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The EU's "Indo-Pacific Strategy" and Key Points for the Future

By WATANABE Hirotaka

Indo-Pacific Strategy for the EU's "Global Strategy"

In March of this year, the U.K. released "Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy," a revision of its 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, which focuses on promoting Global Great Britain. Germany also announced its Indo-Pacific Guidelines in September 2020 and plans to send a frigate to the East China Sea this summer.

Indo-Pacific Strategy Outline Announced

On April 16, the EU announced the conclusions of its Indo-Pacific Cooperation Strategy (hereinafter referred to as the "Strategy"). According to the Strategy, the Indo-Pacific region is the most important in the world for the future, accounting for 60% of the world's population, 60% of the world's GDP, two thirds of the world's economic growth, and an overwhelming majority (90%) of the world's 2.4 billion middle class expected to be living in the region by 2030. This is the most important region in the world. The region is also home to 60% of the world's maritime trade, a third of which passes through the South China Sea. Therefore, the trade and shipping routes in the region must be safe not only for the countries of the region but also for European nations. This view of the strategic document is consistent with the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy advocated by Japan.

However, in reality, trade and supply chains in the region are situated in an unstable political and security environment. Therefore, how to commit to the regional security of the economic partner countries, which will become even more important for the EU in the future, is an urgent issue. The truth is that Europe cannot remain indifferent to this region as a cornerstone of the struggle between the US, China, and Russia. It is natural for Europe to desire securing its presence in the region, and this "Strategy" is a part of the EU's global approach. This is where the true significance of this "Strategy" lies.

Moreover, the "Indo-Pacific region," as pointed out by the EU, means a broad area encompassing from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Island countries. It is not just the commitment centred on the East China Sea that is being discussed in Japan. Although

diplomacy often takes place under the same team, different goal, if the EU's strategy is viewed only from the standpoint of encircling China, the vision of Japanese diplomacy will be narrow and limited. Rather, the EU's interest in the Indo-Pacific is broad and comprehensive. From the European perspective, this is a region of authoritarian regimes. Therefore, the EU's engagement includes involvement over value and norms such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. It is also a strategy for overall engagement in stabilizing and promoting order in the region. This cooperation covers the full range of global issues, such as development assistance, humanitarian aid, climate change, biodiversity, environmental pollution, infection prevention/healthcare, and compliance with international law, including human rights and freedom of navigation. This makes Japan a potential collaborator as well as a peaceful "competitor".

Strategic Independence as a Broader Global Strategy

The EU's new Asia policy is based on the idea of "strategic independence". The EU adopted its first strategic document at the end of the Iraq war in 2003 (*European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in A Better World*, commonly known as the "Solana Strategy"). In 2016, the strategy paper "Global Strategy" set forth the concept of "strategic independence" and even launched the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) as an attempt to create a unified EU force (Refer to my article, *Janet e-World*, March 17, 2021). This "strategic independence" is often discussed in the context of the EU's foreign and security policy. It was German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who first advocated European self-reliance in autumn 2016 right after the Trump administration took office.

On the other hand, in addition to the independence regarding external relations, strategic independence also means, among European leaders, the promotion of comprehensive integration, including economic and social domains, in order to strengthen the centripetal force for pursuing further integration within the region. Strategic independence does not only mean externally, but also involves intra-regional cooperation. For example, the introduction of a digital tax and border carbon tax as the EU's own financial resources, a "Digital Corpus" that includes the training of 20 million IT professionals, 20% share of the world market for next-generation semiconductor production, and an "Edge Computing," not to mention the "green bonds" worth up to 325 billion euros to reduce dependence on the dollar. The Framework Program for Research and Innovation (Horizon Europe 2021-27), agreed last December, supports this. In particular, under the new administration of European Commission President von der Leyen launched last year, the EU is pursuing to strengthen its competitiveness and international cooperation in the two areas of the "Green Deal (i.e. preventing global warming, protecting the environment, and

fostering related industries)" and the "Digital Transformation." Strategic independence is in fact the EU's broader global strategy.

On the EU's official website at the end of March, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EU Foreign Minister) Borrell stated, "Today's world is not binary (as in a dichotomy or the US-Soviet Bipolar Conflict: additional explanation by the author), but a multipolar one. He argued that Europe should break away from its "dependence on the US" for defence and from its excessive economic "dependence on China" and become independent. The EU is fed up with the constant frictions during the Trump presidency, including the tariff wars and withdrawals from the Paris Agreement, the Iran Agreement, and the INF Treaty, and is still distrustful of the U.S. even after the Biden administration. On the other hand, the EU is seeking its own stance to deal with the instability in Asia. This is Europe's "survival strategy" in the era of the U.S.-China "G2," but it is also the idea behind its expanded involvement in the Indo-Pacific region.

EU-Eurasian Connectivity: The Key is Cooperation with ASEAN

The EU's cooperation in Asia is broad and wide-ranging, but its main point is characterized by a multifaceted and diverse "connectivity" from Eurasia to the Indo-Pacific region. China is not necessarily cut off from the EU's "Eurasia" policy. In September 2018, the EU adopted the Europe-Asia Connectivity Strategy, which advocates connectivity of transportation networks, digital networks including common standards and infrastructure development, energy networks, especially renewable energy. It also focuses on human exchange, bilateral cooperation, multilateral cooperation, and international cooperation, and targets infrastructure investment in collaboration with international organizations. In addition, at the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) in the following month of the same year, European Commission President Juncker and Premier Li Keqiang agreed to ensure that China's One Belt, One Road Initiative and the EU's Europe-Asia Connectivity Strategy have a synergistic effect. The EU also emphasizes the importance of connectivity and qualitative infrastructure development, and has launched the "EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy", the "EU-Japan Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure", the "Green Energy Corridor" with India, the "EU-ASEAN Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA, concluded in October 2020)", "Industry 4.0 Cooperation", the "Beyond 5G Dialogue", and increased cultural and scientific exchanges. This implies a caution against dependence on a single market formed by globalization centred on the United States.

As a partner to implement the Strategy, the EU has high expectations for multilateral cooperation with ASEAN, which is also pursuing regional integration. The EU is receptive to a partnership with ASEAN because it is based on a multilateral cooperation

framework and respects ASEAN's centrality. The revitalization of the ASEM will be an effective means to achieve this.

The EU attaches great importance to the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) as a security cooperation in the Strategy. More than 100 participants, including officials from the EU External Action Service (EEAS) and EU Naval Operation "Atlanta", and foreign ministers from Vietnam and Australia, attended the Maritime Security ISM (intersessional meetings), one of the ARF ISMs of the 12th ARF on April 29 to discuss peace, stability, security, and rules-based order. While the foundation of cooperation is for a stable order based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), cooperation to realize "Maritime Security 2018-21" and "Hanoi Action Plan II (2020-25)", and cooperation through the ASEAN Defence Ministerial Meeting Plus (ADMMP) are also underway.

The Indo-Pacific Strategic Document, which I will not go into detail here for the sake of space, includes not only cooperation in the multilateral framework of the "Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)" and the "Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)" in the economic field, but also cooperation efforts in the various areas of "connectivity" mentioned earlier. It sets out a comprehensive approach to cooperation, including Horizon Europe for research and innovation cooperation and the ERASMUS+ program for student exchange. The "EU-ASEAN Strategic Partners Blue Book 2021" outlines a comprehensive cooperation. In this light, even if cooperation with European countries in the immediate security sphere is essential, the core of multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region between the EU and Japan is much broader and multifaceted. A major aspect of future Indo-Pacific strategy will lie in relations with ASEAN.

(This is an English translation of the article written by WATANABE Hirotaka, Academic Member of Global Forum of Japan / Professor, Teikyo University, which originally appeared on the e-forum "Giron-Hyakushutsu (Hundred Views in Full Perspective)" of GFJ on June 14, 2021.)