

Summary

Evolving East Asia Security and the Future of ROK-Japan Strategic Cooperation

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Session I

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Session II

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The changing security architecture in East Asia brought on by the rise of China and the relative decline of the United States induces more active policies from countries in the region. South Korea and Japan, close allies of the United States, have expanded security ties in recent years but have yet to enhance strategic cooperation on the major issues confronting the two countries such as China's military modernization and North Korea's nuclear program. While inherent distrust due to historical controversies has a major impact on relations between South Korean and Japan, the difference in each country's perceptions toward the region also makes coordination difficult. In this regard, it is important to examine the issues that the countries share and the ways in which they can enhance cooperation.

The EAI and the Alliance Project Team from Japan, with the generous support of the Suntory Foundation, organized the ROK-Japan Security Conference under the title of "Evolving East Asia Security and the Future of ROK-Japan Strategic Cooperation." The following is a summary of the main points and policy recommendations from the discussions in each of the sessions.

Session 1: Evolving East Asian Security Landscape

1) The Emerging Structure of East Asian International Politics

The security landscape of East Asia in 2025 will be characterized by the competitive military relationship between the United States and China.

In 2025, the United States and China will be the two major powers in Asian regional politics. The United States will be a naval power having influence over South East Asia while China will be a land power with influence over North Korea, Mongolia, and Laos. Washington and Beijing will over the years try to expand their influence over sea lanes and littoral areas such as Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula, where both naval and land powers could be equally effective. However, this severe competition will be limited in a sense that they will not attempt or be able to achieve regional hegemony.

Demographic changes in East Asia will be a major challenge in the future.

With aging populations in most countries in East Asia, particularly Japan and South Korea, there will be a constraint on economic growth and therefore defense expenditures. For example, despite the North Korean nuclear threat and China's growing power, Japan will struggle to manage its defense expenditures due to the strains of an aging society. South Korea will face

the same challenge of having to spend more of its GDP on social welfare rather than on defense.

Japan and South Korea should consider a division of labor in managing security issues.

The complimentary types of military power that Japan and South Korea possess make ROK-Japan security cooperation more feasible: Japan has stronger naval power projection while South Korea has a stronger land power component. An optimal model for security cooperation in the future would be a division of labor: Japan could increase its patrols of Sea Lines of Communication and strategic areas while South Korea could be more responsible for littoral and coastal areas such as the Yellow Sea.

2) Change and Continuity in Japan's Foreign and Security Policy under the DPJ Government

Japan's foreign and security policy has not changed significantly under the DPJ.

There had been expectation that when the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government formed in 2009 there would be major changes in Japan's foreign and security policies. However, few changes have emerged over Japan's security policies. As before, the U.S.-Japan security alliance continues to be at the heart of Japan's security policies. This was very noticeable regarding the relocation plan for the U.S. Marine Corps base at Futenma. Despite initial efforts to close the base by the DPJ government, Tokyo reverted to the original plan after North Korea's provocations in 2010.

China-Japan relations continue to be strained under the DPJ.

Under the DPJ, building an "East Asian Community" was suggested by former-Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama to promote inter-regional cooperation with a focus on the importance of China. However, relations between China and Japan have not seen any noticeable improvement so far. Japan still seeks for ways to cooperate more with the United States and has recently begun to focus on accession to the U.S.-led free trade arrangement, the Trans Pacific Partnership.

Session 2: Challenges for Alliance Networks in East Asia

1) U.S. Strategic Shift in the Asia Pacific and its Impact on the Alliance Network

Despite a pronounced strategic shift, the United States has always been active in Asia.

The Obama administration has made East Asia a top priority, which has been dubbed by some as the U.S. "return to Asia." This has seen criticism from China, which views the "return to Asia" approach as a strategy of containment against its rise. Although this appears to be a strategic shift, in reality the United States has always been strongly active in the region since the end of the Cold War.

The exact direction of the U.S. military concept "Air Sea Battle" is not yet clear.

Recently there has been much interest in the new concept of "Air Sea Battle" which seeks to diversify the airfields and ports from which the U.S. military can operate from, therefore making it harder to target. It has been argued that "Air Sea Battle" was developed to counteract China's own anti-access/area-denial concept that has received much attention. However, the exact direction of the "Air Sea Battle" concept is not yet known. It has even been argued that this new thinking may reflect bureaucratic wrangling among the different military services for increased defense spending during a time of constraint. Still, the United States must reassure its allies in the region that it can maintain its dominant presence in East Asia in spite of emerging area denial strategies.

2) America Abroad: Retrenchment and Rebalancing

The United States faces strong domestic pressures to retrench its military budget abroad.

There are three major domestic pressures in the United States to retrench; increasing national debt, negative public opinion, and new national priorities such as education, energy, and infrastructure. Regarding these pressures and needs, the United States has begun rebalancing in the areas

of counterinsurgency, international affairs budget, and defense budget. The exact scope of future cuts has not yet been determined, but the likely impact on allies in Asia will be for them to take on more burden-sharing.

Trilateral cooperation and economic ties with Europe will strengthen alliance networks in East Asia.

To cope with U.S. retrenchment abroad, trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea will be needed. Cooperation is possible in various different areas including not only military exercises and capacity building but also cyber security and supporting the emergence of other middle powers in Asia like Indonesia. Another area is for Japan and South Korea to enhance economic ties with European countries as a way to diversify over dependency on trade with the Chinese market.

3) The Challenge and Tasks for the ROK-U.S. Alliance in the Twenty-First Century

South Korea and Japan should share more information on North Korea's military capabilities and political situation.

The most direct threat in Northeast Asia that South Korea and Japan face is North Korea. Cooperation though on North Korea is still limited and should be boosted by sharing more information on this threat. As both are U.S. allies, such sharing of information between Japan and South Korea will certainly help to strengthen the deterrent power against North Korea.

South Korea and Japan can contribute to international society by participating jointly in humanitarian support such as peacekeeping operations.

Cooperation between South Korea and Japan has been hindered by ongoing historical disputes and there is still some resistance among the Korean public toward institutionalizing security cooperation with Japan. Considering these difficulties, security cooperation between Japan and South Korea should focus on non-traditional security issues such as peacekeeping operations. Such issues would be easier to facilitate cooperation on while also promoting a more international role for both countries.

Session 3: Strengthening ROK-Japan Strategic Cooperation

1) Japan-ROK Strategic Cooperation on China and Northeast Asia Security

Strategic convergence between South Korea and Japan on China has increased, but gaps still remain.

Despite similar economic interdependence with China, South Korea and Japan have different approaches toward their larger neighbor. Japan takes a more assertive position toward China, while South Korea seeks a cautious approach. This reflects the relative power difference between South Korea and Japan as well as the inherent distrust that persist between Beijing and Tokyo, particularly over maritime issues. Due to disputes with China in the Yellow Sea/West Sea and the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands in 2010, however, strategic convergence between South Korea and Japan has increased and opportunities for cooperation have expanded. Yet, gaps still remain.

South Korea and Japan should explore strategic cooperation on China with focus on integration and balancing.

ROK-Japan strategic dialogue should be promoted to grasp the potentials and limits of cooperation on China policy. South Korea and Japan should explore areas of cooperation in various strategic approaches toward China with a focus on "integration" and "balancing." Promoting "integration," i.e., cooperative approach with China would be in South Korea's comfort zone. Frameworks such as ROK-Japan-China trilaterals would be useful to promote this approach. In areas of friction or dispute with China, such as maritime security and fisheries, "balancing" through diplomacy, institutions, and security cooperation would be necessary. Not only ROK-Japan, but also the ROK-Japan-U.S. trilateral framework should explore new venues of cooperation in this area.

2) Post 3/11 Regional Cooperation on Nuclear Safety

China, Japan, and South Korea must continue to enhance cooperation on nuclear safety.

Regional cooperation on nuclear safety in Northeast Asia has been very limited due in part to the fact that South Korea and Japan have been competitors in the nuclear energy market. Cooperation was generally limited to contacts within the International Atomic Energy Agency. The Fukushima accident though revealed the need for strong regional safety cooperation among Japan, China, and South Korea due to the large number of nuclear reactions in the region located in close proximity. While there has been much discussion on such cooperation following the Fukushima accident, particularly in the run-up to the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, progress has been slow.

The 2012 Nuclear Security Summit will be an opportunity for regional nuclear safety network building.

With South Korea due to host the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit, Seoul has been trying to put nuclear safety on the agenda. Despite some objections and other pressing issues such as North Korea's nuclear threat and Iran's nuclear program, the 2012 Nuclear Summit would be a good starting point to highlight the importance of building a transnational nuclear safety network. ■

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