

2024 KOREA POLICY

Volume 2 / Issue 1

Camp David and US-Japan-ROK Trilateral Security and Defense Cooperation: Consolidating the Northeast Asia Anchor in the Indo-Pacific

By Yasuyo Sakata

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Introduction

The Biden administration's national security and defense strategies have called for an aligned, coordinated, and integrated network of allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, the Euro-Atlantic, and beyond.² The Ukraine War and its implications for the Taiwan Strait have pushed the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic partners closer. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its four Asia-Pacific Partners (AP4), including Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea), Australia, and New Zealand, is one example. But the security architecture of alliances and partnerships is different in each theater. In the Euro-Atlantic, NATO has expanded in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In the Indo-Pacific, there is no Asian NATO, meaning a formal collective treaty alliance legally bound by mutual defense commitments. However, the traditional US-led hub-and-spokes system (the United States as the hub and the bilateral treaty alliances as spokes) is evolving into a hub-and-spokes plus system or, as some US officials have labeled, a latticework-like structure to respond to the rise of China.³ In the lattice-like structure, bilateral US treaty alliances – with the Philippines, Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) – are complemented by bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral arrangements among treaty allies and non-treaty strategic partners such as India, Singapore, and Taiwan, in addition to European allies such as the United Kingdom (UK), France, and Germany.⁴

On the Indo-Pacific front, Japan and the United States have led the effort to rebuild the security architecture based on their Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategies from Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe, Yoshihide Suga, and Fumio Kishida with the Donald Trump and Joseph Biden administrations.⁵ The state visit by Prime Minister Kishida to Washington in April this year, which included a summit meeting with Biden and the first-ever US-Japan-Philippines trilateral summit. Another achievement was the “first-ever” stand-alone trilateral summit

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held at Camp David in August 2023 with President Biden, Prime Minister Kishida, and South Korean President Yoon Seok-yeol. The US-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship has been successfully reframed and embedded into the Indo-Pacific security architecture, and was reiterated during Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the United States and the Biden-Kishida summit, as the US-Japan Leaders' Statement highlighted Camp David and the US-Japan-ROK trilateral as part of the Indo-Pacific framework.⁶ Similarly, in his speech to the US Congress, Prime Minister Kishida articulated Japan's views on FOIP and the "multi-layered regional framework" with like-minded countries to include the ROK, the US-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship, and the Camp David Summit.⁷

The US-Japan-ROK trilateral partnership now has a place in the Indo-Pacific security architecture, along with the Quad (US-Japan-Australia-India), AUKUS (Australia-UK-US), U.S.-Japan-Australia, and the recently established US-Japan-Philippines trilateral relationship. South Korea's pivot to the Indo-Pacific made this possible. The previous Moon Jae-in administration distanced itself from the Indo-Pacific region, and thus, the US-Japan-ROK relationship was confined to addressing the North Korea issue, but the Yoon Suk-yeol administration has pivoted to the Indo-Pacific region, announced an Indo-Pacific Strategy, and expanded the scope of the trilateral relationship, acknowledged at the Camp David Summit.⁸

What's ahead for the US-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship after the Camp David Summit? How can and should the trilateral develop as part of the Indo-Pacific security architecture? As the trilateral adapts to the new security environment, the unique characteristics of each relationship should be considered, as it may enable but also constrain progress. Compared to the US-Japan-ROK trilateral, the US-Japan-Australia trilateral relationship has rapidly developed into what is often called a "quasi-alliance,"⁹ serving as a foundational hub in the Indo-Pacific. What is the US-Japan-ROK trilateral's place in the Indo-Pacific region? It has been and continues to be an indispensable pillar geographically situated in Northeast Asia. If the newly formed US-Japan-Philippines relationship can be framed as the "Southeast Asia Anchor" or "Southeast Asia Hub" with its priorities in the South China Sea and maritime Southeast Asia, the US-Japan-ROK relationship can be framed as a "Northeast Asia Anchor" or "Northeast Asia Hub" in the Indo-Pacific security architecture.¹⁰ In terms of the scope of the new US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation, there is much on the agenda regarding new and emerging areas of economic and technology cooperation, supply chains, and developmental cooperation. However, this article will focus on defense and security cooperation – an old but new issue – as the trilateral relationship adjusts to the Indo-Pacific security environment, which includes North Korea, the Taiwan Strait, broader maritime security issues, cybersecurity, and space.

In this article, I will first provide a brief historical overview of the origins of US-Japan-ROK defense cooperation as an anchor in Northeast Asia, i.e., the “Northeast Asia Anchor,” since the Korean War, focusing on the roles of the United Nations Command (UNC) and the US-Japan and US-ROK alliances. Then, I will explain how the Camp David Summit redefined the US-Japan-ROK trilateral as an Indo-Pacific partnership and incorporated the “Northeast Asia Anchor” into the Indo-Pacific. Finally, in the last section, I will make policy recommendations on the tasks ahead for the US-Japan-ROK partnership based on the Camp David Summit as the “Northeast Asia Anchor” in the Indo-Pacific security architecture.

Origins of the Trilateral as the “Northeast Asia Anchor”: The Korean War, the UNC, and Two Alliances

The US-Japan-ROK relationship has a long history, over seventy years since the Korean War and thirty years since the first trilateral summit held in 1994 on the sidelines of the APEC Summit. The Camp David Summit, held in August 2023, was the first stand-alone trilateral summit meeting. It was a historical diplomatic accomplishment that opened up a “new era” for the relationship.

Each trilateral arrangement is unique and bound by its historical legacies and structures. In the case of US-Japan-ROK trilateral security cooperation, it is the sum of two treaty alliances (US-Japan and US-ROK alliances) that have been connected by the UNC since the Korean War. Japan has a double security commitment to support South Korea: the US-Japan security treaty signed in 1951 and revised in 1960, namely the Far East clause, and the 1954 Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) with UN forces, which stipulates the provision of rear-area support if a Korean contingency occurs. Japan has hosted the UNC-Rear since 1957. The US-ROK mutual defense treaty was signed in October 1953, after the Korean armistice was signed on July 27, 1953. The two alliances and the UNC/UNC-Rear are mutually reinforcing and make this trilateral arrangement unique as the Northeast Anchor.

The Korean War and the UNC/UNC-Rear: Legacy Structures “Revitalized”

The UNC is a legacy structure that continues to this day. It was established in July 1950 at the outset of the Korean War and predates the two alliance treaties signed in 1951 and 1953 respectively. Japan was under Allied occupation until the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, and Japan and the ROK did not normalize diplomatic relations until 1965. Japan and the ROK did not have much agency during this period, but the creation of the UNC was the start of an indirect, trilateral security relationship led by US and multinational forces, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and other UN Sending States.

After the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement, the UNC headquarters relocated from Tokyo to Seoul (relocated to Pyeongtaek in 2018). UNC Tokyo was reconfigured as UNC-Rear at US forces in Japan (USFJ) at Zama in 1957 (then relocated to Yokota Air Base/USFJ headquarters in 2007) and presently hosts seven UNC-Rear bases (Zama, Yokosuka, Sasebo, Yokota, Kadena, Futenma, and White Beach) critical to South Korean security in the event of a contingency.¹¹ Prior to the relocation, Japan signed the UN SOFA agreement in 1954 to provide support and allow access to UNC bases in Japan for military personnel and assets of signatory countries.¹²

The UNC, a multinational military organization under the unified command of the United States, was established in July 1950 at the outset of the Korean War. Its creation was based on UN Security Council Resolution 84 and exists today to enforce the Korean armistice agreement and preserve member states' ability to fulfill combat forces and capability commitments to the ROK.¹³ Shinji Kawana referred to the UNC, including the UNC-Rear in Japan, as a "multinational quasi-alliance" structure that has become more relevant today.¹⁴

The legacy UNC structure has been "revitalized" in recent years by the US Forces in Korea (USFK). The revitalization began in 2006 in anticipation of the transfer of US-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC) operational control and was further strengthened in 2014 through the multilateralization of headquarter elements.¹⁵ In 2018, a Canadian brigadier general became the first non-US deputy commander of the UNC, followed by Australian and UK officers. Connection with UNC-Rear was also strengthened. In 2007, the USFK started a UNC-Rear base visit program for UNC-ROK military officers to promote greater understanding of the role of the UNC, including the UNC-Rear in Japan.¹⁶ Previously, the ROK authorities were not enthusiastic about the focus on UNC, including both the conservative Park Geun-hye and the progressive Moon administrations.¹⁷ The Yoon administration, however, leaned in. President Yoon publicly acknowledged the role of the UNC and the UN bases in Japan as essential to the defense of South Korea during the 70th anniversary of the Korean Armistice and in his Liberation Day speech on August 15, 2023.¹⁸ The first UNC defense ministerial conference was held in Seoul on November 14, 2023, immediately after the 55th US-ROK Security Consultative Meeting and US-Japan-ROK defense ministerial meeting.¹⁹

Japan, which hosts the UNC-Rear, has not articulated a clear policy on its relations with the UNC. Due to the political sensitivities regarding the so-called secret "Korean Minute" of 1960, the Japanese government has kept a low stance on this issue and has not educated the public, politicians, and defense officials about Japan's UN SOFA or the UNC-Rear.²⁰ But in recent years, the Japanese

government – mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), which deals with the administrative affairs of the Japan-UN SOFA – has begun to articulate its policy position. Since 2018, as the North Korea issue unfolded, steps to highlight the role of the UNC were taken by UNC members and Japan.²¹ MOFA began to publish a fact sheet on Japan's relations with the "UN Forces Korea" on its website and has been updating it periodically.²² The Enforcement Coordination Cell (ECC), a multinational headquarters based on the USS Blue Ridge (based in Yokosuka), was established in 2018 to conduct maritime surveillance of "ship-to-ship" transfers that violate UN sanctions on North Korea. Although ECC is not a UNC-based operation, UNC members and Japan participate, as UN members are obliged to observe and implement UN sanctions on North Korea.²³ Last year, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa welcomed General Paul LaCamera, Commander of USFK, CFC, and UNC, who made a courtesy visit to Tokyo. This confirmed the role of the UNC and UNC-Rear, the surveillance of illegal ship-to-ship transfers by UNC Sending States, and the role of US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation.²⁴ UNC-Rear affairs are handled by MOFA, but in light of UNC revitalization, some Japanese defense and Self-Defense Forces (SDF) officers have advocated for a closer relationship between Japan and the UNC as part of Japanese defense and security policy.²⁵

The US-Japan and US-ROK Alliances and Japan-ROK Relations: A "Virtual Alliance" Since the 1990s

During the Cold War, the US-Japan and US-ROK alliances were siloed, and Japan-ROK defense ties were scarce mainly due to Japan's hesitance to develop security relations beyond the United States and constraints from "pacifist" interpretations of its constitution. The situation has since changed after the end of the Cold War. Under the hubs-and-spokes system, the US-Japan and US-ROK alliances were strengthened, and trilateral cooperation developed, including spokes-to-spokes ties between Japan and the ROK. Trilateral cooperation, which was dubbed a "virtual alliance," emerged with no formal military alliance and mutual defense obligations but the promotion of security cooperation among countries sharing a common ally.²⁶ The ties among the United States, Japan, and the ROK have evolved from two bilateral relationships into a trilateral one.

There are roughly three periods in which the "virtual alliance" progressed. The first period was the 1990s after the Cold War, in which the relationship was one of strategic convergence on the North Korean nuclear and missile threat, buttressed by the Clinton administration's East Asia Strategic Initiative of strengthening alliances and trilateral cooperation. The first formal trilateral

summit among the three leaders – US President Bill Clinton, Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, and South Korean President Kim Yong-sam – was held on the sidelines of the 1994 APEC conference amidst the nuclear crisis of 1993 and 1994 and the Agreed Framework signed that same year. The US-Japan Joint Security Declaration (1996) and the revised Defense Cooperation Guidelines (1997) focused on rear-area support in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. In 1994, the ROK defense minister visited Japan for the first time, and working-level defense talks began. The first bilateral Japan-ROK search-and-rescue exercises were held in 1999.²⁷ In 1998, the Japan-Korea Joint Declaration for Future-Oriented Partnership was signed between Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, and the first Japan-ROK security dialogue among defense officials was agreed upon. On the trilateral front, the Trilateral Coordinating Oversight Group (TCOG) on North Korean policy was established in 1999. But TCOG was crisis-driven and hinged on the Agreed Framework, which ended in 2003.

The second period of progress in bilateral and trilateral security cooperation was in the 2010s in response to the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia, or the Rebalance Strategy.²⁸ Both the US-Japan and US-ROK alliances were buttressed. The Lee Myung-bak administration was keen on revitalizing the US-ROK alliance into a “comprehensive strategic alliance” in line with its Global Korea strategy, pushing the alliance to expand its scope from peninsular to regional and global security.²⁹ The 2010 Cheonan sinking and Yeongpyeong-do shelling incidents on the inter-Korean border pulled the alliance's focus back to North Korea instead of the South China Sea and maritime security issues that were emerging at the time. Strategic divergence between the United States and South Korea began to appear as related to China.

Focused mainly on the North Korea missile threat, the first steps toward institutionalization of defense relations emerged. The Lee administration strengthened the US-ROK alliance, but also prioritized improving Japan-ROK relations. Japanese and ROK defense authorities signed a memorandum on Japan-Korea defense exchange for the first time in 2009.³⁰ The memorandum acknowledged the *defense exchanges* expanded to practically all levels in the past decades and left room to explore *defense cooperation* in new areas, which implied agreements such as the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) and the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).³¹ While ACSA was shelved, Japan and ROK focused on GSOMIA, which was almost signed in 2012 but failed due to South Korean domestic politics. It would later be signed in 2016 during the final year of the Park Geun-hye administration.

On the trilateral front, defense ministerial meetings began in 2009, held annually at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. At the working level, Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT) at the director-general, deputy-vice-minister, and assistant-secretary levels began. Trilateral and multilateral exercises were also increased. With ROK participation from 2009, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) was added to the menu of multilateral exercises such as the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) and Cobra Gold Exercise. For the first time, Japanese and ROK navy officers alternated in participating as observers in US-ROK exercises (Invincible Spirit) and US-Japan exercises (Keen Sword), which was stipulated in the 2009 memorandum to facilitate the “discussion and participation of observers to exercises.”³²

Bilateral and trilateral Japan-ROK defense ties were at their highest point with progress in joint exercises, mainly among the two navies. Even though the history issue continued, Japan-ROK relations between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Park Geun-hye were positive as defense ties were protected and augmented by trilateral initiatives. Abe and Park were at odds, however, over the so-called “comfort women” issue. President Obama intervened to facilitate summit-level dialogue and held a trilateral summit on the sidelines of the Hague Nuclear Security Summit in 2014. In the meantime, the US-Japan-ROK Trilateral Information Sharing Agreement (TISA) was signed in 2014 to share information through the United States, limited to North Korean missiles. Eventually, Japan and the ROK signed the “comfort women” agreement in 2015 and GSOMIA in 2016. Due to Park’s impeachment in 2017, however, there was not enough time to implement the agreements.

The trilateral experienced a major downturn with the advent of South Korea’s progressive Moon Jae-in administration. The Moon administration acknowledged the importance of US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation, limited to North Korea issues, but was wary of proceeding further into what it thought would be a formal military alliance, manifested in its Three No’s policy.³³ Japan-ROK bilateral ties dipped to the bottom in 2018-2019, and damaged not only bilateral but also trilateral defense ties with the United States.³⁴ Defense exercises continued only in multilateral formats. Among them, the Pacific Vanguard, Pacific Dragon, and the Enforcement Coordination Cell were notable examples.³⁵

The third period of revitalization of the US-Japan-ROK trilateral came in the 2020s, symbolized by the Camp David Summit between President Biden, President Yoon, and Prime Minister Kishida. The Biden administration came back with a strong alliance policy and prioritized rebuilding the trilateral

relationship. The ROK leadership changed to a conservative administration under President Yoon Suk-yeol and prioritized re-strengthening the US-ROK alliance, Japan-ROK relations, and US-Japan-ROK trilateral relations. Strategic convergence regarding the Indo-Pacific region among the three countries emerged as the Yoon administration synchronized with the United States and Japan with its Indo-Pacific Strategy in December 2022. In Japan-ROK relations, the diplomatic conflict over the Korean wartime laborers issue during the Japanese colonial era was settled by President Yoon's bold decision to provide third-party compensation, avoiding a legal clash with Japan. Bilateral ties were restored at the summit between Kishida and Yoon in March 2023 in Tokyo, the first stand-alone bilateral summit in twelve years. This paved the way for the historic Camp David Summit in August 2023.

The Camp David Summit: Incorporating the “Northeast Asia Anchor” into the Indo-Pacific

The Camp David Summit was historically significant in many ways. First of all, it was the first time that the US-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship was given this much political attention at the top level as the first stand-alone summit in its history. Second, the agreements were very comprehensive and rather impressive, drawing upon past agreements, adding new dimensions, and setting a new and higher standard for the partnership. There are three documents: the “Camp David Principles,” a joint vision statement confirming shared values and norms, mutual respect, and commitment to peace and stability as Indo-Pacific nations; the “Spirit of Camp David,” an agenda of actions and initiatives to promote institutionalization; and the “Commitment to Consult,” a short two-paragraph document that serves as a pledge to consult in response to regional challenges not limited to the North Korea issue.³⁶

In sum, Camp David was a summit-level boost to *redefine* and *reconsolidate* the trilateral relationship as an Indo-Pacific partnership and to embed the “Northeast Anchor” in the Indo-Pacific security network. *Redefinition* aims to enhance shared values and strategic alignment, expanding and adapting the trilateral agenda to the Indo-Pacific region. *Reconsolidation* focuses on institutionalization to build a more stable and resilient institutional foundation for consultations and cooperation, to better withstand political backwinds such as leadership and policy changes, and to facilitate greater coordination.

Redefinition through shared values and strategic alignment: The Camp David Principles confirmed shared values and goals: “As Indo-Pacific nations, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), and the United States will continue to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific based on respect for international law,

shared norms, and common values. We strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo.” Based on these shared goals and values, and based on the three countries’ respective Indo-Pacific strategies, the United States, Japan, and South Korea came into strategic alignment on issues in the Indo-Pacific region.³⁷ The Spirit of Camp David broadened the trilateral agenda from North Korea to the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, including Ukraine and economic security, as an “Indo-Pacific Partnership.” US-Japan-ROK cooperation had already been redefined as an Indo-Pacific partnership during the trilateral leaders’ meeting on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in November 2022.³⁸ This expansion was known mainly among regional experts, but the stand-alone summit at Camp David had impressed upon the media and the public that this is the new normal.

A notable point in the joint statement was that the principles of upholding the rule-based international order and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region were addressed before the North Korea and Korean Peninsula issues. Commitments to the Taiwan Strait and voicing concern about Chinese and Russian behavior were stepped up. China was specifically named in a trilateral document for the first time: “Recalling the publicly announced position of each of our countries regarding the dangerous and aggressive behavior supporting unlawful maritime claims that we have witnessed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the South China Sea, we strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the waters of the Indo-Pacific.” South Korea has carefully stepped up its commitment to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, which includes the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.³⁹ Regarding North Korea and the Korean Peninsula, the statement reaffirmed the three countries’ commitment to the denuclearization of North Korea, support for a free and unified Korean Peninsula, which marked the first time that Japan committed to this principle in an official document, and the US extended deterrence commitment to Japan and the ROK.⁴⁰

Reconsolidation through institutionalization: The Spirit of Camp David set an ambitious agenda of consultative and cooperative mechanisms. The Camp David agreements not only redefine trilateralism but reconsolidate the relationship through a comprehensive menu for institutionalization. Its aim is to get out of the vicious cycle of on-and-off, ad-hoc engagements of the past. The joint statement spelled out the spirit of cooperation: “This is a moment that requires unity and coordinated action from our true partners, and it is a moment we intend to meet, together.” The trilateral relationship needed to be “locked in,” as a senior US official described, to make it a more reliable, resilient, and working framework.⁴¹

Firstly, to institutionalize the relationship, high-level annual consultations ranging from leader-level summits to ministerial-level and national security advisor-level meetings were agreed upon. This would pave the way for future two-plus-two ministerial meetings, which have never been held in the trilateral US-Japan-ROK or the bilateral Japan-ROK contexts. An assistant secretary-level Indo-Pacific dialogue was also agreed upon to coordinate Indo-Pacific strategies with an emphasis on Southeast Asia, ASEAN, and Pacific Island countries – two key areas for development cooperation.⁴²

Secondly, in defense and security, a consensus was reached on regularizing and expanding the scope of trilateral exercises within a “multi-year” timeframe, as compared to the ad-hoc, one-off plans in the past. The envisioned “annual, named, multi-domain” exercises would include cyber and space; operationalizing information- and data-sharing to exchange real-time missile warning data to improve ballistic missile defense; establishing a cyberspace working group on DPRK activities; establishing a maritime security cooperation framework, including capacity building assistance in Southeast Asia and Pacific island countries; coordinating on countering disinformation; and enhancing information sharing and coordination in general, including disruptive technology protection.⁴³

Thirdly, economic and technology cooperation would be discussed in the Trilateral Economic Security Dialogue, augmented with initiatives such as a pilot supply chain early warning system, national laboratories partnerships, cooperation on protective networks against disruptive technologies and technology standards, and women’s economic empowerment.⁴⁴ Cooperation with the European Union and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is another feature. Fourthly, US-Japan, US-ROK, and Japan-ROK bilateral initiatives in development finance, maritime security, and humanitarian response would be coupled with trilateral mechanisms. Lastly, coordination on global issues such as climate change and health, as well as promoting people-to-people exchange and human resource development initiatives, were agreed upon.⁴⁵

Lastly, the Commitment to Consult aims to further consolidate consultations and coordination to a broad set of regional challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Coordination mechanisms such as TCOG existed before, but they were specifically limited to North Korean policies. This time, the leaders and governments committed to “consult trilaterally with each other, in an expeditious manner, to coordinate our responses to regional challenges, provocations and threats affecting our collective interests and security,” and “share information, align our messaging and coordinate response actions.”⁴⁶ Regional challenges could include not only North Korea but also the Taiwan

Strait and maritime and economic challenges such as economic coercion. However, it was also made clear that this document was a political commitment, not a legal treaty-like commitment akin to a formal military alliance. The document added that the commitment to consult “does not supersede or otherwise infringe on the commitments arising from” the US-Japan and US-ROK alliance treaties. Nevertheless, as US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said, the commitment to consult would be a “very significant step” because it meant that “the three countries recognize their common interests in having a coherent and coordinated response to any contingencies,” another step forward to consolidate trilateral cooperation.⁴⁷

The Tasks Ahead for the “Northeast Asia Anchor” in the Indo-Pacific: Policy Recommendations

What are the tasks ahead? The Camp David agreements cover a wide range of areas. New and innovative cooperation is being explored and institutionalized in economic security, technology, and development cooperation. Defense cooperation should also be updated and consolidated through various measures, old and new. Building on the Camp David agreements, how should trilateral defense cooperation be strengthened? What can and should be done or explored to consolidate the Northeast Anchor in the Indo-Pacific?

As a Japanese security expert emphasized, not only the “deep-rooted political frictions” but also the “failure to conceptualize a strategic and operational framework for cooperation” has led Tokyo and Seoul to “underappreciating and undervaluing the benefits of partnership,” and prevented the two countries from “grasping the real challenges in systemizing cooperation.”⁴⁸ The Camp David agreements now serve as the long-awaited, foundational document for strategic and operational cooperation for the trilateral and bilateral relationship. But more must be done to articulate and operationalize the newly formed Indo-Pacific partnership, particularly in the defense area.

The tasks are twofold. First is the scope of strategic cooperation. Strategically, as the “Northeast Asia Anchor,” the US-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship will prioritize North Korea and the Korean Peninsula but, at the same time, needs to focus on the connections between the Korean and Taiwan contingencies – the Northeast Asia “nexus” in the Indo-Pacific. The Northeast Asia nexus can be strengthened through cooperating on broader regional maritime security, covering the area from the Pacific Islands, the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, to the eastern coast of Africa, including Djibouti.

The second is institutionalization. This is about how to enable smooth and consistent defense cooperation through security and defense agreements and the regularization of joint activities. The Camp David Summit placed an emphasis on multi-year, multi-domain joint exercise plans. Further institutionalization would help to facilitate joint activities agreed to. Institutionalization can be explored through bilateral (US-Japan, US-ROK, Japan-ROK), trilateral (US-Japan-ROK), quadrilateral (with Australia and AUKUS), or other plurilateral and multilateral frameworks (UNC, NATO-AP4).⁴⁹ Despite Japan-ROK rapprochement, bilateral defense cooperation remains a politically sensitive issue. If the Japan-ROK channel is difficult, pursuing initiatives through trilateral or other plurilateral and multilateral venues would be more politically feasible.

Considering the above, policy recommendations in four areas are elaborated below.

Step up strategic and defense dialogues and announce a joint statement on defense cooperation: Policy documents and guidelines are a compass to guide the leaders, policymakers, and bureaucrats. The Camp David agreements serve as a platform document on which the US-Japan and US-ROK alliances and Japan-ROK relations can expand. On the trilateral front, the agreements agreed upon trilateral summits and ministerial meetings, including defense, “at least annually.” Already, US-Japan-ROK defense ministerial meetings were held in November and December of last year to operationalize real-time radar data sharing and planning for the multi-year, multi-domain trilateral exercises. If the next trilateral summit is held in July on the occasion of the NATO summit in Washington, DC, defense cooperation can be a focus of the agenda.⁵⁰ Trilateral defense ministerial meetings should follow up to prepare a joint statement akin to the US-Japan-Australia trilateral defense statement, specifying measures to further enhance “trilateral activities and exercises,” “expanded cooperation,” and “inclusive partnerships.”⁵¹

For the trilateral relationship to evolve, Japan-ROK defense ties need to be put on a more stable footing. Some experts advocate a Japan-ROK “joint security declaration” modeled after the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation of 2007.⁵² That would be ideal, but considering the political sensitivities regarding Japan-ROK defense cooperation in both countries, a second option would be to embed defense cooperation in a comprehensive document, as was done in the Japan-ROK Joint Declaration of 1998. Next year, 2025, is the 60th anniversary of the normalization of Japan-ROK diplomatic relations, so the two governments should be working to put together a “new era” joint declaration to update the bilateral relationship for the Indo-Pacific

era.⁵³ Defense cooperation should be updated, reflecting the Camp David summit. Defense ministers or authorities should update the 2009 Memorandum of Intent on Defense *Exchanges* to a Memorandum on Defense *Cooperation*, or a joint statement like those with Australia, United Kingdom, and India, that go beyond “exchanges” to “cooperation” to reflect the realities of today.⁵⁴

Japan-ROK bilateral defense ties are still on cautious grounds due to the 2018 radar lock-on incident between the two navies, which soured the close defense relationship developed since the 1990s. Japan and ROK defense ministers met in June 2023 and concurred on promoting Japan-ROK and US-Japan-ROK cooperation in FOIP, committing to “communicate more closely” and “accelerating consultations on *issues* (italics added) between Japan-ROK defense authorities including measures to prevent recurrence.”⁵⁵ “*Issues*” imply the 2018 naval incident. A public acknowledgment by the two defense ministers regarding an agreement on preventive measures would smooth the way for bilateral cooperation.

Continue to make progress on joint exercises to deepen the Northeast Asia nexus and promote Indo-Pacific maritime cooperation: Regularizing and expanding the scope of trilateral exercises is one of the concrete agreements from the Camp David Summit. Trilateral joint exercises have expanded from naval⁵⁶ to aerial exercises.⁵⁷ The three countries participate in many other multi-domain, multilateral exercises, such as the Pacific Dragon (air and missile defense) that include Australia and Canada, the Pacific Vanguard (maritime operations) with Australia, Sea Dragon (anti-submarine warfare) with Canada and India, the Kamandang (US-Philippines marine/ground component exercises),⁵⁸ and cyber security exercises such as the NATO Cyber Coalition held in Estonia.⁵⁹ Furthermore, contingency planning for Northeast Asian contingencies could be explored trilaterally or multilaterally.⁶⁰ Multilateral operational headquarters such as the ECC (Enforcement Coordination Cell) would be another framework to build on, to support UN sanctions on North Korea and maritime surveillance activities.

As a result, trilateral exercises have slowly expanded their scope, responding to North Korean missile threats but also overlapping with other scenarios involving China and Russia. Former Rear Admiral of Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) Yasuhiro Kawakami observed that “some exercises in Japan, such as US-Japan air and missile defense exercises, Japan-U.S.-South Korea trilateral ballistic missile data sharing exercises, and flight training over Japanese waters, have increased dramatically since fiscal 2022. These exercises serve not only to establish a presence and deterrence against missile launches by North Korea but also contribute to deterring *major powers* (italics

added) from any actual or attempted unilateral changes to the status quo.”⁶¹ The Northeast Asian nexus of cooperation to enhance response capabilities to North Korea, China, and Russia is deepening.

Furthermore, to promote maritime cooperation in the broader Indo-Pacific region, the three countries should utilize other multilateral Indo-Pacific exercises and engagements, such as those with Australia, Canada, Southeast Asian countries, and Pacific Island countries, more systematically. Japan's MSDF has renamed its deployments to the region as Indo-Pacific Deployments since 2019.⁶² It could be another platform for cooperation with the ROK and other navies from the East and South China Seas to the Aden Gulf. The United States, Japan, and the ROK should coordinate maritime capacity-building assistance to Southeast Asia and Pacific Island countries and utilize the Indo-Pacific maritime domain awareness initiative.

Institutionalize beyond GSOMIA, Utilize the UNC-UNC Rear: To facilitate joint exercises and operational cooperation, GSOMIAs, information sharing agreements (ISA), ACSAs, Reciprocal Access Agreements (RAA), and SOFAs are necessary and have become the standard for Indo-Pacific security cooperation between both treaty and non-treaty allies. Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy noted that, “Japan will promote enhanced engagement with like-minded countries and others in the Indo-Pacific region through bilateral and multilateral dialogues, bilateral training and exercises, conclusions of information protection agreements, Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), joint development of defense equipment, transfer of defense equipment and technology, capacity building support, strategic communication, and Flexible Deterrent Options (FDO).”⁶³ The Japanese Ministry of Defense recognizes that defense agreements aim to institutionalize cooperation so that defense cooperation and exchanges can be promoted “more smoothly and consistently.”⁶⁴

Within Japanese security policies, the Japan-Australia relationship is the model case for “quasi-alliance” institutionalization, which includes an ISA, ACSA, and RAA.⁶⁵ These legal agreements have facilitated an increase in joint training between the two countries. In the case of Japan-ROK relations, GSOMIA was signed between Japan and the ROK in 2016, but information sharing needs improvement. Unlike the US-Japan-ROK TISA, the bilateral GSOMIA is not limited to North Korean missile information but is underused. ACSA was shelved in 2012, but such an agreement is now the standard for facilitating logistics cooperation for both UN peacekeeping missions and joint exercises. RAA would be a bigger hurdle for Japan and the ROK because “reciprocal”

access would mean allowing the Japanese SDF to visit or transit through the ROK, which could generate negative domestic political reactions. The fact that the ROK is not inclined to sign RAAs in general, even with its UNC ally Australia, constitutes another hurdle.⁶⁶

If an RAA is not politically feasible, utilizing alternative frameworks such as the “revitalized” UNC/UNC-Rear, which was discussed in section II, would be more relevant. Japan and the ROK are host nations, but they have acted as guests or outsiders. Japan’s MOFA has basically handled the legal paperwork to facilitate personnel and assets to UNC bases in Japan. UNC-related ROK military personnel visit UNC bases in Japan through the UNC-Rear bases visiting programs hosted by the UNC/USFK. Increasingly, UNC sending states observe and participate in joint exercises. Exchanges and engagements with host nation-states (Japan and the ROK) might be more regularized and officialized in the UNC framework.

Explore defense equipment and technology cooperation through the US defense supply chain: Defense technology and equipment cooperation is another standard in Indo-Pacific security cooperation. But this is also a politically sensitive area for Japan and the ROK, as they see each other as competitors. Japan is currently overhauling its laws and industries to rebuild its defense industry base and exports, while the ROK defense industry has rapidly risen as a global defense exporter and an indispensable partner for NATO in the Ukraine War.⁶⁷

Japan and the ROK, however, will be situated as indirect partners in the Indo-Pacific network, namely the US defense supply chain, from ammunition and missiles to high-tech systems. The Biden administration published its National Defense Industry Strategy in January 2024 and aims to construct a defense production network and defense supply chain in the Indo-Pacific and globally.⁶⁸ Japan and South Korea signed the Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) with the United States in January and November 2023, respectively.⁶⁹ AUKUS Pillar II may be another platform for defense technology cooperation to “develop and field joint advanced military capabilities to promote security and stability in the Indo-Pacific,” within which “interoperability with allies and partners” will be pursued.⁷⁰ At the recent US-Japan summit, Japan was named the first candidate to partner with AUKUS Pillar II.⁷¹ The ROK, with its world-class defense industry capabilities, is likely to be another candidate.

Conclusion

The US-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship is at a historical juncture. The Camp David Summit has successfully incorporated the traditional “Northeast Asia Anchor” (or “Northeast Asia Hub”) into the Indo-Pacific architecture and redefined the trilateral arrangement as an Indo-Pacific partnership. While cooperation in economic and technological security is breaking new ground, defense cooperation also needs to make progress on what has been agreed upon at Camp David and beyond. While maintaining its uniqueness as the “Northeast Asia Anchor” (or “Hub”) the US-Japan-ROK partnership needs to evolve strategically and institutionally. A more comprehensive approach to defense cooperation should be taken in connection with other allies and partners in the evolving “lattice-work” of Indo-Pacific security cooperation.

In the meantime, domestic politics is kicking back in. Elections would inevitably affect the course of the trilateral relationship. The results of the ROK National Assembly elections in April were a blow to President Yoon and the ruling People Power Party in domestic affairs, but in foreign policy, the Yoon administration is likely to continue to consolidate its achievements. At the same time, the rise of progressives may, again, politicize the Japan issue and the trilateral relationship. Who wins in the US presidential elections in November will also strongly influence the direction of the trilateral.

In Japan, the Kishida administration and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) carry their own political troubles, with LDP elections scheduled for September. While dealing with domestic political issues, Japan must remain the steady anchor in foreign policy to protect and consolidate the achievements made in the Indo-Pacific region, including the US-Japan-ROK trilateral partnership. The recent US-Japan summit was a success with many deliverables. Prime Minister Kishida made a phone call to President Yoon to brief him on the summit and emphasized the importance of the trilateral.⁷² For Japan-ROK relations, next year’s 60th anniversary of diplomatic normalization should be seized upon as the moment to consolidate relations as much as possible but with caution before ROK presidential election politics resume.

Time is ticking. The three countries should make the most of the remaining time to consolidate the gains made at the Camp David Summit, laying the foundations for a more stable and resilient relationship.

Endnotes

- ¹ The author would like to thank the conveners and panelists of the Korea Economic Institute seminar on “From Security Threats to Emerging Tech: U.S.-Japan-South Korean Trilateral Relations,” hosted by the Center for Korean Studies, University of Washington in March 2024. The author appreciates the comments provided by Clint Work, Gilbert Rozman, and Jeffrey Hornung on the draft paper.
- ² “The National Security Strategy of the United States,” The White House, October 12, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>; “The 2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” US Department of Defense, October 27, 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.
- ³ Thomas Wilkins, “A Hub-and-Spokes ‘Plus’ Model of Us Alliances in the Indo-Pacific: Towards a New ‘Networked’ Design,” *Asian Affairs* 53, no. 3 (2022): 457-480; Jake Sullivan, “2021 Lowy Lecture,” Lowy Institute, September 11, 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2021-lowy-lecture-jake-sullivan>; Rahm Emanuel, “A New Era of U.S.-Japan Relations,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-new-era-of-u-s-japan-relations-defense-asia-ebd4813a>.
- ⁴ Taiwan (Republic of China) was a US treaty ally since 1954, but after the United States normalized diplomatic relations with the PRC (People’s Republic of China) in 1979, the United States has committed to the defense of Taiwan through the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979.
- ⁵ Kei Hakata, “Japan and the Indo-Pacific; The formation of a geostrategy” in *Indo-Pacific Strategies: Navigating Geopolitics at the Dawn of a New Age*, ed. Brandon J. Cannon and Kei Hakata (New York: Routledge, 2022), 81-99; Yuki Tatsumi, “Japan’s Indo-Pacific Strategy,” Korea Economic Institute of America, November 2, 2023, <https://keia.org/publication/japans-indo-pacific-strategy>.
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- ⁸ Sakata Yasuyo, “The US-Japan-ROK Trilateral in the Indo-Pacific Era: Strategic Alignment or Still in Flux,” The Asan Forum, June 28, 2021, <https://theasanforum.org/the-us-japan-rok-trilateral-in-the-indo-pacific-era-strategic-alignment-or-still-in-flux>; “Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, December 2022, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_26382/contents.do.
- ⁹ Satake Tomohiko, “Tracking the Pathway to a ‘Quasi-alliance’: Japan’s Policy toward Australia from 2013 to 2022,” The Asan Forum, March 21, 2022, <https://theasanforum.org/tracking-the-pathway-to-a-quasi-alliance-japans-policy-toward-australia-from-2013-to-2022>; Satake Tomohiko, *Nichigo no anzenhoshou kyouryoku: “kyori no sensei” wo koete [Japan-Australia Security Cooperation: Beyond the “Tyrrany of Distance]* (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 2023). Japanese media such as *Nikkei*, *Yomiuri*, and *Asahi* often use the term “準同盟” (jun-doumei or quasi-ally/quasi-alliance) for the Japan-Australia relationship, notably since the revised Japan-Australia Security Declaration was signed in October 2022.

- ¹⁰ The author referred to the trilateral as “the anchor in Northeast Asia security” in “Japan-South Korea Relations and the Biden Factor,” Council on Foreign Relations, December 21, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/japan-south-korea-relations-and-biden-factor>.
- ¹¹ “UNC Fact Sheet,” Yokota Air Base, September 2020, https://www.yokota.af.mil/Portals/44/09_21_UNCFactSheet_v6.pdf.
- ¹² The Japan-UN SOFA treaty signatories are Japan, Australia, Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. See “UNC Fact Sheet.”
- ¹³ “UNC FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions),” United Nations Command, <https://www.unc.mil/Resources/FAQs>. Since the establishment of Combined Forces Command (CFC) in 1978 as part of the US-ROK alliance structure, the UNC’s main task is to oversee the Armistice Agreement. The combat operational command functions and UNC operational control of the ROK forces was transferred to the CFC.
- ¹⁴ Kawana Shinji, *Zainichi Beigun Kichi: Beigun to Kokurengun, “Futatsuno Kao” no 80-nenshi [US Bases in Japan: 80 Year History of the Two Faces, US Forces and UN Forces]* (Tokyo: Chuokoronsha, 2024).
- ¹⁵ Kawana Shinji, *Zainichi Beigun Kichi*; Clint Work, “UN Sending States: The Forgotten Parties in the Korean War,” *The Diplomat*, August 7, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/un-sending-states-the-forgotten-parties-in-the-korean-war>.
- ¹⁶ Major General Chang Gwang Hyun, former UNC-MAC representative, noted that he deepened understanding of the “strength” and “strategic value” of the UNC and the UNC-Rear through these visits. Chang Gwang-hyun, *United Nations Command Insights* (Seoul: Seonjin, 2022), 120-127. As a recent example of these visits, General Kang Shin-chul, US-ROK CFC deputy commander, visited UNC-Rear bases in Japan accompanied by Lieutenant-General Andrew Harrison, deputy commander of the UNC, in November 2023. “CFC deputy commander to visit U.N. Command rear bases in Japan,” *Yonhap News*, November 27, 2023.
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- ¹⁸ “The Independence Movement Was a Foundational Movement for Establishing a Liberal Democracy... Properly Commemorating Our National Martyrs Is the Core of Our National Identity,” Office of the President, August 15, 2023, <https://www.president.go.kr/president/speeches/mSgAkgfP>.
- ¹⁹ “Republic of Korea and United Nations Command Member States Defense Ministerial Meeting Joint Statement,” November 14, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3587434/republic-of-korea-and-united-nations-command-member-states-defense-ministerial>; “55th Security Consultative Meeting Communique,” November 13, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3586522/55th-security-consultative-meeting-joint-communique>; “United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Meeting Unilateral Press Statement,” November 12, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3586406/united-states-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-meeting-unilateral>.

- ²⁰ The Secret Korean Minutes of 1960 is an annex to the US-Japan Security Treaty, which essentially allowed the United States to continue using bases in Japan (UNC bases) without “prior consultation” in the case of a Korean contingency. In 1969, the Japanese government attempted to neutralize the secret minutes with the Korea clause in the 1969 Nixon-Sato Communique, affirming that South Korea’s security was essential for Japanese security. In 2010, the Japanese government under the Democratic Party of Japan commissioned an experts’ review of the secret minutes and concluded that the minutes were “de facto” nullified, though this remains debated. Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada made official remarks in June 2010 that Japan would “appropriately and swiftly” respond with prior consultation in case of a Korean contingency. See Kawana, *Zainichi Beigun Kichi* (2024); Okada Katsuya, *Gaiko wo Hiraku [Opening up Foreign Policy]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014), 55-64; Dong-jun Lee, “From the Secret ‘Korean Minute’ to the Open ‘Korea Clause’: The United States and Japan and the Security of the Republic of Korea,” *Asian Perspective* 36, no. 1 (2012): 123-145; Michishita Narushige and Azuma Kiyohiko, “Chousen Hantou Yuji to Nihon no Taiou [Korean Contingency and Japan’s Response],” in *Chousen Hantou to Higashi Ajia [The Korean Peninsula and East Asia]*, ed. Kimiya Tadashi (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2015), 191.
- ²¹ In January 2018, Canada hosted a Foreign Ministers’ Meeting on Security and Stability on the Korean Peninsula, inviting 20 nations, among which 16 were UNC member states, and Japan. See Michael Bosack, “Relevance Despite Obscurity: Japan and the United Nations Command,” *Tokyo Review*, February 1, 2018, <https://tokyoreview.net/2018/02/relevance-despite-obscurity-japan-un-command>.
- ²² “Chosen Kokurengun to Wagakuni no Kankei ni tsuite [Re. Japan’s Relations with the UN Forces Korea],” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, updated March 27, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/na/fa/page23_001541.html.
- ²³ The United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, Japan, France, and Germany are members of the coalition. Artem Sherbinin, “Enforcing Sanctions on North Korea is an Opportunity for Cooperation at Sea,” *War on the Rocks*, March 16, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/enforcing-sanctions-on-north-korea-presents-an-opportunity-for-cooperation-at-sea/>; “U.S. 7th Fleet Enforcement Coordination Cell Visits Partner Nations, FS Tonnerre,” US Indo-Pacific Command, June 21, 2021, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2664969/us-7th-fleet-enforcement-coordination-cell-visits-partner-nations-fs-tonnerre>. According to the UNC, 1156 personnel, 19 aircraft, and 6 ships from Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, Thailand, and the UK visited UNC-Rear bases in Japan in 2022. See Ito Kotaro, “Aratana takami e hikiagerareta Nichi-bei-kan Anpo Kyoroku to Kokurengun Shireibu wo meguru ugoki [US-ROK-Japan Security Cooperation to a New Level and developments surrounding the UNC],” Canon Institute for Global Studies, December 1, 2023, https://cigs.canon/article/20231201_7793.html.
- ²⁴ “Courtesy Call on Foreign Minister Kamikawa by General Paul J. LaCamera,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 26, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_003318.html.
- ²⁵ Former defense officials say that the MOD and SDF have not been directly involved with UNC-Rear but should be more conscious of developing military-to-military relations. See Hikaru Tomizawa, “Nikkan kankei to Kokurengun Chii kyotei -Chosen hantou niokeru kokurengun (takokusekigun) no sonzai igi to wagakuni no taiou [Japan-ROK Relations and UN SOFA Agreement: UN Forces (multinational forces) on the Korean Peninsula, its value and our

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²⁶ Regarding the “virtual alliance” or “quasi-alliance” concept in the context of US-Japan-ROK relations, see Ralph Cossa, *US-Korea-Japan Relations: Building Toward a “Virtual Alliance”* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 1999); Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The U.S.-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford University Press, 1999); Akutsu Hiroyasu, “Nichigo, nichiin, nikkan, gokan anzen hoshou kyoryoku no rironteki gan-i : jundomei renkei no bei habu ando supoku domei shisutemu iji koka ni kansuru ichi kosatsu [Theoretical implications of Japan-Australia / Japan-India / Japan-ROK / Australia-ROK security cooperation: An initial analysis of quasi-alliance cooperation in the US Hub-And-Spoke alliance system in the Asia-pacific],” *Hogaku Kenkyu* 83, no. 3 (Tokyo: Keio University) (March 2010): 423-454; Brad Glosserman and Scott A. Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States* (Columbia University Press, 2015); Yasuyo Sakata, “ROK-Japan Defense and Security Cooperation in the US-ROK-Japan ‘Virtual Alliance’: Evolution and Prospects,” *New Asia* 24, no. 3 (Seoul: New Asia Research Institute, Autumn 2017): 118-155.

²⁷ Track-two initiatives supported official-level defense cooperation, such as the Japan-ROK Shuttle between 1997 and 1999 under ROK’s New Asia Research Institute and Japan’s Okazaki Institute. See *Korea-Japan Security Relations: Prescriptive Studies*, ed. Rhee Sang-woo and Kim Taehyo (Seoul: Oruem Publishing House, 2000). The initiative is mentioned in Sakata, “ROK-Japan Defense and Security Cooperation,” 125-131. See also Togashi Ayumi, *Nikkan Anzenhoshoukyouryoku no Kensho [Examining Japan-ROK Security Cooperation]* (Tokyo: Aki Shobo, 2017).

²⁸ Sakata Yasuyo, “Beikokuno Ajia-Taiheiyou Ribalansu Seisaku to Beikan Doumei: 21-seiki senryaku doumei no mittsu no kadai [The U.S. Asia-Pacific Rebalance and the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Three Tasks for the 21st Century Strategic Alliance],” *Kokusai Anzenhoshou [The Journal of International Security]* (Tokyo: Japan Association for International Security) 44, no. 1 (June 2016): 49-63.

²⁹ Sakata Yasuyo, “‘Global Korea’ to Beikandoumei: Lee Myung-bak seiken jidai no doumei henkaku [Global Korea and the US-ROK Alliance: Lee Myung-bak Administration and Alliance Transformation],” in *Chousen Hantou no Chitsujo Saihen [The Korean Peninsula and the Changing Order]*, ed. Okonogi Masao and Nishino Junya (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2013), 27-56.

³⁰ The Memorandum of Intent for Defense Exchange between the Japan Ministry of Defense and ROK Ministry of National Defense was signed on April 23, 2009. See “Defense of Japan 2009,” Ministry of Defense, http://www.clearing.mod.go.jp/hakusho_data/2009/2009/html/13322100.html.

³¹ Sakata, “ROK-Japan Defense and Security Cooperation,” 135-143.

³² Sakata, “ROK-Japan Defense and Security Cooperation,” 143.

- ³³ The Three No's policy included no further deployment of US THAAD systems, no integration into US missile defense systems, and no trilateral US-Japan-ROK military alliance. President Moon did not completely negate the trilateral relationship and did note the importance of security cooperation with Japan, but only in the context of the North Korea issue rather than the Indo-Pacific. See "Moon skeptical over trilateral military alliance with US and Japan," *Yonhap News Agency*, November 3, 2017, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20171103010200320>;
- ³⁴ The Abe-Moon period were the most contentious years in the history of the Japan-ROK relations since normalization. The spat over history issues soured defense and economic ties. The 2015 comfort women agreement was essentially neutralized by the Moon government, the Korean wartime laborers issue re-emerged with the 2018 ROK Supreme Court ruling. The radar lock-on incident between the two navies and the Japan SDF military flag issue, both in 2018, damaged the Japan-ROK navy ties. The Abe administration, frustrated with the Moon government, abruptly imposed export control measures on South Korea, and the Moon government rashly responded by almost nullifying GSOMIA in 2019. The Trump administration intervened at the last minute and stopped the trilateral defense relationship from unraveling, but the damage was done.
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- ³⁸ "Phnom Penh Statement on US-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Partnership for the Indo-Pacific," The White House, November 13, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/11/13/phnom-penh-statement-on-trilateral-partnership-for-the-indo-pacific/>.
- ³⁹ South Korea committed to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait in its Indo-Pacific Strategy, reaffirming "the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait for peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and for the security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific." But experts have noted that South Korea's stance is mostly rhetoric at this stage and needs to be spelled into action, albeit cautiously. See Clint Work, "Rhetoric vs. Reality: Seoul & Washington's Strategic Alignment on Taiwan," Korea Economic Institute of America, November 3, 2023, <https://keia.org/publication/rhetoric-vs-reality-seoul-washingtons-strategic-alignment-on-taiwan>; Alex Soohoon Lee and Chong-Koo Lee, "The Taiwan Strait and the ROK-U.S. Alliance," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 33, no.1 (March 2023): 153-164; Oriana Skylar Mastro and Sungmin Cho, "How South Korea Can Contribute to the Defense of Taiwan," *The Washington Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2022): 109-129.

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South Korea-Japan Security Cooperation From 2015 to Present,” 8-12; “Defense of Japan 2023,” appendixes; “News,” Self Defense Fleet of Japan, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/sf/news/>; US Department of Defense, <https://www.defense.gov/>; US Indo-Pacific Command, <https://www.pacom.mil/>; US Navy, <https://www.navy.com/>; Pacific Air Forces, <https://www.pacaf.af.mil/>.

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⁶⁴ “Defense of Japan 2023,” 407.

⁶⁵ Satake Tomohiko, “Tracking the Pathway to a ‘Quasi-alliance’: Japan’s Policy toward Australia from 2013 to 2022”; “Defense of Japan 2023,” 407-410. Besides the United States, Japan has signed ISA/GSOMIA with Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, India, and the ROK; ACSA with Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, India, and under negotiation with the Philippines; and RAA with Australia, the United Kingdom, and under negotiation with the Philippines. “Defense of Japan 2023,” 407-427

See also, Satake Tomohiko, Shoji Tomotaka, Ito Kotaro, Nishida Ippeita, “Kasseika suru Nihon no Boueigaiko: Indo-taiheiyou e no horogari to tsuuru no tayouka [Progress in Japan’s Defense Diplomacy: Expanding to the Indo-Pacific and Diversifying Tools],” in *Bouei Gaikou to wa Nanika: Heiji ni okeru Gunjiryoku no Yakuwari [What is Defense Diplomacy: The Role of Military Power in Peacetime]* ed. Watanabe Tsuneo and Nishida Ippeita (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 2021), 106~140..

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- ⁷⁰ “National Defense Industrial Strategy,” 12.
- ⁷¹ “Recognizing Japan’s strengths and the close bilateral defense partnerships with the AUKUS countries, AUKUS partners – Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – are considering cooperation with Japan on AUKUS Pillar II advanced capability projects.” See “United States-Japan Joint Leaders’ Statement,” The White House, April 10, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/04/10/united-states-japan-joint-leaders-statement>.
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