

## Japan's Security Relationship with the Republic of Korea

### Opportunities and Challenges

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#### 1. Introduction

Excessive pessimism about relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) was prevalent between 2012 and 2015 due to the “comfort women” issue. The deterioration of the bilateral ties hindered close cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul in dealing with the problems posed by North Korea’s growing nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. Fortunately, the Japanese and South Korean governments agreed on a formula for solving the comfort women issue in December 2015, which marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This agreement has made it possible for Japan and the Republic of Korea to begin to restore their bilateral relationship. However, it remains to be seen whether both countries can take a further step forward in bilateral and trilateral security cooperation with their mutual treaty ally, the United States. To explore the possibilities for such collaboration, this paper begins by illustrating the historical background of Japan-ROK security ties and then identifies the opportunities and challenges for moving forward. The paper concludes by offering a set of policy recommendations.

#### 2. Historical Background

Japan’s security ties with South Korea have been structured through the U.S.-Japan security relationship since 1950, when the Korean War broke out. Since that time, Japan has played a critical role in providing rear-area logistical support to U.S. forces. The basis for Japan’s support in possible contingencies on the Korean Peninsula has been the notes exchanged by Japanese prime minister Shigeru Yoshida and U.S. secretary of state Dean Acheson upon signing the U.S.-Japan security treaty in 1951 and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with United Nations forces in 1954. Using bases in Japan would be essential for the United States to effectively execute military operations during a contingency on the peninsula.

Even since the Korean War armistice in 1953, there has been a continued recognition of the importance of Japan as a major operating base for contingencies on the Korean Peninsula. For instance, when the United States and Japan concluded a new security treaty in 1960, the two countries agreed that “the use of facilities and areas in Japan as bases for military combat operations to be undertaken [by the United States] from Japan” would require “prior consultation.” However, the United States was concerned that this might make it impossible to use U.S. bases in Japan during contingencies on the Korean Peninsula, so the two governments signed what is now referred to as a “secret agreement” in the form of unreleased minutes of a meeting between the Japanese minister of foreign affairs and the U.S. ambassador to Japan. This

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agreement permitted U.S. forces under the Unified Command of the United Nations to use bases in Japan during contingencies on the Korean Peninsula without prior consultation.<sup>2</sup>

In a 1969 joint statement with President Richard Nixon, Prime Minister Eisaku Sato indicated his position that “the security of the Republic of Korea was essential to Japan’s own security” and expressed his intention to have Japan contribute more to the defense of South Korea.

Furthermore, Sato said in a speech before the National Press Club:

[I]f an armed attack against the Republic of Korea were to occur, the security of Japan would be seriously affected. Therefore, should an occasion arise for U.S. forces in such an eventuality to use facilities and areas within Japan as bases for military combat operations to meet the armed attack, the policy of the Government of Japan towards prior consultation would be to decide its position positively and promptly on the basis of the foregoing recognition.

Through these expressions of its intentions, Japan thus attempted to nullify the 1960 secret agreement, and it negotiated with the United States to achieve this goal. However, Japan’s efforts were unsuccessful and the secret agreement’s validity remained an open question even after the U.S. and Japanese governments concluded their negotiations. Thus, the secret agreement’s validity remains ambiguous. The Japanese government holds that prior consultation would be required in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, while the U.S. government appears to take the stance that, in some cases, this would not be necessary.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1990s Japan has needed to prepare more seriously for a crisis on the Korean Peninsula because of the growing North Korean missile and nuclear threat. To address the new security environment surrounding Japan after the Cold War, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and President Bill Clinton released a “Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security” in April 1996.<sup>4</sup> This document stated that U.S.-Japan defense cooperation would not be limited to a bilateral partnership but would also include cooperation at the regional and global levels. It also set forth a plan to revise the 1978 guidelines for U.S.-Japan defense cooperation. The declaration constituted a *de facto* decision that Japan would support the United States militarily during contingencies on the Korean Peninsula; it was thus a major turning point for Japanese defense policy. The 1997 defense guidelines specified that Japan would provide the U.S. military rear-area support including supply, transport, maintenance, medical services, security, and communications, as well as that Japan would cooperate in activities such as intelligence gathering, warning and surveillance, and minesweeping.<sup>5</sup>

Japan also started to cultivate bilateral security cooperation with the Republic of Korea to cope with the North Korean nuclear crisis in early 1990s. Japan and South Korea have made progress in confidence building by promoting bilateral military exchanges, even as historical issues have grown between the two countries since the 1990s.

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<sup>2</sup> Narushige Michishita, “Changing Security Relationship between Japan and South Korea: Frictions and Hopes,” *Asia-Pacific Review* 21, no. 2 (2014): 19–32.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (hereafter Japanese MOFA), “Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security: Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (press release, April 17, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Michishita, “Changing Security Relationship between Japan and South Korea.”

The year 1998 was a historic moment for Japan-ROK relations. Japanese prime minister Keio Obuchi and South Korean president Kim Dae-jung declared a new partnership in the Joint Declaration of October 1998. Prime Minister Obuchi expressed his deep remorse and heartfelt apology for his nation's wartime past while President Kim accepted Obuchi's apology and showed much appreciation for Japan's role as a peaceful and stable member of the postwar international community. The two leaders welcomed and decided to further strengthen security dialogue and defense exchanges at various levels between the two countries.<sup>6</sup>

Tokyo and Seoul also shared a common view about the importance of both countries steadfastly maintaining their security arrangements with the United States while at the same time further strengthening efforts on multilateral dialogue for the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region as envisioned in the Joint Declaration. In particular, to address the issue of North Korea, Tokyo and Seoul tightened policy coordination with the Washington through the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) between 1998 and 2003.

With regards to bilateral security cooperation, Japan and South Korea signed a memorandum on defense exchanges in 2009 and agreed to improve intelligence sharing and logistical support in 2011. Both countries also share a desire to engage each other on global issues, as articulated in a joint press statement issued when President Lee Myung-bak visited Japan for a summit meeting with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda in April 2008. In addition, scholars from the two countries conducted a study on "Joint Research on a New Era in Japan-ROK Relations," based on an agreement at the Japan-ROK summit in January 2009. Under this joint research framework, the scholars explored a desirable vision for the future of Japan-ROK relations and tried to identify possible areas for concrete bilateral cooperation to "contribute together to the international community." This Joint Research Project Committee submitted policy recommendations to both governments in October 2010 and December 2013.<sup>7</sup>

However, lingering historical issues have always had a negative impact on Japan-ROK relations, especially in the field of security cooperation. Japan was supposed to sign a bilateral agreement on military intelligence sharing, known as General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), in June 2012. However, just an hour before the signing ceremony, the Lee Myung-bak government abruptly pulled out due to flaring domestic criticism over the agreement. President Lee's visit to Takeshima in August 2012 also triggered emotional friction between the two countries.

Notably, the comfort women issue has seriously damaged overall Japan-ROK relations. The ROK Constitutional Court ordered the South Korea government to take action to solve the comfort women issue in August 2011. This court ruling has heavily constrained ROK government policy toward Japan. It had been very difficult for Seoul to move forward in the relationship with Japan without additional measures by the Japanese government regarding the comfort women issue.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Japanese MOFA, "Japan-Republic of Korea Joint Declaration: A New Japan-Republic of Korea Partnership towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (press release, October 8, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Japanese MOFA, "Press Conference by Minister for Foreign Affairs Seiji Maehara," (press release, October 22, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Junya Nishino, "Japan-ROK Relations: Overcoming the Challenges," in *Japan's Foreign Policy Challenges in East Asia: Views from the Next Generation*, ed. Yuki Tatsumi (Washington, DC: Stimson Center, 2014), 31–40.

Given the domestic court rulings and the negative public sentiment toward Japan on historical issues, President Park Geun-hye had to endure extraordinary political scrutiny when she sought to restore her country's relationship with Japan at the beginning of her presidency. President Park repeatedly criticized Japanese political leaders' attitudes toward historical issues, while also eagerly strengthening South Korea's relationship with China. This caused deep distrust toward the Republic of Korea in Japan, not only at the leadership level but also among the general public. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's reputation as a very conservative politician and his visit to Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013 increased negative Korean views toward Japan over historical issues. This vicious circle of the distrust between Japan and South Korea hampered bilateral security cooperation between 2012 and 2015.

Fortunately, the Japanese and South Korean governments agreed on a formula for solving the "comfort women" issue on December 28, 2015, which marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Prime Minister Abe, as prime minister of Japan, expressed sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurably painful experiences as comfort women. The Japanese government also decided to take measures to heal psychological wounds of all former comfort women, providing financial support through its budget to a foundation established by the ROK government.<sup>9</sup>

In a telephone conversation just after reaching the "comfort women" agreement, Prime Minister Abe and President Park promised that they would take responsibility as their nations' leaders to implement the agreement and reaffirmed the importance of moving forward in Japan-ROK relations by strengthening cooperation between the two countries in fields like security, human exchanges, and economics.<sup>10</sup> This provided momentum to restore bilateral security cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul.

### 3. Opportunities for Cooperation

#### 3.1 Restoring and Improving Bilateral Security Relations

The agreement between the Japanese and South Korean governments on the comfort women issue, which had strangled ties between the two countries, opened a new window of opportunity to improve bilateral relations. The agreement also provided momentum to link up joint efforts by the United States and its two allies in Northeast Asia in an unprecedented way. North Korea's fourth nuclear test and long-range missile launch at the beginning of 2016 established a firm platform on which the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea could go further in upgrading security cooperation.<sup>11</sup>

It is fair to say that both Japan and South Korea have tried to restore their security cooperation, given the growing uncertainty of the Kim Jong-un regime. Washington has strongly encouraged Tokyo and Seoul to work together closely on North Korean issues while

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<sup>9</sup> Japanese MOFA, "Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion" (press release, December 28, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Japanese MOFA, "Japan-ROK Summit Telephone Call" (press release, December 28, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Cheol Hee Park, "Reviving the U.S.-Japan-Korea Triangle in South Korean Diplomacy," The Asan Forum, April 29, 2016.

compartmentalizing historical issues. The Barack Obama administration – including the U.S. president himself – intervened at pivotal points over the past few years to help bring Abe and Park closer together, fostering an environment that made it possible for the two countries to settle their grievances.<sup>12</sup> For instance, President Obama brought the two leaders together for a trilateral summit meeting in March 2014 on the sidelines of the nuclear security summit in The Hague.

With regards to bilateral security relations, Japanese defense minister Gen Nakatani visited Seoul in May 2015 and held a meeting with his South Korea counterpart Han Minkoo. This was the first Japan-ROK bilateral defense ministerial meeting since June 2011. The two defense ministers met again in October 2015 and delivered a joint press release. They commended the uptick in Japan-ROK defense exchanges that took place in 2015, including high-level exchanges such as the defense ministerial meeting and the participation of ROK Navy vessels in the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) Fleet Review. Both sides also concurred on the need to strengthen defense exchanges in various fields and to promote cooperation on United Nations peacekeeping operations (PKO), counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) since the two countries share many strategic interests in the region and the world.<sup>13</sup> It was the first time that a joint press statement was issued from a Japan-ROK defense ministerial meeting.

The Japanese and South Korean defense authorities also agreed at the bilateral defense ministerial meeting in May 2016 to strengthen the system for emergency communication between the two defense ministries. This will facilitate communication and coordination in dealing with North Korea's nuclear tests and missile launches, such as those in early 2016.<sup>14</sup>

Another significant step for further security cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul was the signing of the bilateral information sharing agreement in November 2016. As described above, Japan was supposed to sign the GSOMIA with the Republic of Korea in June 2012, yet Seoul pulled out. Since then, the ROK government had remained reluctant to finalize the GSOMIA, but President Park showed strong resolution in concluding the renegotiation with Japan before the end of her presidency.

### ***3.2 Enhancing the U.S.-Japan-ROK Cooperation Mechanism***

Despite the historical animosity between Tokyo and Seoul, U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral security cooperation has continued to gradually develop in order to address North Korea's continuing provocations. The three countries have held a trilateral defense ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore every year since 2010. In their joint press statement after the 2016 trilateral defense ministerial meeting, Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul concluded that the three countries should continue these efforts by utilizing the Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT) framework to enable rapid coordination between their respective defense authorities in the event of future North Korean threats or to address non-traditional security

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<sup>12</sup> Juliet Eilperin, "Agreement on 'Comfort Women' Offers Strategic Benefit to U.S. in Asia Pacific," *Washington Post*, January 9, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Defense of Japan (hereafter Japanese MOD), "Extra Press Conference by the Defense Minister Nakatani" (press release, October 20, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

issues such as HA/DR.<sup>15</sup> The DTT is a senior meeting of defense officials and has been held eight times since November 2008.<sup>16</sup>

At the working level, the three countries have conducted joint naval Search and Rescue Exercises (SAREX) since the late 2000s. After the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong-do incidents in 2010, JSDF officers observed U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises. Likewise, South Korean military officers observed U.S.-Japan joint military exercises in December of the same year. In both cases, the United States invited the JSDF and ROK military officers to attend.<sup>17</sup>

Finalized by their three defense chiefs in December 2014, the Trilateral Information Sharing Arrangement (TISA) concerning nuclear and missile threats posed by North Korea will also allow for a more effective response to future provocations and contingencies.<sup>18</sup> In accordance with TISA the three nations conducted Pacific Dragon Exercise, which is a trilateral ballistic missile defense (BMD) tracking event by the U.S. Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, and ROK Navy. This exercise focused on improving tactical and technical coordination among its participants, including the detection, tracking, and reporting of ballistic targets.<sup>19</sup>

A new trilateral cooperation mechanism, the Trilateral Vice Foreign Ministerial Meeting, was established in April 2015 and has been held six times since (April 2015; January, April, July, and October 2016; and January 2017). The factsheet delivered after the sixth meeting in January 2017 stated that the three countries have coordinated not only in responding to the growing nuclear and ballistic missile threat from North Korea, but also in making joint efforts to address a range of regional security issues. It also stated that they have worked together to forge innovative approaches to help address global priorities, such as space security, cybersecurity, cancer research, and women's empowerment.<sup>20</sup> It is true that the biggest priority for trilateral cooperation is the North Korean threat, but the evolution of cooperation among the three countries has made it possible to expand the agenda for cooperation.

### ***3.3 Being Prepared for Further Cooperation***

Japanese and South Korean leaders resolved that Tokyo and Seoul should open the way for “a new era in the bilateral relationship” just after reaching the comfort women agreement in December 2015. In fact, preparation began as early as the late 2000s, aiming at the year 2015, which was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the normalization of the diplomatic relations between Tokyo and Seoul. This included the nongovernmental bilateral study on “Joint Research on a New Era in Japan-ROK Relations,” written from 2009 to 2013, which was based on an agreement from the 2009 Japan-ROK summit meeting. Under this joint research framework, the scholars explored

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Defense (hereafter DOD), “U.S., Republic of Korea, Japan Trilateral Defense Ministers’ Meeting Joint Press Statement” (press release, June 4, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> DOD, “Joint Statement for the Eighth Defense Trilateral Talks” (press release, December 16, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Nishino, “Japan-ROK Relations.”

<sup>18</sup> DOD, “Signing of Trilateral Information Sharing Arrangement Concerning the Nuclear and Missile Threats Posed by North Korea” (press release, December 28, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Navy, Third Fleet, “Pacific Dragon Exercise Concludes” (press release, June 28, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Japanese MOFA, “Fact Sheet: Key Outcomes of the U.S.-Japan-ROK Trilateral Vice Foreign Ministerial Meetings” (press release, January 5, 2017).

a desirable vision for the future of Japan-ROK relations and tried to identify possible areas for concrete bilateral cooperation.<sup>21</sup>

The second term joint research committee report was released in 2013 and titled “A New Era for Japan-ROK Relations: Seven Tasks for Bilateral Cooperation.” It contains research outcomes in seven areas: (1) promoting knowledge, culture, and media exchanges; (2) creating a human network; (3) constructing complex security order in East Asia; (4) cooperation for nuclear safety and energy; (5) environmental cooperation; (6) establishing the order of symbiotic economy in East Asia; and (7) complex technology cooperation for symbiosis. Both governments welcomed the publication of the joint academic report with a view toward advancing bilateral relations in a future-oriented way. These proposals were expected to be reviewed by the two governments and reflected in their policymaking processes.<sup>22</sup>

However, the dispute over the comfort women issue made it difficult for the two countries to utilize the outcomes of the joint research project. They therefore lost an opportunity for realizing the project’s proposals. Now is the time for the two governments to actively use the report to develop a possible cooperation agenda between Tokyo and Seoul that re envisions the future Japan-ROK relationship.

#### 4. Challenges for Moving Forward

Although Japan and the Republic of Korea have experienced a rapid recovery in their bilateral relationship since 2016, they still face tough challenges. First, frustration over the comfort women agreement and reluctance to cooperate with one another have remained in both countries.

New momentum for upgrading Japan-ROK and U.S.-Japan-ROK security cooperation arrived unexpectedly when North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test on January 6, 2016, just one week after the comfort women agreement and three years after North Korea’s third test. Considering the six-year gap between the second and third nuclear tests, it was clear that North Korea was speeding up the process of upgrading its nuclear weapons capability. Furthermore, Pyongyang argued that the fourth test used a hydrogen bomb. The nuclear test provided a new platform for improving security cooperation among Japan, South Korea, and the United States.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, this positive momentum led both governments to neglect the growing domestic controversy over the comfort women agreement. Neither Tokyo nor Seoul invested in efforts to gain public understanding about the agreement. Against the backdrop of the impeachment of President Park, full implementation of the comfort women agreement is likely to be a daunting challenge for both sides.

Some conservative Japanese politicians claimed that removal of the statue from the front of the Japanese embassy should have been linked to the payment of one billion yen to South Korea’s Reconciliation and Healing Foundation. However, the statue was erected by private

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<sup>21</sup> Nishino, “Japan-ROK Relations.”

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, “Final Report on the Second Term Joint Research Project for a New Era for Korea-Japan Relations Published” (press release, December 24, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Park, “Reviving the U.S.-Japan-Korea Triangle in South Korean Diplomacy.”

citizens and the ROK government has limited authority to remove it. At the very least, it is a sensitive issue politically. As of September 2016, 76 percent of the South Korean public was against the removal or relocation of the statue.<sup>24</sup> That is why the ROK government promised simply to make the utmost effort to relocate it after consultations with relevant bodies. However, the Japanese side's understanding of the agreement is different from that of their Korean counterparts. This perception gap has created unnecessary trouble in implementing the agreement and a revival of the downward spiral between the two countries.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the installation of another statue in front of the Consulate-General of Japan in Busan last year made the situation worse. Recent polls show that 70 percent of the South Korean public favors renegotiating the agreement.<sup>26</sup>

The situation in Seoul regarding the comfort women issue has negatively impacted Japanese attitudes toward South Korea. A poll conducted by the Cabinet Office last November showed the percentage of Japanese who do not feel an affinity with the Republic of Korea at 59.1 percent.<sup>27</sup> The “fatigue” some Japanese feel when the ROK government raises historical issues continues to cause many to lose sight of just how important Korea is for Japan.<sup>28</sup>

A second area of concern is the differing perspectives in Tokyo and Seoul on the rise of China, which have destabilized bilateral relations and made cooperation on various issues in East Asia more difficult. Japan views China as a military threat in part due to the Senkaku Islands issue, while the ROK government has seemingly begun to view Japan's security posture vis-à-vis China as a destabilizing factor in the region. Historically, South Korea's fear has been that the power struggle between Japan and China would escalate into a regional conflict requiring Seoul's involvement.

In a Japan-ROK opinion poll conducted by Genron NPO and the East Asia Institute (EAI) in June-July 2016, the top response in Japan regarding “the country you feel poses [a] military threat” was China (80 percent), followed by North Korea (73 percent). Conversely, respondents in South Korea put North Korea first (84 percent), Japan second (38 percent), and China third (36 percent).<sup>29</sup> A joint *Yomiuri Shimbun-Hankook Ilbo* opinion poll conducted in April 2016 asked: “Which do you consider more important for your country, the [United States] or China.” Japanese heavily favored the United States (75 percent) over China (15 percent), while South Koreans were nearly evenly split between the United States (49 percent) and China (44 percent).<sup>30</sup> In sum, differing assessments of present and future relations with China are causing a divergence in Japanese and Korean security policy and at the same time encouraging mutual distrust.

Third, different perceptions of the strategic environment have generated a serious divergence between Japanese and South Korean policy. The two countries are bound by their alliance partnership with the United States, but their main preoccupations are distinct. There is a

<sup>24</sup> Gallup Korea Daily Opinion, no. 226 (September 2, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Park, “Reviving the US-Japan-Korea Triangle in South Korean Diplomacy.”

<sup>26</sup> Gallup Korea Daily Opinion, no. 226 (February 17, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Japanese Cabinet Office, “Public Opinion Survey on Diplomacy” (press release, November 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Junya Nishino, “Political Leaders in Japan and the ROK Should Highlight the Importance of Bilateral Cooperation,” *AJISS Commentary*, no. 210 (May 15, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Genron NPO, “The Result of the 4<sup>th</sup> Japan-ROK Joint Public Opinion Survey,” (press release, July 19, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> “Japan-ROK Joint Opinion Survey,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 13, 2016.

widespread feeling among South Koreans that their country is caught between its largest trading partner, China, and its ally, the United States. The central issue for ROK security policy continues to be the division of the Korean Peninsula – namely, the ongoing threat of war arising from North Korean miscalculation or the regime’s undiminished desire to reunify Korea under its command. One element of the ROK response to the North Korean threat is Seoul’s effort to drive a wedge between Pyongyang and its Chinese patron. These factors combine to make South Korea reluctant to be drawn into an overt balancing strategy against China.<sup>31</sup>

For their part, Japanese leaders and policymakers tend to view the Korean Peninsula as a secondary concern compared with China. The North Korean missile test over Japanese territory in 1998 alarmed Japan, and the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea has been a prominent cause among conservatives. Recent North Korean nuclear and missile tests have alarmed the Japanese public and policymakers as well. But there remains great reluctance to recognize the Korean Peninsula as a priority for the defense and security of Japan. Rather, Japanese policymakers tend to be preoccupied with the impact of China’s economic and military power.<sup>32</sup>

There has been a convergence on North Korea policy between Japan and the Republic of Korea over the past ten years due to Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile ambitions. Looking back, however, divergence over diplomatic approaches and policies toward North Korea made it difficult for both governments to work together closely in the Six-Party Talks process during the 2000s. There was friction between ROK policies on North Korea, which emphasized dialogue to change the North’s attitude, and Japanese policies, which advocated applying greater pressure. This disagreement allowed Pyongyang to take advantage of the gap to extract more concessions in the Six-Party Talks. Different perceptions on China’s presence and role have also undermined closer cooperation between the Japanese and ROK governments. From the South Korean perspective, China is an important stakeholder in the future of the Korean Peninsula because it is an ally and patron of North Korea and, more importantly, is a signatory to the Korean War armistice of 1953. In other words, China’s endorsement is indispensable for the Peninsula’s unification. This was one of reasons that President Park tried to upgrade ROK-China relations. But Japan viewed this move critically and interpreted it as an ROK tilt toward China.<sup>33</sup> It seems likely that China’s opposition to and economic retaliation against the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to the Peninsula will change South Korean perceptions toward China on North Korean issues. However, it remains to be seen whether this will not actually result in better cooperation.

## 5. Policy Recommendations

### 5.1 Implement a “Two-Track” Approach

It is unrealistic to imagine that historical issues will disappear anytime soon. Despite this, there have been growing signs since 2015 that Japan and the Republic of Korea are looking to

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel Sneider, “Advancing Trilateral Cooperation: A U.S. Perspective,” in *U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateralism: Building Bridges and Strengthening Cooperation* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016), 1–12.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Nishino, “Japan-ROK Relations.”

quarantine essential cooperation on security and economic matters in order to ensure that they are not fundamentally impacted by these feuds over history.<sup>34</sup> Since history issues recur as a result of clashes of identity between the two countries and take the form of identity politics, finding a solution to the comfort women issue will take a long time. The Japanese and South Korean governments should make greater joint efforts to steadily and fully implement the comfort women agreement. As Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida mentioned on December 28, 2015, “projects for recovering the honor and dignity and healing the psychological wounds of all former comfort women [must] be carried out under the cooperation between the Government of Japan and the Government of the ROK.”<sup>35</sup> The leadership of both countries must address history issues in a cautious manner, be aware of their inflammatory nature, and avoid unnecessarily politicizing them in nationalistic ways. They must resist using history as a means to mobilize domestic constituencies for political purposes.<sup>36</sup>

### ***5.2 Explain the Importance of Bilateral Cooperation***

At the same time, the leaders of Japan and South Korea need to speak to their respective publics more enthusiastically and openly about the importance of Japan-ROK relations and cooperation. It goes without saying that the understanding and support of the people of both countries are essential for the further development of Japan-ROK relations, especially in the field of security cooperation. The political leaders in both countries must distance themselves from short-sighted, emotionally loaded arguments and instead highlight the importance of a long-term vision for Japan-ROK relations. The National Security Strategy adopted by the Japanese cabinet in December 2013 made this clear when it stated that South Korea “is a neighboring country of the utmost geopolitical importance for the security of Japan. Close cooperation with the ROK is of great significance for peace and stability in the region, including in addressing North Korean nuclear and missile issues.”<sup>37</sup> Japan holds the same importance for South Korea. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Tokyo and Seoul to explain more candidly and persuasively each other’s great importance for their own security.<sup>38</sup>

### ***5.3 Encourage Strategic Dialogue***

Japan and the Republic of Korea should make active use of political and diplomatic channels to dispel each other’s distrust and deepen mutual understanding through frequent communication. Policy consultations between Japan and South Korea should be institutionalized and strengthened. Resuming shuttle summit meetings on a regular basis should be a priority, as this

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<sup>34</sup> J. Berkshire Miller, “Between History and Strategy: The Trajectory of US-ROK-Japan Relations from an American Perspective,” EAI Policy Debate, no. 36 (Seoul: East Asia Foundation, October 13, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Japanese MOFA, “Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion.”

<sup>36</sup> Yul Sohn, “Relocating Trilateralism in a Broader Regional Architecture: A South Korean Perspective,” *U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateralism: Building Bridges and Strengthening Cooperation* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016), 13–22.

<sup>37</sup> Japanese Cabinet Office, “National Security Strategy” (provisional translation, December 17, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Nishino, “Political Leaders in Japan and the ROK Should highlight the Importance of Bilateral Cooperation.”

step would prompt closer cooperation at the administrative level.<sup>39</sup> Encouraging strategic dialogue at various levels will contribute to fostering a relationship of mutual trust between Tokyo and Seoul. The two countries should attempt to share as many strategic goals as possible through these dialogues, while recognizing and respecting their different perspectives on the region's geopolitical landscape.

Given North Korea's rapid development of nuclear and missile capabilities, Japan and South Korea should talk more seriously about the North Korean problem, including contingency scenarios on the Korean Peninsula. Japan and the Republic of Korea, as well as the other countries involved in the Six-Party Talks, have diverging evaluations of the strategic value of North Korea for their own security, the priority of issues to be addressed, the sequence of actions to be taken, and the long-term vision for stability on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>40</sup> As allies of the United States, Japan and South Korea have to be prepared for inter-alliance cooperation, especially given Japan's new legislation for peace and security enacted in 2016. A desirable formula for strategic dialogue is a "2+2" foreign and defense ministerial meeting, which could define a common strategic vision and objectives between Tokyo and Seoul.

#### ***5.4 Narrow the Perception Gap on China***

Regarding China policy, Japan must make efforts to work together closely with South Korea to encourage Beijing to be a responsible partner and to respect international norms in the region. In the foreseeable future, however, China is sure to regard bilateral and trilateral cooperation among Japan, South Korea, and the United States as directed against it. Tokyo and Seoul should be persistent in their efforts to ease Beijing's concerns through extensive dialogue and concrete action. The two countries should also consult closely regarding their assessment of the evolving security and political situation and attempt to fill the gaps in their approaches toward China as well as the United States.<sup>41</sup> It is also important for Japan to alleviate the ROK concern over U.S.-China and Japan-China rivalry. In order to do so, Japan should respect and support South Korea's confidence-building initiative for Japan, the Republic of Korea, and China. The China, Japan, and South Korea (CJK) trilateral cooperation secretariat (TCS) established in Seoul in 2011 would be a desirable framework in which all three countries could cultivate a habit of cooperation.<sup>42</sup>

#### ***5.5 Enhance Non-Traditional Security Cooperation***

Security cooperation between Japan and South Korea should be expanded beyond traditional security and military issues. Both countries can cooperate more in areas such as HA/DR, PKO, capacity building, and human security. The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)

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<sup>39</sup> Yoshihide Soeya, "The Future of Trilateral Cooperation: A Japanese Perspective," *U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateralism: Building Bridges and Strengthening Cooperation* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016), 23–32.

<sup>40</sup> Park, "Reviving the U.S.-Japan-Korea Triangle in South Korean Diplomacy,"

<sup>41</sup> Soeya, "The Future of Trilateral Cooperation."

<sup>42</sup> Nishino, "Japan-ROK Relations."

could be a useful tool to realize Japan-ROK cooperation in the domain of non-traditional security. Non-traditional security cooperation is the area in which Japan and the Republic of Korea can and should promote substantial cooperation and involve other regional actors such as Australia and Southeast Asian countries. This would contribute to fostering regional cooperation in East Asia.<sup>43</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Security cooperation between Japan and the Republic of Korea has been strongly encouraged by the United States. As an ally of both countries since before the 1965 normalization of diplomatic ties between Tokyo and Seoul, Washington has played a critical role in moving the two countries to work together closely in the security arena. Even after the Cold War, trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea has been a main driving force to facilitate bilateral Japan-ROK security cooperation. In the future, a robust U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral mechanism would also contribute to fostering Japan-ROK cooperation. Tokyo and Seoul should and can make greater efforts to maximize opportunities to further bilateral and trilateral cooperation.

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<sup>43</sup> Soeya, “The Future of Trilateral Cooperation.”