



POLITICAL AND
SECURITY AFFAIRS



Pacific Trilateralism

A New Narrative of Cooperation

WORKSHOP REPORT
THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF ASIAN RESEARCH

NOTE: The views expressed are not necessarily those of NBR or the conference participants.

Prospects for trilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia between the United States and its key allies in the region, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), have improved significantly in recent years. In December 2015, the two neighbors reached a historic agreement on the “comfort women” issue, taking an important step toward resolving a long-standing obstacle to bilateral relations. More recently, in October 2016 the chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from the United States, the ROK, and Japan met at the Pentagon to discuss trilateral collaboration in response to increasing North Korean nuclear and missile threats. Following the trilateral military discussions, Japan and the ROK signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in November 2016, an intelligence-sharing pact that will enhance deterrence against North Korea.

While these developments are encouraging, lingering tensions and gaps in strategic trust must be addressed. The installation of a “comfort women” statue in Busan by a South Korean civic group in December 2016 in protest against the 2015 agreement demonstrates that historical grievances are hardly resolved. If South Korean president Park Geun-hye is removed from office by the Constitutional Court in the coming months, the “comfort women” agreement and GSOMIA will likely come under increased criticism within the ROK and become contentious issues in the presidential election. In the face of North Korea’s increasingly belligerent development of its nuclear and missile programs and the uncertain geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia brought about by China’s rise, the United States, ROK, and Japan must deepen and expand their cooperation. These three states share not only common security threats but also common interests in sustaining peace, stability, and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

Against the backdrop of a growing demand for a strong trilateral partnership, the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) initiated a three-phase project to study the relationship among the United States, ROK, and Japan. Building on the first phase of the project, which explored the key issues of the trilateral relationship, the second phase is focused on the formation of a trilateral commission that will meet with policymakers and key stakeholders in all three countries to develop a holistic view of current dynamics in the relationship. As part of this second phase, NBR convened a day-long workshop in Washington, D.C., to mark the launch of the Pacific Trilateral Commission and provide a forum for its members and other experts to exchange analysis of recent developments relating to the U.S.-ROK-Japan relationship and the policies needed to strengthen trilateral cooperation.

The workshop featured panels on the following four topics: regional security threats, energy security cooperation, the nexus of traditional and nontraditional security, and emerging domains. While based on the findings of the project's first phase, this workshop delved deeper into the challenges and

opportunities for cooperation in several key areas. The workshop also explored areas for trilateral cooperation that included both traditional security threats and nontraditional security challenges, such as energy security, cybersecurity, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), and space policy. The findings of the workshop will lay the groundwork for future project activities and set the tone for subsequent meetings in the region.

Panel 1: Regional Security Threats

The first panel opened with a discussion of security challenges that the new U.S. administration will face in Asia. Particularly, in recent months one of the largest geostrategic challenges to the trilateral relationship has become the erosion of the perception of U.S. dominance in the region. Doubts are growing over U.S. commitments and whether the United States remains firm in supporting the principles and values that have anchored the U.S. alliance system. In this regard, the United States can and should better signal its commitment. Another ongoing issue is alliance coordination: cooperation between Japan

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and the ROK has not been smooth because of issues of history and trust. Although there are some signs that the two countries are slowly moving to address these issues, President Park's recent political scandal and impeachment have added uncertainty to the overall direction of bilateral relations.

The second set of challenges identified during the panel were the growing U.S.-China strategic rivalry, China's ascending military power, and the values gap between the United States and China, which hold fundamentally different views on democracy, human rights, and individual freedom. Workshop participants affirmed that China's primary strategic goal is to replace the United States as the regional leader in East Asia, while subordinate goals include pushing the United States further offshore, undermining U.S. alliances and partnerships, and weakening perceptions of U.S. primacy in the Asia-Pacific. Another component is President Xi Jinping's very different perspectives from his predecessors. Workshop participants argued that it is clear that the values gap between the United States and China on issues such as democracy and free speech is growing rather than diminishing under President Xi. His efforts to strengthen the Communist Party's hold on power may further strain U.S.-China relations. His appointment as president and his view of himself as the savior of the Chinese Communist Party are driving a process of recentralization and a reassertion of the party's role as the sole arbiter of politics, society, culture, and other facets of life in China. Under Xi's administration, there is an ongoing crackdown on human rights advocates, labor unions, and lawyers, as well as political purges of party officials through his anticorruption campaign.

China also poses a challenge to its neighbors in Northeast Asia. It has recently applied pressure on the ROK over the latter's agreement with the United States to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system. On THAAD, Beijing is concerned about the X-band radar system and the

possibility of the ROK linking to broader regional missile defense architecture. Additionally, China continues to offer both explicit and tacit support to North Korea, providing a lifeline that keeps the regime afloat. There are clear indications that China, as many have suspected, is prepared to live with a nuclear-armed North Korea to a much greater degree than anyone else.

The dispute between the ROK and China over the deployment of THAAD, while detrimental to ROK-China ties, provides a favorable atmosphere for the improvement of trilateral security cooperation. Regarding a trilateral response to Chinese pressure to reverse the THAAD deployment, one panelist from the ROK noted that there would be no policy change because the ROK government has decided that the system is necessary and essential to deter North Korean missile threats. From the ROK's perspective, it is obvious that China prioritizes North Korea's regime stability over denuclearization. As the trilateral partners continue to strengthen security ties through actions such as signing the GSOMIA, despite domestic political opposition in the ROK, they should stress that the purpose of trilateral cooperation is to respond to North Korean threats, not to challenge China. This is a critical distinction for the ROK, which regards China as a partner on issues of denuclearization, unification, and trade.

The third major threat is North Korea. The Kim Jong-un regime is moving very quickly toward developing weapon systems that not only threaten the Korean Peninsula, Japan, and U.S. bases in the region but also could eventually threaten the continental United States itself. North Korea's apparent goals are to develop first-strike and survivable second-strike capabilities. The regime considers nuclear weapons as an insurance policy for its survival, as well as a means to blackmail or intimidate its neighbors, and has made it clear that denuclearization as a precondition for dialogue is off the table. There is an ongoing debate

among U.S. experts about the best policy to deal with an increasingly capable North Korea. With the regime stepping up its aggression, a few participants discussed unconventional policy options being floated as alternatives to denuclearization, such as trying to freeze or cap North Korea's nuclear program or the ROK and Japan potentially developing their own nuclear capabilities.

To enhance policy coordination on North Korea, workshop participants argued that it would be beneficial for the United States, the ROK, and Japan to put in place a structure similar to the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group and make cooperation and information exchange as transparent as possible. Mechanisms should be developed to intensify and harmonize trilateral coordination, bringing all three states to the table. It is important for Japan and the ROK to insulate coordination on North Korea from other issues, such as history, while the United States should take concrete steps to assure its allies of its commitment. Seoul and Tokyo should take the lead in talking with their domestic audiences to make it clear that going nuclear is not an end-all solution to the problem they face.

On maritime security, the three countries should agree on a set of trilateral principles and guidelines for managing incidents in the East and South China Seas, including the importance of freedom of navigation and the use of international law as the basis for managing and resolving disputes. The ROK and Japan could help the littoral states in Southeast Asia enhance maritime domain awareness and build capacity. In addition, it is critical that the United States make clear its preparedness to support its allies in connection with treaty commitments, even when avoiding taking public positions on disputes. One conference participant noted that the maximum level of the ROK's contribution is supporting the rules-based international order and freedom of navigation. However, the country might become more involved in the future, as many ROK vessels pass through the South China Sea.

Assurance from the United States regarding its nuclear umbrella is also critical for trilateral cooperation. There are suspicions in South Korea about whether the United States would be willing to sacrifice Los Angeles for Seoul if North Korea were successful in developing ballistic missiles that

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could reach the continental United States. Although the prospects of North Korea developing nuclear-armed missiles capable of striking the U.S. mainland seem distant now, once North Korea achieves this capability, it will dramatically change the United States' strategic calculus for handling a crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Another concern in South Korea is whether the United States would ever choose to pursue a "nuclear freeze" policy for North Korea as opposed to denuclearization. The ROK does not regard a nuclear freeze as an option because North Korea already possesses a short-range nuclear strike capability. The ROK and U.S. governments are working on establishing the high-level Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group, which will allow the ROK to play a more active role in the nuclear policy decision-making process.

Because the workshop directly followed the U.S. presidential election, a common theme highlighted was the uncertainty of the election's results for the direction of U.S. policy toward Asia. It is not yet clear what President Donald Trump's policies and priorities for the region will be. His views on the use of force—whether for deterrence or to respond to

provocations by Pyongyang—will be important not only for setting the stage for the United States' Asia policy going forward but also for clarifying whether his administration will push for further-burden sharing by allies, as Trump hinted at during the election campaign.

One potential challenge facing the trilateral relationship in the coming years is the Trump administration's apparent preference for bilateralism in pursuing national interests, indicating that trilateralism and multilateralism may become a lower priority within the U.S. government. In this scenario, Japan and the ROK should become stronger advocates of trilateralism and make the case to U.S. policymakers for the importance of trilateral cooperation for the United States' interests. Instead of relying on U.S. leadership, Seoul and Tokyo should emphasize to U.S. stakeholders the benefits of a robust trilateral partnership for preserving the peace and stability of East Asia and the costs of not fulfilling the promises of trilateralism, which would result in ineffective coordination on important security issues such as North Korea.



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Panel 2: Trilateral Energy Security

The second panel explored options for trilateral cooperation on energy security. Such cooperation can be in the form of government-government, industry-industry, or academic-academic exchanges, or some mix of all of the above. In the case of the United States, the ROK, and Japan, a number of robust mechanisms are already in place to facilitate bilateral cooperation between the United States and Japan and the ROK. In addition, bilateral cooperation between Japan and the ROK, though less extensive, is growing, particularly in the context of industry-industry and academic-academic initiatives. While formal trilateral cooperation has been relatively underdeveloped, such ties have also been increasing and could be expanded on the basis of shared concerns and common goals for strengthening markets and policies.

A key factor that has contributed to this opportunity is a major shift in energy market outlooks. One panelist noted that until very recently energy security discussions in the Asia-Pacific were dominated by concerns over scarcity. From 2003 to 2013, Japan, South Korea, and many other regional

states that are dependent on oil and gas imports faced a market characterized by incredibly high prices and tight supplies, which contributed to zero-sum views that limited support for cooperation. However, with the shale revolution in North America enabling new energy sources to become viable for production, the supply picture has shifted dramatically and opened the door for the United States to become a major producer of both oil and gas. From 2010 to 2014, U.S. oil production increased from 5.4 million to 9.4 million barrels per day. The increase in production alone is more than Iran's total annual production of oil. Natural gas production likewise rose by 60% in the United States, while shale gas production increased twentyfold. In addition, the emergence of new gas producers such as Australia and the prospects for Iran to re-enter the global market further relaxed tight energy markets.

One panelist noted that trilateral cooperation among Japan, the ROK, and the United States should take advantage of the United States as an emerging liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter to strengthen gas trade between the United States and Northeast Asia. U.S. annual shale gas production is now more

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than two times the annual consumption of Japan, and the U.S. market offers many benefits, including supply diversification and more flexibility in its business models and contracts. Asian countries' contracts with traditional LNG exporters have frequently been for an extended period of time (e.g., 30 years), bound by destination clauses that limit the resale of unused supply, and linked to the price of oil. This makes the United States an appealing supplier from a market perspective. However, U.S. policy presents potential hurdles, as U.S. law requires that exports to countries with which the United States does not have a free trade agreement, such as Japan, undergo a review to determine that such exports are in the "national interest." Participants noted that this review process has been less contentious and more rapid in recent years, and they saw no reason to assume that this trend would reverse. Still, simplifying and modernizing U.S. policies is something that Washington is currently considering, which panelists viewed as a positive sign for deepening trilateral ties.

Many Japanese companies have joined procurement arrangements with South Korean importers to improve their purchasing power. For example, JERA Co, a joint venture of Tokyo Electric Power and Chubu Electric Power and the world's largest buyer of LNG, began talks with Korea Gas Corporation and China National Offshore Oil Corporation in February 2016 to collaborate in the shipping and storage of LNG as well as to explore possibilities for joint procurement. Such collective bargaining could help bring about major shifts among traditional LNG suppliers as existing contracts come up for renewal. As the largest and second-largest importers of LNG in the world, respectively, Japan and the ROK can work toward greater transparency and competitiveness in the global LNG market. The emergence of LNG as a more competitive source of electricity is also a boon to other countries across Asia and could help advance

the global climate agenda through reducing countries' reliance on higher-polluting energy sources such as inefficient coal.

However, several challenges remain that will require trilateral cooperation to address. First, much of Asia's oil and gas supplies pass through the South China Sea, which has seen increased tensions over competing sovereignty claims. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, sea lanes in the South China Sea account for roughly 75% of China's oil imports, 85%–90% of Japan's and South Korea's oil imports, and 33% of Japan's and South Korea's LNG imports. The dramatic rise in the volume of oil and LNG passing through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea—with another 10 million barrels per day above current averages potentially transiting through those sea lanes over the next twenty years—will increase pressure on the region. The trilateral partners should cooperate on ensuring the free, reliable flow of energy and access to critical sea lanes.

Second, if oil and gas producers scale back exploration and investment in a low-price environment, there is a growing risk of a serious supply crunch in a few years. According to Wood Mackenzie's estimate, the industry would spend \$1 trillion less on exploring and developing reserves between 2015 and 2020. Participants indicated that in such a scenario the world oil supply balance would likely become increasingly re-concentrated in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, as the cost structures of these projects are more resilient in this pricing environment. This development would not be good for Asia because of the volatile security environment in the Middle East. As a result, some participants argued that the United States, South Korea, and Japan should work on promoting stability in the Middle East through development assistance or strategic and military assistance. The trilateral partners could also establish a regional energy forum, where key consumers of

energy in Asia, including Japan, the ROK, China, and India, can sit down and discuss their common concerns.

Cooperation on nuclear technology and safety presents another challenge for the trilateral relationship, considering the three countries' different domestic situations and attitudes toward nuclear energy. As of late 2016, only 3 of Japan's 42 operable reactors were active, compared with 54 before the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident. Since September 2016, three major Japanese nuclear companies have been engaged in discussions to potentially combine their fuel procurement businesses because of inadequate demand. Some analysts speculate that they may also combine their reactor sales businesses. These actions show the large degree of uncertainty that currently exists in Japan's nuclear industry. In the U.S. case, 5 reactors have been retired in the past few years, and 24 gigawatts of nuclear power are at risk of being retired between now and 2030. The U.S. domestic market is also very weak. The ROK is the exception in the trilateral picture. Seoul has relatively ambitious plans for nuclear energy and is looking to increase the share of renewable and nuclear energy to 70% of total

power supply by 2030. One panelist, however, noted that both Japan and the ROK are actually lowering their expectations for the scale of nuclear power as an energy source. Although both countries still expect the share of nuclear energy in the overall energy mix to grow, Japan reduced its target from 50% to 20%–22% by 2030, while the ROK reduced its target from 50%–60% to 22%–29% by 2035.

One panelist argued that the key to trilateral energy cooperation is the diversification of energy exports to enhance energy security so that the three countries can enjoy complementarity. Although the ROK and Japan have made significant efforts to diversify their energy sources, their dependence on the Middle East is still relatively high. Both countries have considered Russia as an alternative to reduce their dependence on the Middle East. Russia accounted for 9% of Japan's crude oil imports in 2015, and Japan is the biggest importer of Russian LNG. In the case of the ROK, Russia accounted for 5% of its LNG imports and 4% of its oil imports in 2014. Russia, however, cannot provide sufficient diversification of energy supplies to Japan and the ROK, and this is where the United States comes into play. The ROK will begin



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receiving shale gas from the United States in 2017, which will not only enhance its energy security but also provide the economic benefits discussed above. Lotte Chemical, which is headquartered in South Korea, and the U.S. company Axiall, for example, finalized a joint-venture arrangement to construct a shale-based cracking plant in Louisiana in 2015. This kind of partnership could serve as a good opportunity to expand trilateral energy cooperation, given that Japan has also been investing significantly in U.S. shale gas upstream business.

Panel 3: The Traditional and Nontraditional Security Nexus

The third panel considered opportunities for trilateral cooperation on nontraditional security. In particular, HADR, peacekeeping, antipiracy, and demographic challenges were identified as key areas to strengthen trilateral cooperation. Because there are already a number of multiyear security frameworks in the region, an important issue is how their goals and activities can be reconciled to avoid overlap and conflict with each other. The United States, the ROK, and Japan should think about how they can address nontraditional security issues within their trilateral framework.

One issue that might present unique opportunities for trilateral cooperation is HADR, on which the United States and Japan already strongly cooperate. The two allies, for example, executed robust cooperation on HADR during Operation Tomodachi following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. In the area of HADR, the ROK engages with the United States through a bilateral framework; with the United States, Japan, China, Russia, Mongolia, and North Korea through the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative; and with Japan and China through the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat.

The ROK is also involved in the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), although it does not regularly participate in ADMM-Plus military exercises. Nontraditional security threats such as humanitarian crises have historically been a secondary concern for South Korea, mainly because it already faces ample traditional security threats. After President Park's inauguration, however, the country's mindset changed to view nontraditional security as an area in which it can initiate regional cooperation. As the trilateral partners are all willing to deepen cooperation on HADR, they can work to combine their naval capabilities during a humanitarian crisis, which could help fill capabilities gaps in the delivery of aid.

Peacekeeping and antipiracy are other areas of nontraditional security in which the three countries can improve trilateral cooperation. Participation in multilateral peacekeeping operations is generally seen as a way for U.S. allies to assume greater responsibilities for burden-sharing with the United States. Japan has been quite active in peacekeeping operations, perhaps due to its traditional constraints on the use of force. It has engaged in peacekeeping operations since 1992, deploying forces to Sudan, Haiti, and other countries and contributing over \$200 million to these missions. The ROK has also made significant contributions to UN peacekeeping operations. However, rivalry between the two countries has occurred in this area as well. For example, in 2014, news that Japanese peacekeeping troops in South Sudan supplied ammunition to ROK peacekeepers triggered strong domestic criticism in both Japan and South Korea, prompting the ROK peacekeeping forces to return the ammunition.

Given this constraint, antipiracy might be a more fertile area for collaboration. Both South Korea and Japan have been in Djibouti, contributing to the counterpiracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden since 2009 without running into conflict with each other.

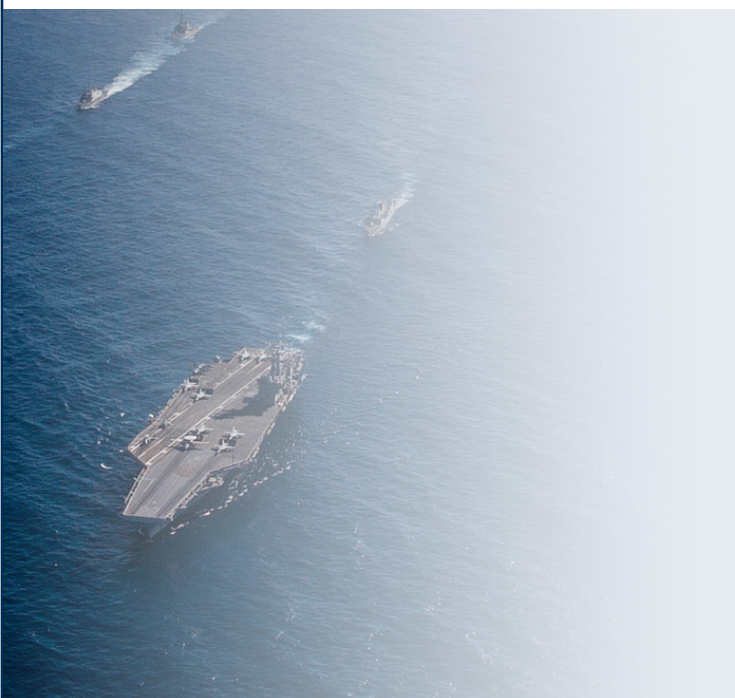
Japan built a \$40 million base in Djibouti, and South Korea conducted a high-profile mission in the Gulf of Aden in 2011 when ROK Navy commandos saved a South Korean freighter, along with its crew of 21 people who had been taken hostage by Somali pirates. Participants noted that successful bilateral ROK-Japan cooperation on antipiracy efforts suggests that security-related cooperation is easier the farther from home it takes place. When operations occur close to home, domestic political sensitivities are more likely to impede effective cooperation.

A final nontraditional security issue that was discussed is the impact of demographics in North Korea on the security environment in Northeast Asia. The potential for a complex humanitarian crisis to break out in North Korea presents a major threat to regional stability. The most likely scenario would entail sudden large-scale movements of vulnerable people, numbering in the thousands or even millions. Although in a crisis North Koreans would likely flow into China, there is also the possibility that people would flee to the South or move within North Korea itself, creating internally displaced groups. Participants observed that little attention is paid to

the latter two scenarios, which should be the subject of more serious consideration.

The impetus for large-scale movements of North Koreans could include regime collapse, a nuclear accident, or an epidemic. When severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) broke out in 2002, the North Korean authorities almost closed the country's borders to prevent the virus from coming in, suspending flights between Pyongyang and Beijing and imposing a strict quarantine at land crossings with China. The fact that the North Korean government responds with significant alarm to such epidemics shows that it might know things about its public health system that the rest of the world is not aware of, such as the susceptibility of the population to potential epidemics. Famine is another potential cause of mass migration within North Korea. Unfortunately, international preparation for a humanitarian crisis in North Korea is very preliminary and weak.

Participants suggested that deepening civil society and governmental trilateral cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan in response to human rights issues in North Korea would send important signals to North Korea and China and



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perhaps open up possibilities for a more practical and positive relationship with both states on these issues.

Panel 4: Emerging Domains

The fourth panel began with an examination of Japan-ROK cooperation in emerging domains. Since the two sides reached their agreement on the “comfort women” issue in December 2015, the bilateral relationship has been gradually improving, especially at the governmental level, although popular opposition to closer ties still exists in both countries. The positive developments in the bilateral relationship have been driven by shared strategic interests on several important issues. Addressing the North Korean nuclear threat is of course one common strategic interest and a top priority for Japan and the ROK to work on together with the United States. Against this backdrop, participants considered cyberspace and outer space as two emerging domains that present opportunities for trilateral cooperation. As Japan-U.S. and ROK-U.S. bilateral dialogues on cyber and space policy continue, the United States should take the lead to enhance trilateral cooperation. One of the key obstacles to such cooperation in these emerging domains, however, is the reluctance of the Japanese and Korean governments to collaborate with one another. Japan hesitates to cooperate with the ROK in high-tech fields where both states are competitors, while South Koreans are cautious about security cooperation with Japan due to historical concerns.

Participants observed that the prospects for trilateral collaboration on cybersecurity are good because the three countries have faced serious cyberattacks, especially from China and North Korea, and share a strong need to jointly address these threats. The 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang and 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo could provide

good opportunities for Japan, the ROK, and the United States to accelerate collaboration in this domain. By contrast, the options for space policy coordination are far more limited because Japan and the ROK both see one another as competitors rather than partners in this field. Therefore, a Track 2 or Track 1.5 approach is necessary to create a basis of trust until the two countries find more specific areas for trilateral collaboration.

Japan has recently been trying to develop national strategies on cybersecurity and space policy. In its cybersecurity strategy, the Japanese government mentions three approaches: forming international rules and norms, improving transparency and building trust, and building capacity. Participants suggested that it might be possible for Japan and the ROK to cooperate on standardization in the high-tech and cyber industries. It is also important to think about ways to strike a balance between U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateralism and China-Japan-ROK trilateralism. Japan, the ROK, and China have been trying to foster cooperation on nontraditional security threats and are also exploring options for cooperation in emerging domains.

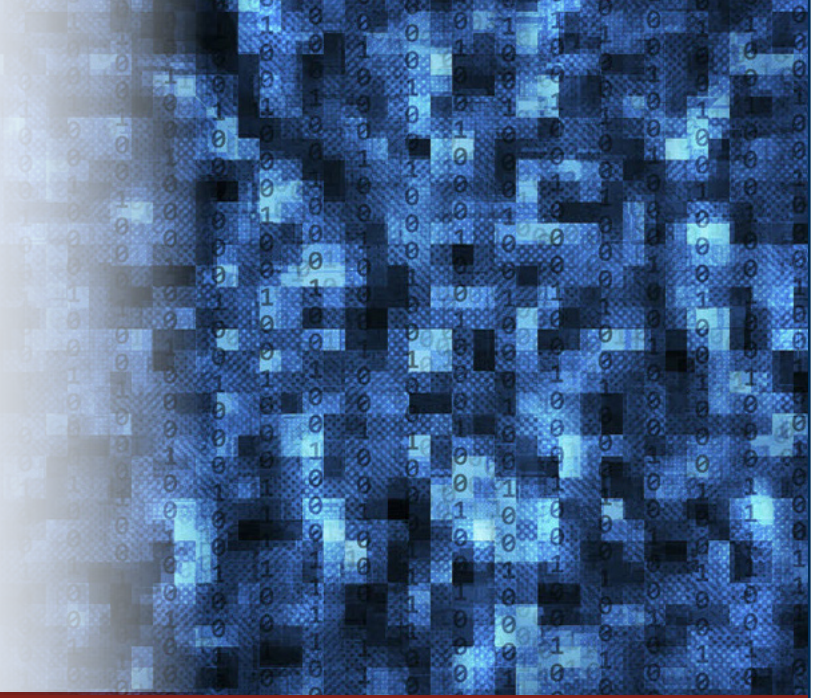
Regarding approaches to cooperation in emerging domains, one participant emphasized that countries should be treated as equal partners despite unequal resources. While cooperation in cyberspace and outer space will require government support, both areas are all-of-society mandates that will require engagement with the private sector. Moreover, no global consensus exists in either domain on the rules for “peaceful use.” Efforts to forge treaties or norms have hopelessly stalled in the United Nations and elsewhere because each country has its own expectations. Instead of coming up with global norms, the United States, one participant argued, can establish norms through its own practice. The efficacy of these norms would be enhanced to

the extent that the United States can convince other countries, such as the ROK and Japan, to cooperate.

Opportunities for cooperation in these domains include intelligence sharing about the cyberthreat environment, which is now more feasible as a result of the GSOMIA that Japan and the ROK signed in November 2016. The sharing of intelligence and other coordinated security responses could be useful in deterring adversaries such as North Korea. Intelligence sharing on resilience and redundancy, such as backup and reboot capabilities when various systems go down, is also needed. In space, in particular, interoperability can be expanded through resiliency and redundancy. Japan is launching the Quasi-Zenith Satellite System next year specifically for the Asia-Pacific. The system, in the near term, can offer great resilience and redundancy for security requirements shared by the United States and Japan, as it offers an alternative to GPS. The ROK could be included in these efforts. In June 2016, Japan and the United States signed a memorandum of understanding on reciprocal defense procurement, which is another initiative that could be trilateralized. A participant identified the use of hosted payloads

to boost the efficiency of space launch capacity as yet another area for potential cooperation.

There are several high-priority missions to improve space situational awareness and maritime domain awareness that may be ripe for near-term trilateral cooperation. Regarding space situational awareness, although space debris is not yet a critical concern, the trend line is not very good, and this issue presents one opportunity for trilateral cooperation. Other options identified by participants include developing norms for retrieving objects launched into space and for sharing data to track space debris. With respect to maritime domain awareness, the intersection of big data and detailed earth observation satellites is an area that is ripe for cooperation. The U.S. Navy will be able to track everything that is moving on every ocean at all times, which is relevant for both bolstering North Korean sanctions enforcement and monitoring Chinese fishing boats operating in restricted areas. This topic is politically sensitive, especially with respect to China, but it offers the potential for regional cooperation among navies, coast guards, and law enforcement. In the areas of cyberspace and outer



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space, participants observed that the United States can foster higher-level strategic cooperation with Japan and the ROK by choosing missions that do not run afoul of the natural competitiveness of U.S. industry or overlap with politically sensitive issues.

Conclusion

Despite the uncertainty posed by new domestic political developments in the ROK and the United States, the prospects for trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the ROK are promising. A common theme that was echoed during all four panels is that trilateral cooperation is a necessary and effective approach to address many of the traditional as well as nontraditional challenges both within and outside Asia.

Nevertheless, one obstacle to deepening such cooperation is the fact that Japan and the ROK still lack the strategic trust that is needed to move forward with security cooperation. As a result, trilateral cooperation lags behind bilateral cooperation—between Japan and the United States and the ROK and the United States—in areas such as nuclear deterrence, energy security, and cybersecurity. To address this obstacle, some panelists proposed that Japan and the ROK should insulate security cooperation on critical threats—e.g., North Korea’s nuclear weapons program—from issues such as history. Some participants suggested that the two countries could also expand cooperation in less politically sensitive areas such as antipiracy in order to build trust and understanding that could later be applied to more divisive security issues.

The United States cannot safeguard its key interests and preserve a rules-based order in Asia without its key allies, Japan and the ROK. Washington should continue to assure its allies of its commitment to the region and lead efforts to strengthen the U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral partnership. Likewise, the governments in Seoul and Tokyo should continue to push for stronger trilateral cooperation, which is more important than ever in Asia’s increasingly complex security environment. ♦

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