

Nationalism and Nuclear Proliferation

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This essay's proposal emerges from a dilemma, which is that nuclear disarmament is highly important, but not possible under current conditions – and may even have detrimental effects. As long as nation-states are competing with each other, and war between them remains a possibility, nuclear powers will not to give up their weapons.

In fact, nuclear disarmament could provoke a war between, say, Russia and the United States, because the nuclear umbrella that has protected the conventionally weaker side is now absent (Waltz 1990). In addition, the knowledge and materials to make nuclear weapons will not disappear, so disarmament may not be permanent. In the worst case, states rearm in secret, meaning that we are still living in a nuclear world – just that communication has become less transparent and thus more dangerous.

If humanity cannot be trusted with nuclear weapons, we probably cannot disarm in an orderly fashion either – not under current circumstances. It is no accident that Bertrand Russell argued that only a world federation can prevent nuclear war (Russell 1958/2020) Russell's federation should remove the ultimate cause for nuclear proliferation – competition between sovereign states. But how should the United States and China, Israel and Iran, or India and Pakistan unite under one federation? The proposal does not appear more plausible than disarmament under current conditions.

However, it may be the only change for a world without nuclear weapons. This sounds grandiose, but absent global amnesia or the destruction of materials for nuclear weapons, there is no other choice. Other ideas to stop state competition have so far failed. Economic interdependence did not prevent the world wars, and while we have evidence that democracies do not wage war against each other, they still fight against non-democracies. Even more, the causality of the democratic peace is disputed (Rosato 2003) and even if it existed, democracies can and do break down (Waltz 2000).

My proposal defines a step towards a federation of states which preserves sovereignty in various areas, but takes away competition – for example by forming an international army strong enough to pacify disputes between states. I am not arguing that we can establish such a federation today or tomorrow. Radical transformations take time. What I am suggesting is merely one part of a complicated development.

My proposal is that Japan should join the European Union.

A radical idea, but are we not facing a radical problem? One may say that it is the *European* Union for a reason, that Japan has no place in the bloc. But why should the EU remain European? Identities of states or international organizations constantly change, national identities we deem normal today have been constructed. At the same time, identities are resistant. While some may fear for European or Japanese identity should Japan join the bloc this is unwarranted. Did French identity change when Croatia was admitted into the EU? Cultures are not threatened by expanding a political bloc. But expansion can be a motivating factor to expand horizons of solidarity.

Currently, the European Union builds its identity around the continent's experiences during the Second World War. Should such Japan join, the new bloc needs a new narrative that binds people from two sides of the world together. This is where the beauty of the proposal unfolds: the solution is nested inside the problem. Put simply, there is a narrative to unite Japan and the EU: their commitment to pacifism and nuclear disarmament.

The European Union presents the largest pacifist project in the world. It has united large parts of a continent after centuries of war through economic interdependence and democracy, but the EU has primarily transformed how its citizens view themselves and others. War against other members has not just become more costly, it has become unthinkable. Nonetheless, EU's pacifism is contingent as long as it exist in a world full of state competition – currently indicated by its increase in arms-spending as a reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine Without a global transformation, the EU has to stay prepared for war.

An important step towards global reform would be admitting Japan. It would show that the EU can expand beyond the borders of Europe. In addition, admitting Japan, whose pacifist norms are a model for the world, may further refine the EU's norms too. After all, France still has nuclear weapons.

Currently, both Japan and the EU are trapped in a world where “power-politics” is necessary. This will not change in the near future. Global nuclear disarmament does not happen over years or a few decades. It will require small changes, consistently applied over a long period of time.

A decisive step, as I have argued, would be to unite the forces of the most advanced supranational bloc with those of a highly influential pacifist nation. They can amplify their strengths and correct their weaknesses. Both the EU and Japan are admirable instances of democracy, a commitment to human rights, and pacifism. But they are inhibited by a world that largely does not apply their values. Together, they can start a process to change this.

This is a bold idea for nuclear disarmament. But relying on the combined influence of the EU and Japan to facilitate normative changes is the only way out of the dilemma that a system of sovereign nations entails. If both can, despite their differences, exist the same political bloc, the EU and Japan prove the power of their commitments to pacifism and supranational governance. They could show everyone that a better, safer world order is possible.

References

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