Prevention, Prevention, Prevention

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Patrick Weimert



Reviewing the Japanese-German Security Dialogue Track 2023

On November 13, the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung of the German Green Party invited to a symposium on 'Current Challenges for Security Politics in Asia and Europe' as part of their Japanese-German Security Dialogue. Part of the agenda was the Indo-Pacific, national security strategies and a rules-based international order. Special focus was put on the German-Japanese

partnership and cooperation possibilities in addressing the challenges occurring in Asia and Europe.

Keynote Speeches

The Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung provided high-level speakers, with Dr. Imme Scholz, president of the Stiftung and His Excellency Hidenao Yanagi, ambassador of Japan to Germany, giving the keynote speeches. Both have mentioned the Russian aggression in Ukraine and its implications for a rules-based international order, a set of rules and norms all states in the world should subscribe to, manifested in post-WWII liberal institutions such as the United Nations. Liberal values like democracy, human rights and the rule of law are the guiding principles of this order, which both Japan and Germany embrace. However, it is unlikely that the audience was wondering if Germany or Japan were in favour of such a rules-based order. More likely they were waiting for ideas on how to defend this order against challenges, like the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Something neither Dr. Scholz nor Ambassador Yanagi had sufficient answers on.

Panel Discussion:

With:

Something that manifested during the panel discussion is that no matter how often you mention the rules-based order, this does not create a plan on how to protect it.

Prof. Iwama was speaking about China challenging international norms as the most pressing issue of German-Japanese security cooperation, a shift in the balance of power is witnessed. MdB Mijatović agrees, that the rule-based order is under threat, the largest one of all perhaps being disinformation. Finally, Ambassador Nakamura is the first to present a solution to its challenges: Strengthening multilateral institutions. A simple, but not irrelevant answer. The rules-based order is very much manifested in institutions like the United Nations, protecting these institutions means protecting the values they represent. However, one could argue that the threat those institutions face comes from within. Since this month, the Islamic Republic of Iran, recently criticised for numerous human rights violations, has been appointed chair of the UN Human Rights Council 2023 Social Forum. How can we strengthen institutions that are threatened by their own members?

What became more and more clear during the inputs of both Ambassadors, neither of the countries truly had a strategy on how to protect the rules-based order they have so numerously subscribed to. This very much reflects the lack in the recently published national security strategies of both countries. Ambassador Nakamura wants China to follow international law, it wants the protection of liberal values like democracy, human rights and the rule of law, but it also wants to cooperate with China on crucial mineral resources. Also, ambassador Thümmel stresses the importance of

cooperating with China. However, knowing what you want is not enough to constitute a strategy. Even though Christmas is approaching, both countries might not be in the position to make a wishlist.

Finally, a young student from the University of Potsdam asks the Gretchenfrage: What do Germany and Japan do in case China decides to invade Taiwan? Both ambassadors are quick to answer: Prevention, prevention, prevention. Ambassador Thümmel answers that the German Federal Foreign Office is taking multiple steps to prevent a further escalation surrounding Taiwan, but also acknowledges that Germany supports a one-China policy. A peaceful solution is desired, and a military escalation will not be tolerated.

Strangely, the student from the University of Potsdam did not ask how Japan and Germany are preventing a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, he asked what happens if it takes place. A scenario that many experts agree on is more a matter of 'when' rather than 'if', something that neither Germany nor Japan seem to acknowledge. It is likely that the day will come when the countries have to decide which wish on their wishlist is more important, cooperation on resources from China or the rules-based order.

What stays behind is a certain feeling of déjà vu. If you asked German officials in January 2022 what their plan for a Russian invasion of Ukraine was, they would have probably answered prevention as well. Perhaps this explains the uncoordinated response in the early days of the war. Since the invasion of Taiwan is a rather likely scenario, they should coordinate their responses rather the day before than the day after.