

Chapter 7: US “Withdrawal” from the War in Ukraine and Europe’s Choice: Japan-Europe Partnership Soars

◆ EU remains the largest supporter of the war in Ukraine while military and financial aid from the US declines

A new EU leadership was established after the European Parliament elections in June. The pending re-appointment of European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen was decided, and former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas was chosen as the new High Representative of the European External Action Service. The appointment of former Estonian Prime Minister Kallas, who has taken a very tough stance toward Russia, is proof that the EU sees the war in Ukraine as its utmost priority.

The EU’s first security partnership with Japan was concluded in 2024, and the EU will continue to recognize the need for cooperation with the Indo-Pacific in security policy. The EU itself has begun to communicate its “complementarity” with NATO in security policy, and it is expected that cooperation with Japan in the security field will increase. Hungary, which has remained reluctant to support Ukraine, has held the presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2024 but, despite some disunity among the member states, Council is expected to operate smoothly under Poland’s leadership in 2025. On the other hand, the EU is likely to face difficulties in steering its affairs due to increasing disagreements with the US under the Trump administration.

◆ “Discontent” within member states spurs growth of far-right and far-left parties

Looking at the lineup of leaders in the new EU regime, support for and solidarity with Ukraine appears firm, and there is a strong consensus within the EU that the war in Ukraine is “a matter of own security”. On the other hand, there is a considerable psychological distance between the European elites and the citizens in the member states, and the great strides made in France and Germany by far-right and far-left parties in the June 2024 European Parliament elections are still a fresh memory. Although a leftist coalition won in France, there is a faction within the coalition that seeks to dismantle NATO, so stable government management is likely to be extremely difficult. The French presidential election in 2027 is expected to see the far-right rise again. Some far-right parties in Europe have close ties to the Trump administration, which will boost their popularity. Anti-immigration and economic measures are considered more pressing issues for far-right parties than the war in Ukraine, and strong opposition to the European elite is likely to be expressed.



New NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte (Left) (Photo: Reuters/ Afro)

For far-left parties, on the other hand, the double standard highlighted by the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is problematic. In any case, support for Ukraine is an “unpopular” policy for radicals at both ends of the political spectrum, and the more united the EU elites become, the more divergent their views will become from those of the radicals who have attracted their support, making a change of government in member states possible. With Bundestag elections set to be held in Germany in February, the new government may face an unstable administration depending on how many seats radi-

cal parties such as AfD and BSW win. In countries such as Hungary where radical parties are already in power, there will be an increasing amount of discourse that will disrupt EU solidarity.

◆ **The rise of far-right and far-left parties will have a major impact on relations with China**

Economic policy is a key issue for far-right parties in the face of protracted inflation and rising unemployment, and their focus is on expanding into the Chinese market. The fact that Prime Minister Victor Orbán set up a meeting with President Xi Jinping soon after Hungary took over the presidency of the Council of the European Union is a clear indication of his focus on the Chinese market. It has also been revealed that the secretary to a key politician in Germany’s far-right AfD party was a Chinese spy, so one should be wary of the ties between populist parties and China. The Indo-Pacific is an issue that has received less attention from far-left parties than the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. There are also traditional skeptics of NATO, who tend to place less emphasis on the importance of deterrence when it comes to security issues.

The Trump administration is expected to take a hardline attitude toward NATO. Even though it is unlikely that the US will completely withdraw from NATO, it is possible that the US will effectively reduce NATO’s functions by repeatedly refusing to participate in joint missions, and thus a dysfunctional NATO will come under increasing pressure from both the left and right.

◆ **Recommendations**

- While Europe itself has begun to communicate the linkage between North Atlantic and Indo-Pacific issues, Japan needs to continue to communicate this to Europe. The fact that North Korean soldiers have been sent to the Ukrainian front has heightened Europe’s sense of crisis vis-à-vis North Korea, and this should be an opportunity to strengthen international communication from Japan’s perspective on other North Korean issues such as nuclear missile development and abductions of Japanese citizens.
- It is recognized among European experts and practitioners that European security and Indo-Pacific security are becoming increasingly integrated. At the same time, there is not a full understanding at the private-sector level of the linkage between European issues and Indo-Pacific challenges. This may open European countries up to infiltration efforts by certain countries, so efforts should be made to change perceptions at the grassroots level.
- As US involvement in NATO declines, Europe needs to support Ukraine more than ever, and concrete involvement in the Indo-Pacific is expected to decline to a certain degree. It is important to set up mechanisms to get European countries involved in Indo-Pacific security, and it is necessary to continue to cooperate and coordinate with other countries in the future. Mechanisms to get European countries involved in Indo-Pacific security – as typified by the UK’s involvement in the Indo-Pacific through AUKUS and the joint development of fighter jets by Japan, the UK, and Italy – are important, and continued cooperation and coordination with other countries is necessary. To this end, cooperation and coordination among defense industries is urgently required, and Japan’s defense industry needs to work on creating a system and environment for joint production and joint development.
- A renewed discussion is also needed on how Japan can engage with NATO. Now that Japan’s participation in NATO summits has become customary, more in-depth discussions must be undertaken on

specific cooperation beyond that. It is essential that Japan participate more concretely not only in joint exercises in the Indo-Pacific region but also in NATO exercises to promote mutual understanding at the unit level. As Europe provides more support to the Ukrainian front than ever, Japan should also continue to support Ukraine on a larger scale than before to foster further cooperation.

(November 29, 2024, Asako Takashima,
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