

POLICY ANALYSIS

Does the United States Need a New East Asian Anchor? The Case for U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateralism

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KEYWORDS: TRILATERALISM; U.S. ALLIANCE RELATIONS; JAPAN; SOUTH KOREA; NORTH KOREA; ASIAN REGIONALISM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article evaluates the value of U.S.-Japan-Korea (UJK) trilateralism as an anchor of Asian regional architecture by examining the history of trilateral partnerships, alternative regional groupings, and geopolitical and domestic circumstances.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The trilateral partnership among the U.S., Japan, and Korea has significantly contributed to the peace and security of East Asia over the last 50 years. This article argues that with additional improvements UJK trilateralism can serve as an anchor for a cooperative framework for regional security in Asia. New leadership in all three countries provides an opportunity to review existing policies and develop long-term strategies for regional architecture. UJK trilateralism compares favorably with alternative regional groupings such as Japan-China-Korea or U.S.-Japan-India. A well-crafted UJK trilateral partnership therefore has the potential to serve as an example-setting cooperative mechanism in the region.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- An enhanced UJK partnership, based on the traditional bilateral U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Korea alliances, can effectively coordinate addressing regional security contingencies.
- A trilateral UJK partnership can contribute to the resolution of the North Korea issue by reviving the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) and integrating it into the existing six-party talks.
- The current economic and financial setbacks should not deter the UJK countries from setting up a bold and creative economic partnership that looks forward to an emerging “Pacific century.”
- The UJK trilateral partnership can go beyond traditional security issues and meaningfully engage broader issues of development, democratic governance, and human rights.

“I believe this tripartite cooperation will endure into the future, and be applied to other problems in the region, as well.”

— William Perry, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., October 12, 1999

Does the United States need a new anchor in Asia? Can the U.S.-Japan-Korea (UJK) trilateral partnership be a viable option for a new regional architecture? The policy implications of this research question are clear and all the more urgent considering that all three countries have recently experienced a change in leadership; new administrations are charting new foreign policies to achieve stability and development in the region. This article argues that improved UJK trilateralism can serve as an anchor for a cooperative framework for regional security in Asia.

Trilateralism among the United States, Japan, and Korea has significantly contributed to peace and security in East Asia over the last 50 years. The most important links in the UJK triangle are the United States’ bilateral alliances with Japan and South Korea. Genuine trilateralism, however, has been important in issue areas such as policy coordination regarding North Korea. Building on this success, the United States, Japan, and Korea are now looking to improve their trilateral cooperative mechanisms.

The benefits of trilateralism seem obvious. As traditional allies, the three states are natural partners for promoting peace and security in East Asia. They also share core values of democracy and freedom, making them indispensable pillars of an open East Asian region. Nor does there seem to be a clearly better alternative to UJK trilateralism. To the extent that East Asian community-building requires a subregional anchor, it is hard to think of a better anchor than the U.S.-Japan-Korea triad. It is, therefore, important to review the concept and history of trilateralism among the three states and to explore ways to expand and deepen this partnership as a positive force both in the building of an open and peaceful East Asian region and, more broadly, in constructing a durable Asian regional architecture for stability and development.

The future success of UJK trilateralism is not assured. First, both the U.S.-ROK (Republic of Korea) alliance and the U.S.-Japan alliance have shown signs of strain in recent years. Second, the three countries have not been successful in articulating a new rationale for trilateralism in the presence of competing ideas. While highlighting the potential benefits of trilateralism, this article also recognizes the potential obstacles that may hinder the development of trilateral relations in light of recent political and economic developments. The economic downturn may result in less

attention being paid to Northeast Asia, as this region's place on leaders' policy agendas is eclipsed by other policy priorities at home and abroad. The financial crunch may also lead to cuts in defense spending and thus less money for alliance relations. Economic hardship most obviously and directly affects economic relations, pulling political attention away from multilateral cooperation. The mounting domestic opposition to the Korea–U.S. free trade agreement (KORUS FTA), both in the U.S. Congress and in the Korean National Assembly, is just one instance of a protectionist backlash that is undermining cooperation.

Given domestic leadership changes and fluid regional security dynamics, now is an opportune moment to evaluate the potential benefits of trilateral cooperation and to consider what those changes portend for trilateral relations. In examining UJK trilateralism, the article is divided into five sections:

- ≈ pp. 70–72 describe the characteristics of trilateralism as a cooperative grouping
- ≈ pp. 72–78 review the historical pathways of UJK trilateral relations
- ≈ pp. 78–86 consider alternative regional groupings as potential candidates to serve as an anchor of cooperative framework and establish the argument that UJK trilateralism is a politically feasible and desirable option
- ≈ pp. 86–91 examine the conditions necessary for successful implementation of trilateralism and specifically consider domestic political conditions as well as geopolitical circumstances
- ≈ pp. 92–99 offer a set of policy recommendations that the United States, Japan, and Korea together can pursue and consider four policy issue domains: alliance policies, the problem of North Korea, the future of trilateral economic cooperation, and the possibility of broader cooperation on human rights issues

THE CONCEPT OF UJK TRILATERALISM

Before developing concrete policy proposals and strategies based on trilateralism, it will be helpful to describe trilateralism's form and substance. This section first considers a general definition of trilateralism, with attention to key characteristics and requirements. It then derives a typology of trilateral relations. The discussion is primarily informed by the history of trilateralism and consideration of contemporary patterns of trilateralism in practice.

Trilateralism refers to “cooperative security behavior between three states or strategic polities to promote specific values and orders.”¹ This definition focuses on three elements: the nature of the arrangement, the parties involved, and the goal of the arrangement. First, with regard to the nature of the interaction, trilateralism is defined as cooperative behavior. It is behavior that can be developed into institutionalized cooperative forms or practices. Although such cooperation has historically been confined to the issue of security, trilateralism can be extended to other domains, such as economic development or the environment, due to the close policy nexus among issue areas.

Second, in terms of the actors involved, trilateralism is a forum for policy among three states or other strategic polities. This implies that trilateral relations are more than the sum of bilateral relations between the countries that are willing to cooperate. It also means that major actors share some predisposition to be strategic allies equipped with political will and capabilities.

The third element of the definition—common political goals and a shared strategic vision of regional or international order—establishes the necessary conditions for trilateral relations. The creation of trilateral relations requires the alignment of foreign policy interests, be they common threats or the establishment of regional or international order. The progenitor of modern trilateralism, the Trilateral Commission, is a case in point. This grouping was formed by private citizens of the United States, Japan, and Europe who shared the goal of together shouldering leadership responsibilities in the international system. The trilateral relations among the United States, Japan, and South Korea fit the proposed definition. These three states have a history of coordination in security affairs, are strategic allies with bilateral military alliances, and share common interests in peace and security in the region.

If we consider any and all forms of interaction and exchange that take place between countries, then trilateral relations can be found to exist among just about any randomly selected set of three countries. Therefore, it is important to confine analysis of trilateralism to formal trilateral relations, i.e., to cooperative behavior under formal bilateral or trilateral agreements.

There are two main variables affecting forms of institutionalized trilateral relations: (1) the strength or circularity of bilateral relationships along the trilateral axis and (2) the choice of a multilateral forum as the primary political venue used to foster trilateral relations. Countries pursuing trilateralism first choose whether to use a hub-and-spoke system or a three-way mechanism.

¹ William Tow, Mark Thomson, and Yoshinobu Yamamoto, eds., *Asia-Pacific Security: US, Australia and Japan and the New Security Triangle* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007), 24.

Under a hub-and-spoke system, two bilateral agreements are necessary to tie the three countries in a trilateral relationship. We call this system a strong “two-legged” structure. Alternatively, the three countries can formalize trilateral relations through a three-party agreement, resulting in a “three-legged” structure. The second variable—venue choice—is important because three countries can pursue a trilateral partnership embedded in a multilateral structure or independently of any multilateral framework.

Depending on the strength of bilateral relationships and the choice of venue, trilateral mechanisms can be, at least in theory, divided into four types: (1) strong two-legged, (2) independent three-legged, (3) multilateral two-legged, and (4) multilateral three-legged. In practice, however, it is highly unlikely that a multilateral two-legged structure will emerge, and even if one did, it would not be a significant development because the problem of coordinating bilateral relationships is always present in a multilateral framework.

Trilateralism is more than the sum of bilateral relations, and the three “probable” types of trilateral mechanisms will be understood in this article as three evolutionary stages of trilateralism. Trilateralism can start with common historical experience based on bilateral relations. Such two-legged structures can branch out to form three-legged structures. If the three-way relations mature, trilateralism in its fuller form can root itself in a broader regional framework. Although this typology does not take account of the subtleties of how trilateral relations are managed, it nevertheless yields a general concept and broad category of trilateralism, thereby grounding our discussion of the past and future of UJK trilateralism.

AN OVERVIEW OF U.S.-JAPAN-KOREA TRILATERAL RELATIONS

This section reviews the existing practice of trilateral relations among the United States, Japan, and Korea by examining the history of each type of trilateral relations introduced in **Table 1**, by offering examples of recent practice of trilateralism, and by describing patterns and lessons drawn from past experience. We first consider trilateral relations among the United States, Japan, and Korea according to the typology of strong two-legged, independent three-legged, and multilateral three-legged structures.

TABLE 1

Types of Trilateralism

Choice of venue	Strength of bilateral relations	
	Hub-and-spoke	Three-party agreement
Embedded in a multilateral framework	Multilateral two-legged (NA)	Multilateral three-legged (e.g., trilateral summits on the sidelines of APEC)
Outside a multilateral framework	Strong two-legged (e.g., U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Korea alliances)	Independent three-legged (e.g., the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group, 1999–2002)

Strong Two-Legged Structures

Trilateral security relations among the United States, Japan, and South Korea have often been depicted as the relationship between two “strong legs” and one “weak leg.” The relationship builds on bilateral relations between the United States and Japan, on the one hand, and the United States and the ROK, on the other.² The U.S.-Japan alliance has traditionally served as a linchpin of the United States’ Northeast Asian policy.³ The U.S.-ROK alliance, albeit weakened gradually in recent years due to political tensions between the two countries, has been a strong one.⁴ As a matter of policy, the crucial question is whether this status quo policy has a sufficiently strong rationale to be maintained. Some scholars and policymakers have advocated the continuation or consolidation of current policies—a view most articulately propounded by Ralph Cossa, who has characterized the tripartite relationship as a “virtual alliance.”⁵ According to this view, the trilateral partnership will not take the form of a formal alliance but instead will take a virtual one where

² Victor Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

³ See “The National Security Strategy of the United States,” White House, Report, March 2006. For a current discussion of the U.S.-Japan alliance, see Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye, “The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Getting Asia Right through 2020,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Report, 2007.

⁴ For political developments regarding the contemporary U.S.-ROK alliance, see Kun Young Park, “A New U.S.-ROK Alliance: A Nine-Point Policy Recommendation for a Reflective and Mature Partnership,” Brookings Institution, 2005. For a discussion of the recent thorny security issues between the United States and South Korea, including whether South Korea should join the U.S.-led missile defense program and the Proliferation Security Initiative, see Scott Snyder, “Inauguration of Lee Myung-bak: Grappling with Korea’s Future Challenges,” Brookings Institution, May 18, 2008.

⁵ Ralph Cossa, ed., *U.S.-Korea-Japan Relations: Building toward a “Virtual Alliance,”* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 1999).

the three countries build on the two antecedent bilateral partnerships, thereby maintaining the U.S. alliances with Japan and Korea while also strengthening bilateral security cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul. Proponents of the continuation of such a strong two-legged approach point to the European experience, where the key partnership between France and Germany developed into the supranational institution of the European Union (EU). This approach is nevertheless cautious about any progress to be made toward a three-way relationship and ignores the fact that trilateralism is more than the sum of separate bilateral relations.

Independent Three-Legged Structures

The second modality of trilateralism is the partnership grounded on strong three-legged bilateral relations with the aim of a three-way coordinating mechanism. Examples of a three-legged structure include the Perry Process, which led to the establishment of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) and a defense trilateral. Officially established in 1999, the TCOG was at that time touted as a successful example of trilateral cooperation that led to a concerted foreign policy effort toward North Korea. The TCOG originated from informal trilateral discussions among high-ranking government officials in 1992 in response to the first North Korean nuclear crisis; however, over time the group lost its political luster by primarily engaging junior-level officials. As another part of the Perry Process, a defense trilateral was pursued by defense ministries. This bureaucratic-level inter-agency coordination provides the advantage of establishing points of contact and also guarantees continued dialogue, unlike APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit meetings, whose political initiatives can quickly dissipate and fade away. In sum, trilateral relations among the United States, Japan, and Korea have historically exhibited an independent three-legged structure; however, the approach these countries have actually followed has been rather *ad hoc*, focusing more on the problem of North Korea than on providing any long-term vision for comprehensive cooperative issues.

Multilateral Three-Legged Structures

Occasional summit meetings in APEC among the leaders of the United States, Japan, and Korea are the best example of trilateralism with a multilateral three-legged structure. This form of trilateralism is the most promising arrangement in the long run, given that this article views trilateral relations as part of a broader, regional cooperative framework. For the UJK

partnership, trilateral relations can operate as an anchor and can be further developed, thereby building the regional cooperative order. “Anchor” here means a solid political alliance with the goal of promoting regional peace and security. An anchor as a meaningful political unit would internally consolidate bilateral relations into an institutionalized three-legged structure while externally providing the basis for broader regional integration. The aim is to have a trilateral partnership that can create cooperative synergies and ultimately embed itself into existing multilateral regional architecture. Here, this article takes a rather evolutionary view of trilateralism as applied to the UJK partnership, moving away from two strong bilateral structures to an independent three-legged arrangement, ultimately establishing an institutionalized political cooperative unit in a gradual fashion.⁶

The political network among the United States, Japan, and Korea can serve as a subgrouping within broader cooperative regional partnerships. This not only consolidates the trilateral partnership but also provides a complementary cooperative mechanism in the region. Multilateral forums where UJK trilateralism has been at work but could be made stronger are APEC, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).⁷

Table 2 provides examples of existing mechanisms for trilateral interactions among the United States, Japan, and Korea, broken down into issue areas of international security, economy, and human rights. Some interactions that typically remain submerged in a multilateral setting and that are outside of the typology proposed in Table 1 have been intentionally included. They serve as examples of the current status of regional cooperation that could be emulated by a trilateral partnership in the future.

Two major patterns emerge from Table 2. First, existing mechanisms have been largely bilateral or multilateral. The TCOG, with its independent structure, is one salient exception. The practice of trilateral relations has occurred either as an independent two-legged arrangement or comprehensively embedded in multilateral settings. For instance, on bilateral military alliances, the United States has worked with South Korea and Japan individually. In multiple settings,

⁶ This view is also in line with the argument in Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, “A Security and Peace Mechanism for Northeast Asia: The Economic Dimension,” Peterson Institute for International Economics, Policy Brief, no. 8–4, April 2008.

⁷ Track II security forums include the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the Asia Security Conference (ASC). For a discussion of the development and activities of these informal institutions, see Keiichi Tsunekawa, “Why So Many Maps There? Japan and Regional Cooperation,” in *Remapping East Asia: The Construction of a Region*, ed. T. J. Pempel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 101–48.

TABLE 2

Practice of U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Cooperation

Trilateralism in security issues			
Existing mechanisms	Issues	Trilateralism types	Notes and assessments
ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM); ROK-U.S. Military Committee Meeting (MCM)	Security environment in and around the Korean Peninsula, North Korea issue, combined force command, anti-terrorism and counterterrorism activities	Independent two-legged	Based on the U.S.-Korea Mutual Defense Treaty (1954); yearly ministerial meetings; agenda changes depending on political circumstances
U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) ^a	Realignment of U.S. forces, counterterrorism efforts, missile defense, coordination of Japan's Self-Defense Forces and the U.S. armed forces	Independent two-legged	Based on the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty of 1960; so-called 2+2 meeting of the U.S. secretaries of state and defense with their Japanese counterparts
Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG)	North Korea denuclearization	Independent three-legged	Established in 1999 by the Perry Report ^b
Six-party talks	North Korea denuclearization	Multilateral	Talks opened in 2003; <i>ad hoc</i> form of multilateral diplomacy ^c
ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)	Confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region	Multilateral	Established in 1994 and not yet fully developed ^d
Trilateralism in economic affairs			
Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA)	Trade	Independent two-legged	Signed in 2007; ratification by the U.S. Congress uncertain
Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI)	Finance	Multilateral	Established in 1999 under ASEAN +3 (the U.S. is not a member); a step toward the creation of an Asian Monetary Fund; bilateral swap initiative

Table 2 (continued)

Trilateralism in other issue areas			
UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ((UNESCAP)	Human rights	Multilateral	Framework level with initiatives; at nascent development stage; mostly under the umbrella of UN agencies such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or UN Commission on Human Rights
North East Asian Sub-regional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC)	Environment	Multilateral	Established in 1993, the U.S. is not a member to this intergovernmental network of China, Japan, North Korea, Mongolia, the ROK, and Russia
World Bank and IMF	Governance and corruption	Multilateral	Influence through international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF
Common mechanisms across issues			
Meeting of the Japanese and Korean heads of state	Various	Independent two-legged	Various years; so-called shuttle diplomacy, the meetings cover issues such as youth exchange and the Economic Partnership Agreement ^e
APEC Meeting	Various	Multilateral three-legged	Founded in 1989, APEC agendas include issues such as climate change and corporate social responsibility; perceived to be weak in implementation

Source: *a* = for the SCC agenda over time, see Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; *b* = for the complete listing of TCOG meeting chronology, see James Schoff, "Security Policy Reforms in East Asia and a Trilateral Crisis Response Planning Opportunity," Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, Second Interim Report, 2005, appendix B; *c* = for a select chronology on the North Korean nuclear issue, see Schoff, "Security Policy Reforms," appendix A; *d* = see Miles Kahler, "Legalization as Strategy: The Asia-Pacific Case," *International Organization* 54, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 549–71; and Tsunekawa, "Why So Many Maps There? 101–48; *e* = For the complete listing of the exchanged visits between the heads of state, see the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Press Release, April 22, 2008, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/2008/4/0422.html>.

the three countries have conducted diplomacy in a multilateral forum without explicit trilateral coordination. Second, thus far no active forms of trilateral initiatives capable of pushing truly multilateral agendas have been observed. The scope of issues under the TCOG was narrowly confined to North Korea. Also, even when the leaders of the three countries meet on the sidelines of the APEC summit meeting, they usually discuss issues of common interest not related to the APEC agenda. This narrow scope indicates the need for a discussion of a longer-term vision, potentially beyond security issues—a discussion that might be catalyzed by strengthening the trilateral relations among the three countries.

As demonstrated in Table 2, the episodes of trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and Korea have been significant, even though few in number. The historical trajectory of such cooperation holds important lessons for the future of trilateralism. The evidence demonstrates the need for multilateral three-legged trilateral relations—trilateralism embedded in a regional cooperative framework. As cooperation issues become ever more comprehensive, the capacity of bilateral hub-and-spoke relations to tackle emerging issues such as human rights and the environment, not to mention effective coordination on security issues, becomes more limited. In sum, all three types of trilateral cooperation—*independent two-legged*, *independent three-legged*, and *multilateral three-legged*—have been present in the history of interactions among the three countries of interest. Based on this review of past and current trilateral relations, multilateral three-legged cooperation would be the most desirable form of trilateral relations for stabilizing and developing the Asian region in the future. Historically, relations based on *independent two-legged* cooperation have been most salient, with a couple of attempts at *independent three-legged* cooperation, but *multilateral three-legged* trilateralism has the most potential to further the interests of the region.

WHY UJK TRILATERALISM?

Because trilateralism is a means rather than an end, it is important to clarify what the end of trilateralism is. This article will argue that UJK trilateralism should be ultimately justified as an anchor for, and a motor of, East Asian integration. In East Asia a multilateral regional order has been slow to develop; one reason for this is that East Asian multilateralism has lacked a strong subregional anchor.

Many scholars and practitioners suggest that political heterogeneity in Asia prevents coherent and deep multilateral cooperation. One important strand in the relevant literature attempts to explain how and why cooperation in East Asia emerges and becomes organized the way it does. The first line of work tries to solve the puzzle of why multilateralism has not emerged in East Asia. The answers point to a variety of possible causes, including the remnants of the San Francisco system;⁸ a hub-and-spoke series of bilateral alliance relations stemming from lack of common identity in the post-World War II period;⁹ political heterogeneity or historical animosity;¹⁰ and the perception of multilateralism as instrumental, strategic, and a “means to other ends.”¹¹

Given the absence of significant multilateralism in East Asia, scholars have ruminated about possible bilateral or triangular relationships with different core states that could meaningfully replace or complement the multilateral structure. Many scholars identify the leadership role of the United States as the key factor in determining which forms of cooperation will emerge in the region.¹² Besides the question of leadership and of who counts as a “core” state, the scope of membership—whether membership should be open or closed—is also a critical matter in deciding which cooperative framework to pursue.

This article argues that trilateralism does not necessarily undermine multilateralism and can actually be woven into a broader multilateral forum. Modern-day trilateralism is not necessarily confined to the security realm; it can be extended to many other issue areas such as governance, cultural, and social issues. As a result, this article places trilateral relations within a comprehensive regional order and claims that trilateralism becomes meaningful only when it becomes an anchor for a broader regional order. Among the three types of trilateralism mentioned in the previous section, an anchor would fall under the independent three-legged category, and would gradually develop into a multilateral three-legged structure. An example of a “model” anchor is the

⁸ Vinod K. Aggarwal and Min Gyo Koo, eds., *Asia's New Institutional Architecture: Evolving Structures for Managing Trade, Financial, and Security Relations* (Springer, 2007).

⁹ Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 56, no.3 (2002): 575–607.

¹⁰ Etel Solingen, “East Asian Regional Institutions: Characteristics, Sources, Distinctiveness,” in *Remapping East Asia: The Construction of a Region*, ed. T. J. Pempel (Cornell University Press, 2005), 31–53; and Kongdan Oh, “Northeast Asia: Changes and the Potential for a Cooperative Future,” Brookings Institution, January 2003 \approx http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2003/01northeastasia_oh.aspx.

¹¹ Kahler, “Legalization as Strategy.”

¹² Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*.

Franco-German relationship at the inception and through the early stages of the European integration.¹³ The Franco-German relationship exemplifies the tight connection between the existence of an anchor and the success of regionalism. The relationship has been cited as a “motor” or “engine” of EU integration.¹⁴ In this case, bilateral relations were based on well-developed communication channels that permeated everyday politics¹⁵ and that also connected France and Germany to the Atlantic alliance on matters pertaining to NATO as well as other items of mutual political interest.¹⁶

If European integration has been anchored by the German-French partnership, one must ask which relationship in Asia could anchor regional cooperation. Which country is willing and capable of providing leadership for Asian regionalism? The literature on East Asian regionalism reveals that the development of political alliances has been rather haphazard and there is no core anchor given the web of bilateral relations.¹⁷ Given this historical development, there is no better candidate than the UJK triangle to serve as the anchor for future East Asian regionalism. Other observers have similarly advocated for UJK trilateralism. Michael Armacost and Kenneth Pyle have argued that trilateral coordination can help prepare for the contingency of Korean unification.¹⁸ Michael Auslin has suggested Japan and Korea as a regional core with a potential to strengthen multilateral relations of Asian nations.¹⁹

This article takes a different analytical approach from previous works. In order to highlight the merits and demerits of UJK trilateralism, it considers potentially competitive regional groupings. The literature suggests that

¹³ For leading works on Franco-German relations in the EU, see Haig Simonian, *The Privileged Partnership: Franco-German Relations in the European Community 1969–1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984); Peter Schmidt, “The Special Franco-German Security Relationship in the 1990s,” Institute of the Western European Union, Chaillot Paper, June 1993 ~ <http://aei.pitt.edu/452/01/chai08e.html>; and Douglas Webber, ed., *The Franco-German Relationship in the European Union* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁴ Thus goes the famous quote of French president Giscard d’Estaing (1974–81): “Germany and France agree, Europe makes progress; wherever they are divided, Europe marks time.” Quoted in Webber, *The Franco-German Relationship*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2–4.

¹⁶ Schmidt, “Franco-German Security Cooperation.”

¹⁷ Key volumes on East Asian regionalism include David Shambaugh, ed., *Power Shift: China and Asia’s New Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Peter Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Peter Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi, eds., *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); and John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Michael Armacost and Kenneth Pyle, “Japan and the Unification of Korea: Challenges for U.S. Policy Coordination,” *NBR Analysis* 10, no. 1 (March 1999): 5–38.

¹⁹ Michael Auslin, “Japan and South Korea: The New East Asian Core,” *Orbis* 49, no. 3, (Summer 2005): 459–73.

there are at least eight groupings that can be presented as alternatives to UJK trilateralism: (1) U.S. unilateralism, (2) U.S.-China bilateralism, (3) U.S.-Japan bilateralism, (4) U.S.-Japan-China trilateralism, (5) U.S.-Japan-Australia trilateralism, (6) U.S.-Japan-India trilateralism, (7) Korea-Japan-China trilateralism, and (8) ASEAN-U.S.-China multilateralism. The consideration of these eight groupings does not exclude the possibility of other potential groupings.²⁰

The discussion of these alternative groupings focuses on three evaluative criteria: political feasibility, potential policy effectiveness, and efficiency in formation of a grouping. The first criterion of political feasibility refers to the meeting of interests of the parties, whether domestic political support exists or the grouping would not disrupt geopolitical balance. The second criterion of potential policy effectiveness examines whether the grouping may yield desirable outcomes in the region—in this case, stability and development in the Asian region. The third criterion of efficiency evaluates whether the grouping already has followed the historical trajectory of having solid relations. Such historical relations make further political developments less costly with already established governmental and policy networks. The following discussion applies these evaluative criteria in comparing the groupings.

U.S. unilateralism ∞ Historically, the United States has shaped the regional order in Asia.²¹ The argument for U.S. unilateralism would crucially assume the robustness of American power. Now that U.S. dominance is in decline, political observers question whether U.S. unilateralism is possible.²² Some observers even suggest that any attempt at unilateral management of Asia may be counterproductive.²³

U.S.-China bilateralism ∞ The strongest proponent of this anchor is C. Fred Bergsten,²⁴ who proposed the group of two (G-2) as an institutional framework. The proposal is based on the argument that the United States must embrace China as a responsible global partner to solve global problems. Given

²⁰ For instance, the article does not specifically mention ANZUS, the grouping among Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Although the 1951 ANZUS security treaty was not fully abrogated, the leg between New Zealand and the United States no longer holds.

²¹ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*.

²² Fareed Zakaria suggests that U.S. unilateralism is no longer sustainable. Fareed Zakaria, *The Post American World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

²³ Armitage and Nye, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance." Mike Mochizuki argues that U.S. unilateralism would likely make Japan-China relations closer. See Mike Mochizuki, "Terms of Engagement: The U.S.-Japan Alliance and the Rise of China," in *Beyond Bilateralism: U.S.-Japan Relations in the New Asia-Pacific*, ed. Ellis Krauss and T. J. Pempel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 87–114.

²⁴ C. Fred Bergsten. "A Partnership of Equals: How Washington Should Respond to China's Economic Challenge," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no.4 (July/August 2008): 57–69.

the historical record of how difficult it is to manage such competitive relations, it is difficult to imagine a G-2 alliance emerging in the near future. The most difficult question is whether China would be willing to accept that order.

U.S.-Japan bilateralism ≈ The Armitage-Nye report makes a case for strong ties between the United States and Japan by arguing that this partnership would have a positive influence in Asia.²⁵

U.S.-Japan-China trilateralism ≈ Proponents of this enhanced trilateral cooperation arrangement have argued that the post-Cold War regional order would be best managed by the three countries with the greatest capacity to bring about regional economic, political, and military stability, particularly in the wake of recent economic turbulence and tense China-Taiwan relations.²⁶ The feasibility of this trilateral arrangement in any institutionalized form, however, is questionable in the foreseeable future.²⁷

Japan-China-Korea trilateralism ≈ Given the three states' geographical proximity, Japan-China-Korea trilateralism has been suggested as an alternative anchor. The archetype for such a partnership already exists in the ASEAN +3 format. This grouping, however, may not appeal to the broader design of the United States regarding regional security. The grouping seems even less feasible when current relations among the three countries are considered. Although Korea is growing closer to China due to strengthening economic relations, the prospect of Japan and China forging a formal alliance relationship is distant. Therefore, this trilateral arrangement looks unlikely in the short term, though scholars increasingly discuss its possibilities. As Japan-China relations enter into a rather stable phase²⁸ and as Korea's economic ties with China become closer,²⁹ this trilateral relationship may become viable if U.S. interest in the region declines. With China slowly assuming regional leadership in regional organizations such as in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and embarking on its project of military modernization,³⁰ the possibility of this trilateral relation emerging in the next decade or so cannot be excluded. If we

²⁵ Armitage and Nye, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance."

²⁶ See Ikenberry and Mastanduno, *International Relations Theory*; "'Dialogue': U.S.-Japan-China Relations and Asian-Pacific Stability," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report, no.37, September 9, 1998.

²⁷ Armitage and Nye also note the importance of this triangular relationship for regional security and stability but do not necessarily advocate the development of trilateralism among the three countries. See Armitage and Nye, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance."

²⁸ Mike Mochizuki, "China-Japan Relations: Downward Spiral or a New Equilibrium?" in Shambaugh, *Power Shift*, 135-50.

²⁹ Shambaugh, *Power Shift*, 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23-33.

take the convergence of interests as a key prerequisite of trilateralism, then this trilateral configuration still has a long way to go.

U.S.-Japan-Australia trilateralism ∞ This trilateral partnership is the most compelling alternative to UJK trilateralism, given recent developments.³¹ The Australia-Japan-U.S. Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) was inaugurated in September 2007; Japan and Australia signed the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in March 2007; and the United States is a long-time unwavering ally of both states. It is doubtful, however, whether Australia will be willing to invest political capital in the security matters of East Asia.

U.S.-Japan-India trilateralism ∞ This trilateral relationship is also seriously considered by scholars and practitioners given its geographical reach that spans South Asia and East Asia.³² The security ties between the United States and India were demonstrated in the 2007 nuclear agreement. The ties between Japan and India have been forged by the “Joint Statement towards India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership” signed in 2006. There is some uncertainty about the viability of this trilateral relationship, however, stemming from the foreign policy position of India. New Delhi has traditionally been cautious about balancing ties to China with ties to the United States; thus, it is difficult to imagine that India would align itself strictly with the United States.

ASEAN-U.S.-China multilateralism ∞ This triangular relation is thought to be critical to maintaining security in the region of ASEAN members.³³ The Southeast Asia region, however, is clearly an arena for competition between China and the United States, and therefore this trilateral partnership cannot provide a shared and coherent vision for regional order.

Table 3 summarizes the eight groupings discussed above. The comparative evaluation of these alternative groupings indicates that a UJK arrangement deserves serious consideration as a viable political option. It is certainly one of the most feasible means to achieving the goal of regional stability and economic development in East Asia as well as in the Asian region more broadly. Compared to the U.S.-Japan or U.S.-Japan-Australia arrangements, the UJK trilateral partnership is strengthened by the fact that Korea provides leverage in resolving the North Korean nuclear problem

³¹ See Tow, *Asia-Pacific Security*.

³² See, for instance, “The United States, Japan, and India: Toward New Trilateral Cooperation,” CSIS, U.S.-Japan-India Report, August 16, 2007 ∞ http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,4004/.

³³ Marvin Ott, “The Triangular Relationship of the United States-China-ASEAN: A Prototype of American Diplomacy,” Woodrow Wilson Center Asia Program Congressional Briefing Series, Washington, D.C., April 1998 ∞ <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/us-china-asean.pdf>.

TABLE 3

Alternative Regional Groupings

Alternative configuration	Source	Key rationale for or against
U.S. unilateralism	Krauss and Pempel, 2004*; Katzenstein, 2005*	Declining U.S. power; can be counterproductive if it produces negative reactions in other countries
U.S.-China	Bergsten, 2008	Strong need for continued coordination
U.S.-Japan	Armitage and Nye, 2007; Krauss and Pempel, 2004*	Traditional allies in the East Asia region
U.S.-Japan-China	Glosserman, 2007; Ikenberry and Mastanduno, 2003; Armitage and Nye, 2007*; USIP report	U.S. as a stabilizer (assuming U.S. commitment to deep engagement); regarded as the critical trilateral relationship to sustain the region's stability
U.S.-Japan-Australia	Tow et al., 2007	Japan and Australia are long-time U.S. allies; a Japan-Australia-U.S. axis has been suggested as a counterforce to the emergence of China as a regional power
U.S.-Japan-India	CSIS 2007 report	They share common values and a commitment to the maintenance of an open and stable international order; significant shared interests in the strategic, energy, and economic fields
Korea-Japan-China	Shambaugh, 2005*	The cooperation among these three major Asian countries has been meager and limited to technology cooperation due to historical disputes. This trilateral relationship has not been often mentioned in practice
ASEAN-U.S.-China	Ott, 1998*	As members of the ARF, ASEAN, the U.S., and China can be another potential trilateral arrangement inclusive of two major global powers (the U.S. and China)

Source: Krauss and Pempel, *Beyond Bilateralism*; Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*; Bergsten, "A Partnership of Equals"; Brad Glosserman, "U.S.-Japan-ROK Relations for the 21st Century," CSIS Pacific Forum, Issues and Insights 7, no. 5, 2007; Armitage and Nye, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance"; Shambaugh, *Power Shift*; Ikenberry and Mastanduno, *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*; Ikenberry and Mastanduno, "Dialogue"; Tow et al., *Asia-Pacific Security*; Ott, "The Triangular Relationship"; and "The United States, Japan, and India: Toward New Trilateral Cooperation."

Note: Asterisk indicates that source does not necessarily advocate this particular trilateral arrangement, nor does it directly consider the idea of trilateralism. Instead, the source examines bilateral relations among the said three countries.

while providing a better prospect for economic cooperation based on a KORUS FTA. Several groupings fail the feasibility test. For instance, U.S.-Japan-India may not be politically feasible because India, in order to maintain good relations with China, may be reluctant to align explicitly and consistently with the United States. The U.S.-China alternative seems unlikely in the near future, although the bilateral relationship between these countries will remain crucial in coming decades. An ASEAN-U.S.-China partnership could be thorny because it might sharpen the rivalry between China and the United States over ASEAN countries.

For these reasons, the UJK trilateral alliance should be considered a serious alternative to the other designs. If developed properly and with adequate political resources, the proposed trilateral relationship can be an example-setting anchor for East Asia and more broadly for the Asian region. The UJK relationship can provide well-orchestrated security policies while proffering a long-term vision for regional cooperation in the areas of economic affairs, human rights, and the environment.

The UJK trilateral partnership this article envisions is not a mutually exclusive grouping with existing ones. Rather, as the concept of anchor illustrates, such a partnership and existing groupings or regional forums can be mutually reinforcing. The already robust U.S.-Japan-Australia partnership can be one grouping that could support the UJK axis, particularly on the issue of Southeast Asia. Forums such as APEC, ARF, and the East Asian Summit (EAS) can also be complementary mechanisms to the UJK trilateralism.³⁴ Ministerial-level discussions can continue through the ARF. Alternatively, UJK trilateralism can be a channel through which the United States voices its political agenda in the EAS, which currently does not include the United States as a member. The challenge of course is how to manage all these proliferating groupings. Having a clear anchor will certainly help streamline these policy coordination processes. This approach will not require a dramatic policy change from the perspective of the United States but rather will augment the traditional Washington hub-and-spoke approach, providing a continuation of current policy from the United States.³⁵ The present authors therefore agree with other scholars that fully institutionalized multilateralism in Asia is not

³⁴ The United States is not a member of the East Asian Summit but may join under the Obama administration. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

³⁵ Nick Bisley, "Asian Security Architectures" in *Strategic Asia 2007-08: Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2007), 341-69.

likely to take root in a short period of time and that the continuation of weak institutionalization will be a defining feature of regional architecture.³⁶

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL UJK TRILATERAL COOPERATION

Three key factors could shape the development of trilateral relations: geopolitical relations, changes in domestic politics, and issue characteristics. The first determinant—geopolitical relations—is important because these relations help us to identify the international constraints and opportunities for trilateralism. The form and viability of any trilateral partnership will in large part be determined by the regional geopolitical environment, such as the potential political response of China and the history of regional cooperation in Northeast Asia or in Asia more broadly. Trilateral relations should be conducted alongside engagement with other countries outside of the triangle, given that the preferences of other countries clearly shape the forms trilateral relations can take, not to mention the very possibility of their initial emergence. Geopolitical concerns of this order include the preferences of influential states such as the United States and China, in addition to the development of Sino-U.S. relations. The consideration of geopolitical relations is also important insofar as it causes us to consider other forms of international groupings that might push the same agenda of creating a regional order. China's political response to trilateralism is of particular importance due to the country's growing regional influence based on its economic power.

The second determinant—changes in domestic politics—provides guidance regarding the question of timing. With turnover in leadership, new political agendas and opportunities emerge. In general, favorable domestic politics constitute a precondition for successful trilateral relations. A systematic examination of domestic political environments is important because it provides a basis for assessing the foreign policy preferences of each country, which in turn provides a basis for forecasting the foreign policies countries will embrace. Depending on which foreign policy priorities a new leader puts forward, as well as how new initiatives are pursued, the change in domestic leadership can bring about structural changes in trilateral relations and determine the type of trilateral partnership. The new leader's coalition base in domestic politics and political capital with domestic constituents as

³⁶ Haggard and Noland, "A Security and Peace Mechanism for Northeast Asia"; and Bisley, "Asian Security Architectures."

well as international counterparts can help the trilateral partnership evolve into a two-legged, three-legged, or multilateral structure.

The third determinant—issue characteristics—affects the form of trilateral relations because different policy domains demand different levels of cooperation and political attention. With these considerations in mind, it will be useful to discuss domestic, regional, and international political factors in order both to gauge the political climate in the three countries of interest and to evaluate historical records of cooperative mechanisms in the region.

Geopolitical factors, such as Sino-U.S. relations, have political ramifications for a proposal to solidify trilateral relations. U.S. trilateral cooperation with Japan and South Korea will be conditioned on U.S. policy toward China as well as Washington's overall foreign policy objectives.³⁷ China's foreign policy and strategic thinking will also determine the viability of trilateral relations. Such considerations are likely to influence security issues heavily.

Security arrangements are what bind the United States, Japan, and Korea together and it is important to analyze and gauge the prospects for regional security cooperation in this regard. Two lines of predictions exist, one positive and the other negative. In 2008 then secretary of state Condoleezza Rice took the positive view and hinted at the possibility of creating an institutionalized form of cooperation, tentatively named the "Northeast Asian Peace and Security Mechanism," that would build on groundwork laid by the six-party talks.³⁸ Some scholars and policymakers, however, are more reserved and suggest that any forecast regarding security cooperation and stability is contingent on the future of relations between the United States and China.³⁹

Given the mutual desire of the three states to avoid an escalation of conflict with China, and China's apprehension about U.S. predominance in the region, trilateral relations are not likely to develop into a three-way military alliance. The key trade-off for trilateral policymakers is between the danger of risking peace with China and the potential gains from policy coordination among three allied—or quasi-allied—countries. If the United States pursues a confrontational policy toward China, trilateral mechanisms for cooperation

³⁷ For two opposing views about China within the U.S. policymaking circle, see "U.S.-China Relations: An Affirmative Agenda, A Responsible Course," Council of Foreign Relations, China Task Force Report, 2007 ~ <http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/ChinaTaskForce.pdf>. The first view is the "engagement" position and the second is the "adversarial" position represented by the Pentagon's 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report.

³⁸ Condoleezza Rice, "Rethinking the National Interest: American Realism for a New World," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 4 (July/August 2008): 2–26.

³⁹ Shambaugh, *Power Shift*.

may develop in unexpected ways.⁴⁰ The existing tensions between Japan and China would be heightened under this scenario. UJK trilateralism would be accepted by China only with suspicion, and thus could be counterproductive. If the United States does not want to provoke a confrontation, Washington will make the pursuit of economic prosperity the U.S. priority in the region. There is an implicit consensus among policymakers that the United States should not challenge China (as evidenced by Washington's decision not to change course on Taiwan policy) because of potential economic disruption; neither does China want to risk escalating security tensions, given domestic political troubles with secessionist movements and outbreaks of civil unrest. For the United States, a confrontational policy is also not appealing, given that the Obama administration has inherited many other foreign policy challenges, including terrorism and the war in Iraq, in addition to the recent economic troubles.

Thus, the prospect of stable U.S.-Sino relations in the near term provides favorable conditions for trilateral relations to develop. Although a three-way alliance would produce a negative reaction from China, other forms of close security cooperation beyond the status quo of two-way alliances can provide a needed platform to solve problems, such as those involving North Korea when the six-party talks do not make meaningful progress. Also, the trilateral cooperative framework can be extended to address broader regional problems such as disaster management.

Domestic political changes serve as another important factor that has affected the historical development of trilateral relations among the United States, Japan, and Korea. Trilateralism among the United States, Japan, and Korea cannot materialize if there is not domestic political support in each of the three countries. Indeed, domestic politics may be the most important stumbling block to the success of trilateralism. Nationalist animosities between Japan and Korea are one clear example. There will be no shortage of critics in each country if UJK trilateralism is openly (and exclusively) promoted. The question, then, is how to navigate domestic politics to harness the positive forces of trilateralism when they are needed.

The empirical record of the ebbs and flows of trilateral cooperation according to domestic political changes is rather mixed. Historically, leadership

⁴⁰ Occasional friction regarding human rights violations has surfaced between the United States and China but has not affected the economic and security relations of the two countries. China's intention is also important given its proactive role in the ARF, SCO, and six-party talks. See Aggarwal and Koo, *Asia's New Institutional Architecture*, 295.


change has not dramatically altered the face of trilateral cooperation.⁴¹ The United States' perception of the importance of U.S.-Japan relations as the linchpin of the U.S. security strategy in the region has not shifted over the past 50 years.⁴² U.S. troops also remain in South Korea, although the main U.S. base there has been relocated due to political tensions between the liberal leadership of South Korea—which was heavily influenced by popular anti-American sentiment—and the United States.⁴³

Moreover, new leadership in the three countries has shown a strong interest in trilateralism. The new conservative regime in South Korea led by Lee Myung-bak has vowed to renew UJK trilateral cooperation in addition to pursuing a policy more aligned with the United States. President Lee's efforts to develop a closer relationship with Japan are also a part of his trilateral diplomacy. As the new Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) leadership led by Yukio Hatoyama emphasizes strong ties both with the United States and neighboring Asian countries, trilateralism seems to be a feasible and palatable option to Japan. The Obama administration may also review the United States' foreign policy in Northeast Asia. It is unlikely, however, that his administration will push for a complete reversal of the Bush administration's policies emphasizing U.S. alliances in East Asia.

This favorable turn of events does not necessarily mean that the stability of trilateralism is immune to domestic leadership changes. The election of a progressive government in Korea caused some friction between Washington and Seoul.⁴⁴ Also, given the untested nature of the new administration after 50 years of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) rule, it is unclear whether Japanese prime minister Yukio Hatoyama would follow the footsteps of the former prime minister Taro Aso and support the South Korean initiatives for UJK trilateral cooperation, such as the trilateral summit meetings at APEC and bilateral consultations between Japan and South Korea.

The critical question is whether trilateralism can garner enough political support in all three countries. Even if gaining initial support, such a partnership

⁴¹ For a detailed review of trilateral relations during the historical period between 1945 and 1996, see Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*.

⁴² This statement is confirmed by "The National Security Strategy" of the United States. See "The National Security Strategy," White House, March 2006  <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>.

⁴³ See the barometers of public opinion in Marshall M. Bouton et al., "Global Views 2004: South Korean Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, East Asia Institute, 2005.

⁴⁴ For further discussion of the changes in relations between South Korea and the United States due to changes in domestic leadership, see Jongryn Mo, "What Does South Korea Want?" *Policy Review*, no. 142 (April/May 2007): 43–55.

would still have to navigate a political minefield fraught with uncertainties, such as the preferences of new leaders in the three countries as well as the vicissitudes of public sentiment altered by external events (e.g., the Dokdo Island disputes between Japan and Korea or the dispute between the United States and Korea over beef imports). Nevertheless, the fact remains that the three countries have a better chance of overcoming bilateral animosities and tensions through trilateral formats than through strictly bilateral ones. For example, bilateral problems between Korea and Japan have not hampered Seoul's efforts to promote China-Japan-Korea trilateralism. Although detractors of UJK trilateralism would point to these political tensions as the major political obstacle to the implementation of such an approach, the critical issue is whether key political stakeholders in the three countries can maintain an agenda focused on the bigger political picture rather than be swayed by the pendulum of public opinion. UJK trilateralism at its nascent phase will not be a panacea to all these political events or structural problems. Nor can it heal the historical wounds between Japan and Korea and eliminate the issue of memory and reconciliation. Yet over time, the constructive and forward-looking dialogue facilitated by a UJK trilateral partnership can continue to refocus the region's political agenda—or at least safeguard relations from acute political tensions. A consolidating anchor can serve as an antidote to the occasional instabilities in bilateral relations.

The specific issue characteristics of various policy domains also determine the underlying foundation for trilateral cooperation. Issue characteristics are understood to mean two things: the extent of sovereignty compromise and the type of institutional demands. Depending on the nature of the issue, some policies are more amenable to stronger institutional forms of trilateralism while others are more suitably embedded in multilateral settings. Issue characteristics matter in determining which forms of trilateral relations are likely to be observed, mainly because different political issues tend to involve different political institutions and demand different political tools grown out of different historical experiences. The issue areas exhibit divergent trajectories of historical cooperation and require varying degrees of political will and resources.

Security issues are traditionally viewed as sensitive issues, involving high sovereignty costs in terms of the loss of autonomous decisionmaking. Security coordination, therefore, demands coordination among high-level officials. Security politics encompasses all matters that are vital to national and international security, including the issues of military alliances, regional security cooperation, and confidence-building measures and exchanges. Where military power and regional security relations are of paramount

importance, nations are likely to prefer two-legged trilateralism, due to existing bilateral military alliance structures consolidated over time. For this reason, development toward formal alliance structures would likely be slow and most security relations would likely involve effective coordination among the three parties without alliance formality.

Relative to security issues, humanitarian politics are less likely to be constrained by geopolitical configurations. At the same time, however, the issue is more sensitive than those associated with economic affairs with respect to considerations of sovereignty and autonomy. In this issue area, a combination of bilateral and multilateral structures is likely. In fact, trilateral cooperation regarding humanitarian issues has usually been embedded in a multilateral framework, occasionally boosted by unilateral moves with regard to salient issues such as human rights problems in North Korea.⁴⁵

We expect that economic issues will be heavily influenced by external, macro changes of global policy convergence due to the forces of globalization as well as by domestic political support. The economic aspects of cooperation have been analyzed extensively in the growing literature. Both scholars and practitioners have observed that there is an increasing web of bilateral or regional economic ties that are being negotiated and signed,⁴⁶ even before alternative options are thoroughly debated.⁴⁷ For example, alternative options to bilateral agreements could include a single Asia-wide free trade agreement⁴⁸ as a form of stand-alone ASEAN free trade area (AFTA), through APEC, or based on the ASEAN +3.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ For instance, Japan sent humanitarian aid to North Korea, and the U.S. Congress passed the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 to alleviate the suffering of the North Korean population. In 2004 Japan also offered humanitarian assistance to North Korea through contributions to the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization. See "Contribution to the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and the World Health Organization (WHO) for Humanitarian Assistance for North Korea," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Press Release, August 5, 2004 \approx <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2004/8/0805.html>.

⁴⁶ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) chronicles all the bilateral trade ties in the Asian region at its Asia Regional Integration Center, <http://aric.adb.org/ftatrends.php>. For a list of trade agreements concluded by countries in East Asia as of September 2007, see Innwon Park, "Regional Trade Agreements in East Asia: Will They be Sustainable?" Korea University, Working Paper, February 2008 \approx http://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/5068/1/MPRA_paper_5068.pdf.

⁴⁷ Scholars recently have attempted to find which cooperative forms are welfare-improving. This question is related to a larger body of research on whether regional trade is a building block or a stumbling block. See, for example, Park, "Regional Trade Agreements;" and the recent exemplary work by Richard Baldwin, "Big-Think Regionalism: A Critical Survey," National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper, no.W14056, June 2008.

⁴⁸ In 2005, Masahiro Kawai, as the head of the Office of Regional Economic Integration of the ADB, proposed such a long-term trade liberalization plan. See Masahiro Kawai, "Asian Economic Integration: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities" (conference presentation, Asian Economics Speaker Series, Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada, Vancouver, October 13, 2005).

⁴⁹ For a review of bilateral and regional cooperation in various issue areas including drug control and monetary cooperation, see Tsunekawa, "Why So Many Maps There?"

POLICY MEASURES FOR BETTER MANAGEMENT
OF UJK TRILATERALISM

The preceding section suggested that UJK trilateral relations can go beyond a traditional strong two-legged structure to be an anchor that can take the political initiative to develop a multilateral cooperative architecture. With this broad vision of UJK trilateralism in mind, the following discussion will offer specific policy recommendations for each policy topic—security, economic cooperation, and human rights. For the trilateral partnership in security affairs, this section discusses alliance relations and policy toward North Korea separately since the latter deserves special attention as a present threat. The goal is to provide concrete suggestions for adequate policy communication channels and required political resources. In doing so, this article takes a principled approach: the key objective is to improve trilateral relations in a meaningful way, by embedding the partnership in a multilateral cooperative framework whenever desirable, while taking into account domestic political constraints and geopolitical considerations.

Reviving the TCOG process can and should be done immediately. This position is in agreement with James Schoff's assessment that the TCOG improved coordination among the United States, Japan, and Korea in dealing with North Korea in 1999–2002, despite the occasional political rifts among the parties. Unfortunately, the process has died out since the inception of the six-party talks, partly because of disagreement among the leaders of the United States, Japan, and Korea.⁵⁰ The three leaderships can, however, view the TCOG process in a new light. The process can be resuscitated and directed toward promoting policy coordination among the United States, Japan, and Korea. One of the key benefits of the TCOG process would be to deter North Korea from employing wedge strategies that attempt to widen disagreements among the three countries with the aim of extracting concessions by negotiating bilaterally.⁵¹ North Korea has had some success in playing the three countries against each other, thereby achieving benefits in the form of humanitarian aid or lenient security policy. Revival of the TCOG would block North Korea's wedge strategy, thereby stabilizing policy toward this unstable regime. An additional benefit of resuscitating the TCOG is that

⁵⁰ James Schoff, "U.S.-Japan-Korea Coordination of North Korea Policy" (paper presented at the Conference on East Asian Development and Security: The Role of U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateralism, Hoover Institution, Stanford, December 4, 2008). Observers of the TCOG suggest that its demise coincided with the controversy over the Yasukuni Shrine and the ascension of Roh Moo-hyun to power. The authors thank an anonymous reviewer on this point.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the trilateral process could work as an institutional hedge in the event that the six-party process fails.

One lesson from the history of the TCOG process is that it requires a political champion. Former secretary of defense William Perry initiated the TCOG process and maintained the political dialogue. The personal initiative of high-ranking officials within the U.S. administration, with the help of Korean and Japanese policymakers and experts on North Korea, will again be instrumental for the revival of the TCOG. In reinstating the TCOG, it is important that the group be promoted and managed as a political venue that is complementary to—and not in competition with—other political venues, such as the existing six-party talks. In particular, the process should not alienate China and Russia. Based on the track record of the TCOG, a well-managed TCOG actually has the potential to strengthen the five-party coalition excluding North Korea. When the group was in place, China was willing to work with the trilateral dynamic created by the TCOG.⁵² It will be critical, therefore, for the TCOG to assure China that the trilateral group's process will commit to the denuclearization of North Korea and that the process will work with rather than against China's strategic interests toward North Korea.

In addition, as long as Russia can view the revival of the TCOG as an effective supplement to the six-party process, the TCOG process will be a fruitful way to embed the UJK trilateral partnership into the existing multilateral framework.

North Korea is not the only security challenge for the United States, Japan, and Korea. The three countries should utilize the existing bilateral security consultations to build a trilateral mechanism for security cooperation. An adequate political channel for discussing trilateral security issues would be tentatively titled the "tripartite consultative meeting." The meeting would bring together the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) and the Korea-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM). Both consultative mechanisms are annual meetings involving military and defense officials—precisely the groups that trilateral security cooperation should actively engage. Although these consultative meetings have been held separately so far, they could be convened sequentially or simultaneously.

The discussion in the proposed tripartite consultative meeting should ultimately entail the possibility of military coordination for regional security stability beyond Northeast Asia. Each bilateral consultative meeting has so far

⁵² Schoff, "U.S.-Japan-Korea Coordination."

focused on a narrow agenda: U.S.-ROK meetings have been focused on the security problems surrounding the Korean Peninsula. U.S.-Japan meetings, on the other hand, have primarily covered military cooperation between the two countries, such as counterterrorism efforts and missile defense. The tripartite meeting could address such agenda items as joint responses to natural disasters and humanitarian crises in the Asian region as well as longer-term policy planning on issues such as force posture.⁵³ In conducting these dialogues, it would be beneficial for the proposed meeting to engage the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM).

There are possibilities for UJK trilateralism beyond the security area, especially in the area of example-setting trilateral initiatives. There is no better way to promote peace and security in East Asia than by constructing a regional economic community. Regional efforts to achieve economic integration have not been successful, however, and one reason for the slow progress is the reluctance on the part of the three most advanced market economies, the United States, Japan, and Korea, to fully open their markets to each other and to the rest of East Asia.

Fortunately, the last ten years have witnessed the proliferation of bilateral FTAs among East Asian countries, with many involving the United States, Japan, and Korea. The United States initiated negotiations in 2006 to participate in the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership of 2005 with Brunei Darussalam, Chile, New Zealand, and Singapore, thereby affirming Washington's intention to maintain close economic relations with the region.⁵⁴ South Korea has so far concluded six bilateral FTAs, Japan ten (with others pending negotiation), and the United States twelve.⁵⁵ For the purpose of UJK trilateralism, one of the most important developments was the signing of the KORUS FTA in 2007—although given the expiration of fast-track authority the ratification of the agreement by the U.S. Congress is uncertain. In fact, the KORUS FTA represents the largest FTA to date for both countries. The signing of the agreement has set off another round of FTA negotiations.

⁵³ Chang-hee Nam, "Revisiting U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Security Cooperation in the Alliance Transformation" (paper presented at the Conference on East Asian Development and Security: The Role of U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateralism, Hoover Institution, Stanford, December 4, 2008).

⁵⁴ "United States to Negotiate Participation in Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership" Office of the U.S. Trade Representative Trade Facts, September 2008 ~ http://www.usembassyjakarta.org/press_rel/Sep08/092208%20-%20TPP%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf.

⁵⁵ The United States has or is negotiating agreements with Colombia, Panama, Korea (pending congressional approval), Israel, Jordan, Chile, Singapore, Australia, Morocco, Bahrain, Oman, and Peru. For recent updates on the proposed treaties and agreements involving Japan and Korea that are under negotiation, see the ADB Asia Regional Integration Center website ~ <http://aric.adb.org/ftatrends.php>.

Korea and Japan are resuming FTA negotiations, which began in 2003 but have been suspended since November 2004. Support for a U.S.-Japan FTA is also growing.⁵⁶ Given this web of FTAs linking the United States, Japan, and Korea and the domino effects of FTAs,⁵⁷ it is only a matter of time before the three countries consider a three-way FTA in order to streamline FTA relationships.

In promoting open trade, however, the United States, Japan, and Korea should show more leadership. Instead of waiting passively for regional integration to advance, they should work together to jump-start regional integration by establishing a three-way FTA.⁵⁸ Given the economic weight of the three countries in Asia, there is no question that a UJK FTA would become a powerful catalyst for the formation of a region-wide FTA along the lines of the proposed Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP).⁵⁹

The economic integration of the United States, Japan, and Korea can come in phases, however, and need not start with a full-blown free trade agreement with deep commitments for tariff cuts or with concessions in politically sensitive sectors. Rather, the three countries can take the trilateral economic partnership step by step. One option would be to assume substantially less onerous obligations and create a framework agreement with an eye toward eventually forming a three-way FTA. The timing for launching this initiative may come after the endgame of the KORUS FTA is revealed.

While preparing for the proposed three-way FTA, the three countries should expand their trilateral economic cooperation to address other important global issues such as financial and economic stability. With the group of twenty (G-20) summit likely to meet annually to coordinate economic affairs, now is

⁵⁶ Scott Bradford, "An Analysis of a Possible Japan-US Trade Agreement" (paper presented at a joint conference of the Japan Foundation and the Peterson Institute for International Economics on New Asia-Pacific Trade Initiatives, Washington, D.C., November 27, 2007). For a discussion of the development of U.S.-Japan FTA proposals, see Raymond J. Ahearn, "Japan's Free Trade Agreement Program," Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, RL33044, August 22, 2005.

⁵⁷ Keisuke Iida, "Exit, Voice, and Bandwagoning: The Prospects for a Free Trade Agreement Network among the United States, South Korea and Japan" (paper presented at the Conference on East Asian Development and Security: The Role of U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateralism, Hoover Institution, Stanford, December 4, 2008).

⁵⁸ Reviewing the history from CUSFTA to NAFTA, it is clear that extending bilateral FTA ties to a three-way FTA is not an easy task. Adding political heterogeneity to the mix, negotiations may be very difficult. Given the web of bilateral and regional trade webs forged recently, however, this is not a hopeless proposal if the political environment becomes more favorable.

⁵⁹ One historical example of this would be the experience of the European FTA (EFTA). The three EFTA countries—Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein—had built robust economic relations before it established the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) with the EU. The difference from EFTA countries, however, will be that this particular UJK trilateral relationship should be the one that creates multilateral economic cooperation, not one that would be absorbed by a larger economic cooperative framework.

an especially opportune time to put the three countries in a multilateral setting. The G-20 meeting can jump-start the proposed trilateral effort in economic cooperation, in tandem with the policy to keep protectionism in check.

In lock step with trade cooperation, the political discussion in UJK trilateral relations can include the issue of financial and monetary cooperation. Established in 1999 under ASEAN +3, the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) has been the core regional forum for monetary cooperation. The United States is currently not a member. If the United States decides to increase its financial influence in the region, it could do so through the trilateral partnership. From the U.S. perspective, the trilateral partnership can be a vehicle to coordinate policies in the region. Given that Japan has been an enthusiastic supporter of the CMI and that Korea wants to improve its regional standing in the financial sector, the UJK trilateral partnership would be willing to discuss the issue of financial and monetary cooperation with a view to economic stability in Asia.

If trilateralism is to be driven by common values, the humanitarian crisis in North Korea would be one area where one would expect to see a high level of trilateral cooperation among the three leading democracies of East Asia—the United States, Japan, and South Korea. Yet trilateral cooperation on North Korean human rights has been sparse and ineffectual, especially at the intergovernmental level.

The right mechanism of coordination for trilateral partnership in human rights would be the trilateral conference among special envoys, due to the fact that the United States and Korea already have special envoys on North Korean human rights. The conference could count on the support of government offices dealing with human rights issues, given that substantial attention already is paid to the matter.⁶⁰ In fact, the initiative could pay political dividends: many argue that the multilateral pursuit of a human rights agenda will be an asset to the Obama administration.⁶¹

The trilateral human rights conference should aim to lay out the key issues. Human rights are commonly defined as individual rights and freedom in the form of civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights. Given the wide scope of the issue, the three countries will need to come together around a focused agenda from the start. This article suggests four issues. First. the

⁶⁰ The U.S. Department of State already challenged the human rights practices of some Asian countries in its annual report, including Myanmar, North Korea, Vietnam, and Cambodia. See “2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,” U.S. Department of State webpage ~ <http://www.state.gov/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/index.htm>.

⁶¹ Catharin Dalpino, “Human Rights, Asia and the New Administration: Can Multilateralism Work This Time?” Brookings Institution, December 2008 ~ http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/12_multilateralism_dalpino.aspx.

humanitarian imperative with respect to the North Korean civilian population should remain as one of the top priorities. Second, the issue of the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea could be discussed in the context of UJK trilateralism. The issue is important to both the ROK and Japan, as citizens from both countries have been abducted. The suggested UJK human rights commission could set up a working group to discuss how to either link or decouple this issue to or from other issues pertaining to North Korea. Third, the threat posed by natural disasters, which are increasing in number due to climate change, requires attention as well. Fourth, overseas development assistance policies can be coordinated through this trilateral cooperative mechanism for promoting human rights.

The UJK conference on human rights could further develop into a regional human rights organization in East Asia. Promoting human rights is a relatively new idea in Asia. Other regions in the world have human rights courts in place, such as the European Court of Human Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Though the Middle East does not have an institutionalized mechanism to protect human rights, the Council of the League of Arab States has adopted the Arab Charter on Human Rights. Recently, ASEAN countries proposed the idea of establishing a human rights body, but this idea has not been realized as a practical matter.⁶² The lack of a history of human rights cooperation in the region leaves a gap the trilateral UJK partnership could fill. The first step in this effort would be to develop a common policy framework, potentially with the support of human rights bodies within the United Nations.⁶³

Finally, the UJK partnership could plant a seed for environmental cooperation. South Korea is actively developing "green policies." With Japan as a leader in environmental technologies and energy efficiency and the Obama administration keen on tackling the question of climate change, there is a great opportunity for UJK trilateralism to facilitate cooperation on environmental issues. Thus far, much of the attention among U.S. policymakers has been focused on the necessity and opportunity for U.S.-China cooperation on environmental issues. Japan and the ROK should be brought into the mix.

⁶² Jim Gomez, "ASEAN Unveils Rights Body But It Still Lacks Teeth," Associated Press, February 27, 2009.

⁶³ The ultimate goal could be the signing of the Asian Charter of Human Rights, although this may provoke China in the short term, given the frictions between China and the United States. This is one reason why this article advocates working on human rights efforts in a trilateral framework.

CONCLUSION

The UJK triangle is attractive for three reasons. The first is the political timing of structural power shifts in the region. The UJK alliance is the most viable option at this historical juncture, when China's foreign policy trajectory is unknown. The triad is the best anchor for Asian regionalism for the foreseeable future, at least until China becomes more developed and responsible for Asian affairs. The second argument for UJK trilateralism concerns the change in domestic politics currently underway in all three countries. It is high time to review the foreign policies of each country to assess their broader goals regarding the establishment of a new regional order. The third reason is a functional one. There are significant problems, such as the North Korean issue, to be addressed through the coordinated leadership of the three countries. The UJK trilateral relationship carries utmost functional importance considering that a power vacuum is soon expected in North Korea, coinciding with the death or retirement of Kim Jong-il. In addition to this immediate security issue, the proposed trilateral partnership has the potential to shape the regional order by orchestrating cooperation on other issue areas, including economic development and environmental protection.

This article argues that UJK trilateralism is an attractive policy option because it is feasible, efficient, and has the potential to be effective. Such a trilateral partnership is feasible both because of the timing of domestic political changes in the three countries and owing to geopolitical circumstances in Northeast Asia. UJK trilateralism is an efficient option because the partnership can tap into and build onto existing alliance relations. Finally, UJK trilateral relations could be effective because the three countries share interests and a common political agenda that could be meaningfully extended to other areas of cooperation through issue linkages.

Given the above, the three countries should develop a trilateral partnership. Such a partnership would provide an opportunity for the United States, Japan, and South Korea to forge new cooperative mechanisms in a region marked by weak institutionalized cooperation. Trilateralism should not, however, be viewed as a mere security management tool. Triangular relations between these three states can be enhanced to become an avenue to constructive institution-building. Trilateral relations can also be couched in a broader regional framework that can foster future cooperation in the region. Given the weak institutionalization of regional cooperation frameworks in East Asia, a trilateral UJK partnership could serve as an anchor for broader security and economic coordination.

In the area of economic and humanitarian issues, trilateralism should be and is, in fact, capable of serving as an example-setting cooperative mechanism. Along these lines, the three most advanced nations of East Asia should set an economic, political, and moral example for the rest of the region. The best way to exhibit this kind of leadership would be to integrate the three societies in a way that would promote the idea of cooperation as a model for East Asia. Specific policies would include the formation of a three-way FTA, the adoption of a three-way human rights agreement, and cooperation on common environmental policies. Shaping trilateral cooperative mechanisms in this way will help bring about a stable and prosperous region in the coming decades. ◆

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