

The German-Japanese Forum 2025: World Order in Upheaval

Your Excellencies Chancellor Merz and Prime Minister Takaichi,

the Japanese-German Forum held its 33rd joint meeting in Berlin from December 3 to 5, 2025. In three sessions, members from the two countries with diverse professional backgrounds analysed the strategic challenges we are facing in our respective geographies and constructively discussed ideas for cooperation and deepening ties between our countries. Four alumni of the Japanese-German Center Berlin's (JDZB) German-Japanese Young Leaders Forum 2024/2025 which took place in Tokyo contributed valuable insights to our group.

We are deeply grateful to the Japanese and German governments for their continuous support to the Forum which once again has offered the space for confidential dialogue, mutual learning but also outreach to wider audiences among our two likeminded countries.

We herewith submit our recommendations to the German and Japanese governments.

German–Japanese Cooperation in Times of Global Upheaval

During our public event “**Past – Present – Future. Reviewing the Japanese-German Partnership**” which also celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Japanese-German Center Berlin (JDZB), we discussed the most severe challenges the international community is facing since the end of the Second World War. Representatives of the Japanese and German governments and the two co-chairs of the German-Japanese Forum discussed Japan's and Germany's contributions at this critical moment.

JDZB was established in 1985 during the Cold War in Berlin, then divided between East and West, under the shared Japanese-German sense of mission to “build trust through regular exchanges and safeguard world peace and prosperity.” Furthermore, the German-Japanese Forum was launched following German reunification in 1993. Its purpose is to strengthen the Japanese-German relations and enhance mutual understanding by providing a platform for experts from both nations' political, economic, and academic spheres to engage in free discussion.

Currently, the international order is under unprecedented threats, and with it the role of international law as the foundation of peace is also being undermined. In an age where freedom, security and prosperity can no longer be taken for granted, it is essential that **Japan and Germany—sharing common values such as democracy, the rule of law, and sustainability—view each other as “premium partners” and cooperate closely to maintain security and multilateral frameworks, revive the economy, and achieve the SDGs.** Moreover, to enhance the effectiveness and innovation of Japan-Germany

cooperation, it is crucial **not only for strategic dialogue between governments but also for all levels—including companies, research institutions, and young leaders—**to expand their networks and increase candid exchanges of views. As platforms for this, **the long-established JDZB and the German-Japanese Forum can continue to play a significant role.**

Also, as Japan and Germany join hands to design future societies, strategic priority themes could include: (i) Japan’s pioneering efforts in offering approaches and solutions for **aging** societies; (ii) Germany’s leadership in **energy transition, climate policy, and sustainable industrial transformation** – a theme also featured at the Osaka-Kansai Expo; (iii) intensified commitment and cooperation in **global health** as the US has withdrawn from the WHO; and **cutting-edge scientific and technological cooperation** for instance in quantum research, fusion energy, artificial intelligence and robotics, as well as space exploration.

[Session I]: A New World Order: Challenges and Approaches from German and Japanese Perspectives

Facing a changing geopolitical environment together

Beyond economics and science, the joint contribution to global stability increasingly extends into the realm of security and defense policy. For both countries, historically characterized by strategic restraint, this represents a significant evolution. In the current international situation where “domination by force” and violent conflicts continue to increase, the security of Europe and the Indo-Pacific is more interconnected than ever.

Against this backdrop, Japan and Germany are rapidly intensifying their defense cooperation. Germany regularly deploys units to the Indo-Pacific, signaling its commitment to regional stability. Japan, for its part, has sent its training ship squadron to Hamburg, and in September of this year, fighter jets of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force landed on German soil for the first time—an important symbolic and practical step.

Japan and Germany remain committed to multilateralism, and as middle powers, are increasingly worried by the expansion of zones of influence and the rise of violent conflict. Both countries engage in multiple formats to uphold rules-based structures and develop new formats. The European Union, meanwhile, is exploring multiple partnerships around the world, closer cooperation with the CPTPP (Comprehensive Transpacific Partnership) which would stabilize rules-based trade as the multilateral trade order is under pressure.

In this overall context, Germany and Japan have significant potential to act together as like-minded democracies navigating a more fragmented and contested international order.

Recommendations:

1. First, both can deepen **strategic governmental cooperation on security and defense** in ways that respect their constitutional traditions, while strengthening deterrence and resilience. Joint initiatives could include a deepening of cooperation on economic security, cyber security, maritime security, and protection of critical infrastructure.

Beyond defense, both countries can work together to defend and modernize multilateralism. As major supporters of international institutions, Germany and Japan are well positioned to respond to recent reform pushes and should together develop reform proposals for engaging multilateralism and global governance in areas such as trade, development finance, health, and climate action. They could form **the bilateral core for a multilateral task force** for a reformed multilateral governance based on fairer rules, stronger enforcement, and greater inclusion of emerging economies. Their cooperation can also serve as a bridge between regions, working against further fragmentation of the global system.

2. Underpinning this governmental cooperation with regular strategic dialogues linking Europe and the Indo-Pacific would benefit the depth of analysis, trust and mutual understanding. A **German-Japanese Security Conference** could bring together key actors from policy, research and business to broaden the base for strategic dialogue. Acting together, Germany and Japan can help connect European and Asian security debates and reinforce the rules-based order beyond their immediate regions.

3. Given the technological sophistication and industrial strength of both countries, there is significant potential to explore **future cooperation in defense-related technologies, supply chains, and industrial production**, contributing to shared security responsibilities. This should include **tech and dual-use start-ups** that so far are rarely involved in bilateral initiatives. Also cooperation on green technologies—such as hydrogen, battery production, and sustainable manufacturing—would allow to pool innovation capacity and set international standards while reducing strategic dependencies.

4. Citizens in both countries perceive diplomacy, defense, and economic security as distant from their daily lives. Yet, it is essential **to raise public awareness** of the “implicit sense of security” that underpins our societies. Proactively engaging the public on these issues has become more important than ever and both countries can engage by identifying **best practices for public engagement** on strategic questions and practical, security related matters.

[Session II] : International Developments as Internal Challenges: The Current Political, Economic, and Social Situation in Germany and Japan

Adapting the domestic economy and society to the new international order

As two leading industrial democracies, Germany and Japan face parallel pressures that are increasingly shaped by international developments, though filtered through distinct political, economic, and social contexts.

In Germany, global shocks have intensified uncertainty. Russia's war against Ukraine has upended long-standing assumptions about security, energy supply, and relations with authoritarian powers, forcing Berlin to reassess its strategic role in Europe and beyond. At the same time, geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China complicates Germany's export-oriented economic model, particularly given its deep trade ties with China. These external pressures strain the governing coalition, fuel public debate over defense spending, migration, and globalisation, and contribute to the rise of political forces that question Germany's traditional international openness.

International developments also weigh heavily on Germany's economic and social situation. Disruptions to global supply chains, higher energy prices, and increasing trade protectionism have exposed the vulnerabilities of an economy built on industrial exports and global interdependence. The European Union's internal debates over fiscal rules, industrial policy, and enlargement further shape Germany's policy choices, limiting national flexibility while increasing expectations of leadership. Socially, global crises—ranging from war and climate change to instability in neighboring regions—translate into domestic challenges, particularly in the form of migration pressures and distributional conflicts over who bears the costs of economic and ecological transformation.

Japan's political environment is likewise deeply influenced by shifts in the international order. Heightened tensions in East Asia, especially China's growing military assertiveness and North Korea's weapons programs, have pushed Japan to rethink its post-war security posture. International developments have enabled political leaders to justify higher defense spending and closer security cooperation with the United States, Europe, and regional partners. At the same time, global uncertainty reinforces the appeal of political stability at home, sustaining the dominance of established parties even as public concern grows over Japan's long-term competitiveness and strategic autonomy.

Economically and socially, Japan's challenges are increasingly intertwined with global dynamics. Slower growth in China, volatility in global markets, and shifts in international trade and technology regimes affect Japan's export sectors and innovation capacity. The global competition for talent, capital, and technological leadership sharpens the impact of Japan's demographic decline, making labor shortages and productivity growth more

pressing. International inflationary pressures, combined with currency fluctuations, directly affect household purchasing power and public confidence. In both Germany and Japan, international developments no longer merely influence domestic affairs from the outside; they actively reshape political debates, economic models, and social expectations from within.

Recommendations:

1. Internal challenges will remain high. Japan and Germany share various common challenges in both their economies and societies, including international inflationary pressures, protectionism, labor shortages. Limited resources and high expectations for political leadership place additional strain on intergenerational justice in both countries, for example in pension policy. Investing in the foundation of our partnership, our respective democracies, is key to ensuring a lasting friendship among our governments and societies. For instance, **exchange on the increasing threat of hybrids attacks and disinformation and the potential for technology for participation in democracy** can be useful for both sides beyond the German-Japanese Forum.

2. To address public security concerns - especially among younger generations who worry facing military conflict within their lifetimes - we recommend **clear, honest and proactive communication** about how ordinary citizens and civil society can contribute to the responsibilities our nations now shoulder. Societal resilience will become an increasingly important prerequisite as open societies are put under threat.

Furthermore, the importance of transparent communication holds true for domestic reforms as well. Particularly for painful reforms in areas such as the social security system, it is essential for the government to earn the public's understanding and foster a sense of participation in the reforms by sincerely communicating with the people while clearly demonstrating the concrete benefits.

3. Given the important international and domestic shifts both countries need to navigate, we recommend investing in more **opportunities for young professionals to engage in our bilateral relations**. The JDZB's German-Japanese Young Leaders Forum and subsequent delegation to the German Japanese Forum organised by the JDZB serve as model initiatives. An additional financial contribution by private and public supporters could substantially amplify the impact.

[Session III]: Space Utilization Beyond Borders: Germany and Japan's Roles and the Future of Bilateral Cooperation

Leveraging the strengths of Japan-Germany collaboration to contribute to technological innovation and problem-solving

Space utilization, both for commercial and public interest purposes, is on the rise and will develop rapidly in the coming years. However, the rapid growth of space activities has also brought forth various challenges, including:

- (i) Space treaties and international guidelines are becoming inadequate to address the current realities of increasing satellites, private sector participation, and militarization.
- (ii) The lack of internationally unified standards, operations, and language for traffic management is increasing the risk of satellite collisions and debris generation.
- (iii) Philosophical and ethical debates concerning bioethics, environmental conservation, and technology governance (the purpose for which technology and knowledge are used) have not kept pace with the rapid pace of space development.

Japan-Germany cooperation in space development is already advancing in research, development, and personnel exchange, based on the Strategic Partnership Agreement (2016) between DLR (German Aerospace Center) and JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency). Given the high correlation between space technology and related technologies in the automotive sector—a key industry for both Japan and Germany (such as control systems, safety, and automation)—specialists from both nations are able to collaborate smoothly at a high level. It is expected that Japan and Germany will continue to leverage these strengths to jointly produce innovative and competitive outcomes, contributing to the sustainable development of space.

Recommendations:

1. Given the significant risks and costs involved in pioneering new frontiers in space, public-private partnerships and international cooperation are essential. We recommend **the expansion of the exemplary partnership of DLR and JAXA into a robust framework that involves numerous universities, research institutions, agile startups, and large corporations**. Building on this foundation, we should actively pursue research and development in globally significant themes such as small satellites, rocket reusability, space traffic management, Earth observation, and cybersecurity.
2. We recommend deepening university partnerships and **setting up a special research program that allows mobility for cutting edge space researchers** between Japan and Germany. Young researchers should be addressed explicitly so they can engage in our strategic partnership early and to bring value to cooperation on research and innovation as “sustainably producing individuals who can drive Japanese-German joint development and innovation” and “facilitating the sharing of philosophical and ethical values and governance awareness.”
3. Japan and Germany should collaborate to **take the initiative in revising international norms and rebuilding governance structures** in light of the rapid expansion of space

utilization. Not only leading technologically, but also actively engaging in the creation of international rules is an essential element for ensuring national competitiveness, resilience, and security.

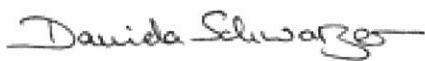
However, establishing effective governance requires attention to two points: (i) securing the cooperation of the United States, which holds overwhelming dominance in both the scale of its space development budget and its technological capabilities; and (ii) exercising careful balancing, as excessive regulation could hinder new entrants and potentially impede industrial development.

Concluding Remarks

Our fruitful discussions have proven to the relevance of the German-Japanese Forum in particular challenging times. We have identified ample ways to deepen German-Japanese cooperation, bilaterally and in the multilateral context. Our discussions ranging from the public event with a wide outreach, which also celebrated 40 years of JDZB to our confidential exchanges underscored the importance to broaden the base of exchange among policy makers, economic actors, scientists and in particular the younger generation to allow us to support Japan and Germany in jointly developing innovative responses to shared domestic and foreign policy challenges in an increasingly complex world.

Kindly allow us to once again express our heartfelt gratitude for the continuous support that you, Prime Minister Takaichi and Chancellor Merz, have given the German-Japanese Forum. We sincerely appreciate your strong interest in our activities.

Respectfully yours,



Prof. Dr. Daniela Schwarzer
German Chairperson



Eizo Kobayashi
Japanese Chairperson