to explore the process of political reconciliation by building a cooperative system in areas and fields where common interests can be found and agreed on.

The transformation of the international structure in Asia is characterized by the asymmetry of Japan-China power with the power shift as the background, the competition between the United States and China, and the Japan-US alliance (U.S.-China conflict) and China. In this regard, the policy of the United States is a strategic encirclement of China, which is intended to suppress the "challenger" against the United States. The report analyzes China's view considering Japan as an agent of the U.S. hegemony

In that regard, the conflict between Japan and China has arisen due to four reasons: The uplift of nationalism of both countries, the mutual historical conflict, the fact that leaders are using external threats to boost domestic politics, and the fact that the mutual response is causing a negative spiral phenomenon.

First, with regard to the uplift of nationalism, a public opinion poll found that the mutual likability between Japan and China is very poor, being between 6 to 11 percent. The report describes the psychological situation of the people from both countries behind the Senkaku territorial disputes: China is trying to demonstrate the revival of the Great Power, and on the other hand, Japan is trying to give off the impression of "strong Japan" contrary to the country's stagnation.

However, the report points out that the factors preventing conflict between Japan and China are the self-esteem and prejudice of both countries, based on the presupposition that the historical conflict is resolvable, introducing the case example of postwar reconciliation between Germany and France despite the experience of the Nazi era. For Japan and China to reconcile, it is essential for both sides to give up and accept their pasts.

On the other hand, economic exchanges between the two countries, Track 2, and student-private-cultural exchanges are developing. The report offers the opinion that a breakthrough should be found in improving confidence-building through cooperation in these fields. To that end, the following should be utilized: Functional cooperation by field through Joint Development Agreement, Joint Oil

and Gas Development, Joint Fisheries Agreement, UN Framework (UNCLOS, UNCED, etc.) and Regional Framework (CSCAP + EU, Analysis of Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) (NAPCI)).

In particular, the EU's role in resolving the situation is to support the study of solutions at the CSCAP-EU workshop launched in November 7 2014. To support this, it is recommended, as the offered proposal, that a solution path be taken in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) ratified by Japan and China in 1996. Here, the EU has expressed its hope that the international and legal systems in accordance with laws and rules will make it possible to approach a solution. Japan has an optimistic outlook. As I said earlier, the EU wants to have an influence on the stability of the international order as its prescriptive power, so it is in a position where it can play a role in the security of the East China Sea as an "advocate of codes." This attitude of the EU could be a double-edged sword.

For Japan, it is therefore possible to offer a great deal of cooperation in terms of freedom and safety of ocean navigation, but there is still room for doubt as to how much it will help resolve disputes between Japan and China. The foreign affair authorities understand this well to the best of the author's knowledge. As we take a holistic view of Eurasia, including Europe, it will be essential to propose and build a multilateral cooperative security framework with institutionalization, while strengthening the multilateral network.

ⁱ John Fox and Francois Godement, *A power Audit of EU-China Relations* (European Council on Foreign Relations), Asia Centre, April 2009.

ⁱⁱ Zhu Liqun, *Chaillot Paper: China's Foreign Policy Debates* (September 2010)

ⁱⁱⁱ My manuscript: "The Chinese Dream viewed from Europe: How to respond to China's new international order concept" published in "East Asia," July 2016

^{iv} Ivan Krastev, Mark Leonard *THE CRISIS OF AMERICAN POWER: HOW EUROPEANS SEE BIDEN'S AMERICA*, ECFR January 2021

^v Elena Atanassova-Corneils and Roman Pacheco Pardo and Eva Pejsova, *Pride and Prejudice, Maritime Dipute Northeast Asia, Report No23* March 2015, EUISS.