

Strengthening U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateral Relations

A Working Group Report
of the CSIS International
Security Program

September 2002



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This publication was made possible by a grant from the Korea Foundation. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

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Introduction

Northeast Asia remains one of the most dynamic regions in the world and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The rise of China, economic restructuring in Japan, stalemate across the Taiwan Strait, and of course, continued tensions on the Korean Peninsula all contribute to an environment of uncertainty and volatility. In China, economic growth and integration internationally intensified by accession to the World Trade Organization, internal social unrest, and military modernization are leading to questions about the future trajectory of the world's largest nation and the regional power balance, including that across the Taiwan Strait. For Japan, decade-long economic stagnation has called into question its leadership role as the engine of regional growth and development, even as its security posture becomes more assertive, both at the encouragement of the United States and independently.

On the Korean peninsula, relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) continue to be marked by hostility and periodic military skirmishes, despite occasional hopeful developments such as the 2000 North-South summit and periodic family reunions. The North Korean economy remains in shambles, even as the regime continues to pour resources into its military. The regime develops and often exports for hard-currency technologies and capabilities that sow international instability, such as ballistic missiles, tanks, and other military hardware. The international community has been particularly concerned about the DPRK's apparent development of weapons of mass destruction and, particularly following September 11, their potential export to rogue states or terrorist movements. At the same time, even as the international community seeks to curb the DPRK regime's rogue excesses, few want to see the regime's rapid collapse, which could lead to massive refugee movements in the region and place a tremendous burden on regional resources.

The United States has responded to the above challenges by fundamentally reaffirming its East Asia security strategy of bilateral alliances and military presence, a strategy that has preserved regional stability and promoted peaceful political and economic development for half a century. Despite the apparent success of this approach, however, by the late 1990s, the United States recognized that creative initiatives generated within this structure could further strengthen common security and promote its interests in the region. Among those initiatives was an effort to coordinate U.S. policy on North Korea with the United States' two Northeast Asian allies, and to begin a trilateral process that could be applied to other regional security interests over time. The "Perry Process"—the establishment of a (Foreign Ministry-led) Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), a (Defense Ministry-led) Defense Trilateral, and sporadic trilateral summit meetings on the margins of APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation,) etc.—raised hopes in all three capitals that a "virtual alliance"

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between Japan, South Korea, and the United States was possible. In the process, it was hoped that Japan and South Korea might overcome historical enmity as the two developed a habit of strategic and operational (search and rescue, peacekeeping, piracy, etc.) cooperation.

Indeed, Japan, South Korea, and the United States found themselves at a hopeful juncture at the turn of the twenty-first century. Momentum toward trilateralism, however, appears to have stalled in recent months. A trilateral workshop organized by CSIS examined developments in the trilateral relationship in recent history. The workshop brought together government officials, scholars, and business leaders from the United States, South Korea, and Japan in the spring of 2002. This report is a compilation of papers presented at the workshop; they reflect the different perspectives of each country toward the question of trilateralism and attempt to identify prospects for future development of the process.

The report concludes with a final essay that draws together the findings of the papers and of the workshop as a whole and analyzes the course of trilateralism. The essay notes that trilateralism has recently suffered from the development of divergent national interests and policy approaches toward North Korea and the weakening of U.S. commitment to the process with the coming to power of the Bush administration. The concluding section also presents specific recommendations for policymakers to consider should they decide to further institutionalize and revitalize the trilateralization process in the future.

1. U.S. Perspectives on Trilateral U.S.-Japan-Korea Relations

L. Gordon Flake

Former U.S. ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield was revered in Japan for his oft-repeated mantra that the U.S.-Japan relationship was the United States’ “most important bilateral relationship, bar none.” Korean officials, on the other hand, have often been heard to contend that the Republic of Korea is the United States’ “best” or “closest” ally in Asia. This claim extends to the international arena where Korea consistently strives to be “one-better” than Japan. Combined, these two relationships—as well as the common interests, cooperation, and competition that underlie the interaction between Japan and Korea—form the foundation of a de facto trilateral relationship.

While there is not yet, and probably should not be, a formal U.S.-Japan-Korea alliance, the prominence of the U.S. bilateral relationships with both Korea and Japan as well as the numerous overlapping interests in the region almost necessitate the closing of the triangle in the form of a trilateral relationship. At a minimum, a full understanding of the Northeast Asian region demands consideration of the trilateral dynamic between the United States and its two major allies.

Much careful thinking on this issue has already been done. Seminal works include *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* by Professor Victor Cha¹ and a comprehensive project on a “Virtual Alliance” headed by Ralph Cossa, the president of the Pacific Forum CSIS.² The intent of this short paper is to examine the trilateral relationship in light of recent developments in the international arena and to explore the likely and preferable direction of the relationship in the future.

Justification for a “Trilateral” Relationship

Many of the justifications for a strong trilateral relationship among the United States, Japan, and Korea closely mirror the objectives of a strong U.S. military presence in the region and U.S. alliance relationships with Japan and Korea: regional stability, deterring the North Korean threat, counterbalancing the

1 See Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

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

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growing influence of China, etc. There are, however, several factors that call specifically for improved trilateral coordination and cooperation.

Deterrence

Deterrence—the most historic strategic rationale behind our alliance relationships in Asia—is greatly strengthened by close trilateral relations. Strong and transparent coordination and cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea adds credibility to the deterrent effect of U.S. alliance relationships in North East Asia. With major bases in both Korea and Japan, it would be difficult for the United States to carry out significant operations anywhere in the region without the support of both regional allies. Conversely, schisms among the three parties, even between Korea and Japan, add a complex political consideration to any actions or reactions that require close coordination. It is no mistake that North Korea’s policies have been characterized over the years as intending to “drive a wedge” between the allies. This is a classic divide-and-conquer strategy. In recent years, North Korea has been particularly concerned by and vocally critical of closer trilateral coordination among the United States, Japan, and Korea, as evidenced by the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG).

Reinforcing the Obvious

One primary motivation for addressing the trilateral relationship is that, however important each might be on his own, the United States’ bilateral relations with Korea and Japan cannot be understood in a vacuum. Any action taken or agreement reached between the United States and Japan has implications for the U.S.-ROK relationship, and vice versa. This is not solely a result of regional proximity. The similarities in stated purpose, form, and function mean that any action taken on issues such as Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), defense guidelines, or troop levels has important implications for the other bilateral relationship. While such interaction may not be formalized, improved communication and transparency in the region and particularly between parallel alliance partners should be inherent in a trilateral relationship.

Strengthening the “Third Leg”

The trilateral relationship is aptly compared to a three-legged stool with the U.S.-Korea relationship and the U.S.-Japan relationship forming the first two legs, and the Korea-Japan relationship forming the third. The strength of any single leg determines the overall stability of the stool. Hence strengthening ROK-Japan ties becomes both a means to regional stability and an end, or objective, of trilateral relations.

Historical animosities and recurring domestic political exploitation of such emotions continue to make direct Korea-Japan cooperation on the security front sensitive at best and politically poisonous at worst. A trilateral relationship provides a framework in which bilateral Korea-Japan cooperation and coordination might gain political cover in Tokyo and Seoul. The U.S. role in

trilateral relations has thus served to facilitate relations between Korea and Japan, as trilateral consultations provide politically acceptable venues for dialogue and cooperation between Korea and Japan even on seemingly innocuous issues like search and rescue.

This is not to say that the trilateral venue is a prerequisite to improved coordination between the ROK and Japan. The historic summit between Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi was largely a Korean initiative. Furthermore, in his book and in several subsequent articles, Victor Cha has made a convincing argument that it might be the threat of U.S. withdrawal or periods of relative U.S. disinterest in the region that actually motivates periods of accelerated improvement in ROK-Japan ties. At a minimum, however, the trilateral dynamic provides both Korea and Japan with a safety net in that each state's own national security remains tied to strong relations with a common ally, the United States.

Maintaining a U.S. Role in the Region

Though often unspoken, from a U.S. perspective, a strong trilateral relationship is not only necessary to maintain regional stability in Northeast Asia, but also to provide a palatable justification for the continued presence of U.S. forces in the region. This justification is at present primarily provided by the perception of an ongoing threat from North Korea. In the long term, however, the mutual acceptance of and continued support for a U.S. role in the region by both Japan and Korea will be essential if the United States is to maintain a prominent security role in the region. This is particularly true in the context of domestic U.S. politics. For the past 50 years, U.S. presence in Asia has been sold to the American people based on threats to the region stemming from the Cold War. The Korean peninsula is still commonly referred to as the last bastion of the Cold War. It follows, therefore, that after a hoped-for resolution of the ongoing division of the Korean peninsula, or at least after a clear diminution of the North Korean threat, the U.S. government must communicate a strong rationale for continued U.S. engagement in the region to its citizens. Both Korea and Japan will play an important role in this because the interests of two of the United States' most important trading partners as well as two of the strongest democracies in Asia, are more likely to be grasped by the American public than the relatively vague concept of "regional security."

Recent Developments and Challenges

The past few years have witnessed both peril and promise for the trilateral relationship. Dramatic breakthroughs and unfulfilled expectations on the Korean peninsula, a change of administration in Washington, a new government in Tokyo, flare-ups in Korea-Japan relations over textbooks and shrines, a tumultuous U.S. relationship with China, and the horrific events of September 11 have all impacted on the practice of and prospects for closer trilateral cooperation and coordination.

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Continuation of TCOG (Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group)

Former secretary of defense William Perry delivered his much anticipated Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations on October 12, 1999. Long after the contents of that particular report have been forgotten, however, the consultative process through which the report was achieved and the process of close trilateral coordination that followed—initially dubbed the Perry Process—will be remembered and hopefully continued. In fact, while one might argue about the substance of the Bush administration’s policy toward North Korea, one aspect of the previous administration’s policy that has survived in name as well as in practice has been the relatively frequent TCOG meetings.

At present, the TCOG meetings form the most tangible evidence of an overt trilateral relationship. While there has been some question as to the meetings’ efficacy, their continuance can be seen as an endorsement by all three countries of a high level of dialogue. Some past participants have jokingly referred to the TCOG as “three bilaterals and a plenary.” The United States certainly raises the same issues discussed in the TCOG in its bilateral talks with the ROK and Japan; the TCOG meetings, however, add a different dynamic. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that Korea and Japan have begun coordinating or at least discussing their own approaches in advance of the TCOG sessions.

Understandably, each meeting of the TCOG varies in efficacy depending on the players involved and the issues at hand. There has been some criticism that the individual parties have used the forum for consultation rather than coordination. As might be presumed, such charges are most typically leveled against the United States. Although during the most active periods of ROK initiative toward the North, South Korea was not beyond reproach. The success or failure of this particular venue will depend on the quality of the representatives sent by each government and their ability to actually coordinate activities—including possible adjustments in policy.

Impact of September 11 and the War on Terrorism

The horrific events of September 11 and the resulting international coalition in the war on terrorism have had immediate impacts on the trilateral relationship. It is easy to forget that prior to the events of 9/11 the important “third leg” of the relationship was at a low-point. The combination of the textbook issue and controversy over Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine had greatly inflamed Korea-Japan relations to the point that many of the gains from the 1998 Kim-Obuchi summit were eroded, and much if not all of the bilateral ROK-Japan dialogue on security issues was suspended.

Just as trilateral talks among the United States, Japan, and the ROK serve to place Korea-Japan relations in a broader context and to emphasize common

interests, the events of September 11 served to bring the trilateral relationship itself into a broader context. In the face of a terrorist threat and, perhaps more important, in light of the U.S. call for nations to join an international coalition to fight a war on terrorism, the common interests of Korea and Japan again came to the forefront.

On a more immediate level, for a country like South Korea, which prides itself on its vibrant international role, it became awkward to openly criticize Japan, an ally in the war on terrorism. Nowhere was this more apparent than in South Korea's muted response to an unprecedented Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) action to support U.S. actions in Afghanistan. One need only consider the likely Korean reaction to such Japanese moves prior to September 11 to understand the full impact of the events of that day.

Defining the Relationship

The greatest impediment to a more formalized trilateral relationship is the difficulty of articulating an alliance relationship that stands for rather than against something. The fundamental driver for an alliance relationship is a common enemy. While the Soviet Union, the Cold War, and the North Korean threat provided ample justification for the United States' bilateral alliances with the ROK and Japan, it is difficult to conceptualize moving toward a U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral alliance today without unnecessarily antagonizing China or Russia. This will become even more of an issue should the current threat from North Korea dissipate.

The real challenge, therefore, for the United States, Korea, and Japan is to define their relationship as "pro" rather than "anti." Although there is wide recognition in the region of the need to avoid replacing the Soviet Union with China as the justifying threat, the articulation of a strategic justification for a formal trilateral alliance remains elusive. Hence, scholars such as Ralph Cossa have called for a virtual alliance.

The Emergence of China

The emerging 800-pound gorilla in the region, which cannot be ignored, is, of course, China. How the U.S.-China bilateral relationship develops will have deep and long-term implications for both U.S. bilateral relations in the region and trilateral ties. Both the ROK and Japan are already keenly attuned to the U.S.-China dialogue and a delicate and ongoing balancing act will be required. While Japan is certainly wary of being "passed" or marginalized as the United States pursues a new relationship with China, neither Japan nor Korea want to see the United States and China in a confrontational relationship. The Koreans have an apt proverb that says, "When whales fight, the backs of shrimp get broken." Neither Japan nor Korea could pass for shrimp, but both would be adversely affected by increased tensions in the region.

The China factor makes it even more essential that any trilateral relationship be open and transparent. Given China's oft-stated concern about being contained

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or encircled, trilateral ties will require a heightened sensitivity to regional perceptions.

Asymmetries in the Trilateral Relationship

One inevitable challenge to maintaining a strong trilateral relationship is the asymmetry in relative strength, defense posture, and national objectives between the United States, Japan, and Korea. This challenge is not unique, of course, to Northeast Asia, as the United States' status as the world's sole remaining superpower similarly impacts on U.S. relationships throughout the world. Both Korea and Japan's dependence on the United States in the past, however, as well as public desires in both nations for a more mature relationship, will continue to color both bilateral and trilateral relationships.

Historical Legacies Mixed with Domestic Politics

As evidenced by the events of last summer, the historical legacy of Japan's wartime activities in Asia will continue to constrict Korea-Japan relations. Likewise, the natural proclivity of politicians in both countries to politicize the issue for short-term political gain will not soon dissipate. There is, however, cause for optimism. As acrimonious as the exchange over the textbook issue and the Yasukuni Shrine was last year, it was still more measured than similar flare-ups in the mid-1980s. Furthermore, in addition to the evolving demands of the international coalition on terrorism, both sides seem genuinely concerned for reasons of national pride, among others, that the Korea-Japan World Cup be successful. In fact, even beyond the events of 9/11 there was general recognition among policymakers in Seoul and Tokyo that things had gotten out of hand. Finally, there is a generational shift underway in Japan and Korea that promises to gradually ease bilateral tensions as the wartime generation passes from the scene.

Economic Stagnation in Japan

For decades Japan has been considered a timid partner in regional and international security issues. With a decidedly pacifist constitution and body politic, Japan's participation in security affairs has remained hypersensitive. Despite calls for Japan to shoulder an international role commensurate with the size and influence of its economy, Japan remained ambivalent at best. The prevailing logic was that as an economic superpower, Japan had the means but lacked the will to be an international or a regional player. This tendency was of course reinforced by harsh international criticism from Korea and China of even the most minimal of Japanese initiatives.

Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that while in some small way Japan has found its voice under Prime Minister Koizumi, as evidenced by its unprecedented and decisive response to the U.S. call for assistance in Afghanistan, after a decade of decline in the Japanese economy there is some question as to whether Japan will have the wherewithal to play a meaningful role.

Taking the Bilateral Alliances for Granted

Using the three-legged stool analogy, much of the current focus is on the Japan-Korea leg. The trilateral relationship, however, rests equally on the other two. While both the U.S.-Japan alliance and the U.S.-ROK alliance remain strong, there is little cause for complacency, especially in the long run.

Recent developments in Korea have been particularly troubling. Accurate or not, the growing perception in Korea that the United States is somehow responsible for limiting inter-Korean relations, does not bode well for the long-term strength of the alliance.

U.S. Prospects

TCOG

The meetings of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group should be continued and enhanced. At a bare minimum, they continue to provide a visible symbol of the trilateral relationship as well as a venue for communication, consultation, coordination, and hopefully political cover for Korea and Japan to take actions that may be sensitive in their domestic political contexts. Of course, the TCOG is at present limited by its particular focus on North Korea; such meetings, however, are an important and potentially precedent-setting institution. Depending on developments on the Korean peninsula, the TCOG might be further institutionalized and have its mandate expanded beyond deterring the DPRK.

Toward Tangibility

While maintaining their virtual alliance, the United States, Japan, and Korea should continue to seek out opportunities for more tangible trilateral cooperation and coordination. Joint search and rescue exercises, joint planning for responses to humanitarian disasters like floods, famine, and earthquakes, and even coordination of international activities such as peacekeeping missions could serve to further flesh out the relationship.

Defense Trilateral Meetings

While there are some ongoing meetings, an effort should be made to increase the pace and profile of trilateral meetings between defense officials and agencies. Understandably, such meetings are likely to be the most sensitive and at times the most publicity shy. Particularly when meetings involve humanitarian, search and rescue, or other nonthreatening activity, however, they should be openly announced in Seoul and Tokyo. In fact, one advantage of military trilateral meetings is that they are not limited in scope in the same manner as those held under the auspices of TCOG.

Leaders Trilateral Meetings

The most powerful sign of cooperation would be the resumption of trilateral meetings among the heads of state of the United States, Japan, and Korea. The annual APEC leaders meetings provide an excellent venue for three-way meeting

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to take place. Such meetings, however, should not be limited strictly to regional forums. The United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and other multilateral institutions would all present excellent opportunities for head-of-state and other high-level trilateral meetings.

Expand the Field of Discussion

The trilateral dialogue should be expanded beyond security to include additional global issues such as environment, energy security, and trade. This would represent an implicit recognition of the strong common interest shared by all three nations. Perhaps the process of trilateral coordination might be expanded to include meetings between policy planners at Korea and Japan's respective Foreign Ministries and the U.S Department of State. Ultimately, however, this expansion of trilateral dialogue is a process, and initiatives that include a trilateral element will serve to further strengthen the web of communication and cooperation among the United States, Japan, and Korea.

In conclusion, Ambassador Mansfield's declaration remains true. The U.S.-Japan alliance remains the most important U.S. bilateral relationship "bar none." It is equally true, however, that the U.S.-Japan relationship remains very much dependant on the strength of the U.S.-ROK alliance and vice versa. All three parties, therefore, have an inherent interest in strengthening trilateral ties as a tool for both strengthening their bilateral relations and for advancing common interests in the region.

2. Japan's Policy toward the Korean Peninsula from 1999 to 2002: Conflicts over DPRK Policy Require Trilateral Coordination

Tsuneo Watanabe

Observers of the Korean peninsula have witnessed remarkable ups and downs over the past few years. This paper briefly reviews Japan's policy and role in regional security and Korean unification, particularly with regard to U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral coordination since 1999.

The year 1999 was marked by preparations for the U.S.-Korea-Japan Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) for policy coordination on North Korean affairs. After the DPRK's launch of a Taepodong missile in 1998, U.S. policy coordinator William Perry organized a period of close coordination among the United States, the ROK, and Japan on security threats emanating from the DPRK, including development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The following year saw an element of détente in the historic North-South summit under the leadership of ROK president Kim Dae-jung in June 2000. His administration is also credited with the establishment of a more favorable bilateral relationship between the ROK and Japan during this period, which some scholars have evaluated as the closest in recent history.

The year 2001, however, was marked by stalemate on Korean unification initiatives. In response to the Bush administration's cautious stance on relations with the North, the DPRK cooled its interests in North-South reconciliation despite great efforts on the part of Kim Dae-jung. Moreover, Japan's history textbook controversy slowed the close cooperation between Japan and the ROK, including security cooperation and dialogue. On the other hand, U.S.-Japan relations significantly tightened following Japan's contribution of logistical support to the U.S.-led campaign against global terrorism.

2002 has begun as a year of potential recovery vis-à-vis the DPRK. President Kim Dae-jung will send a special envoy to the North, eager to resume the North-South dialogue. The Japan-ROK summit this past March pushed both sides to recommence close bilateral cooperation, starting with joint sponsorship of the World Cup soccer tournament this summer.

In spite of these ups and downs, the U.S.-ROK-Japan TCOG and U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework have worked to deter the DPRK's development of nuclear and missile weapons as well as to strengthen the two U.S. bilateral alliances in the region (U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK). This in turn has enabled the United States to

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maintain its military presence in both countries to ensure security on the Korean peninsula and throughout Northeast Asia. East Asians have also witnessed increased Japanese military activity within the U.S.-Japan alliance including expanded guidelines for the U.S.-Japan security treaty and the dispatch of Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force for logistic support of the United States in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.

Although Japan has never played a direct role in the security of the Korean peninsula, Japan's indirect influence and constructive stance have become apparent to regional actors through the trilateral coordination process. One important point is that Japan's recent increased security measures have not provoked as much anxiety in the region as many experts had expected. In effect, the existing trilateral cooperation framework helped to prevent regional suspicion of Japan's intentions despite some bilateral conflicts regarding Japanese World War II history during the year 2001.

A Trilateral Dilemma: Two Japanese Policies toward the DPRK

Victor Cha deftly points out three dilemmas in Japan's engagement policy toward the DPRK:

First, Japan has fewer opportunities than Seoul or Washington to distinguish the DPRK tactical behavior from the intentions that underlie it. Secondly, historical reconciliation remains an almost immovable obstacle. Thirdly, the strategic priorities that inform Seoul and Washington's engagement policy are not necessarily in tune with those that inform Japan's; in turn, this could isolate Japan even in a best-case scenario.³

Such factors have occasionally frustrated Japanese policymakers in terms of determining priority between security cooperation with the United States and the ROK, and Japan's own interests such as abducted Japanese citizens in the North. Despite such a dilemma, however, Japan's best strategic choice vis-à-vis the DPRK is the maintenance of close policy coordination with the United States and the ROK. Japan alone cannot attain eventual normalization with the DPRK unless there is détente and disarmament on the Korean Peninsula, which is only possible through trilateral coordination.

Hisahiko Okazaki, the former Japanese ambassador to Thailand, best describes the structural nature of Japan's conflicting interests toward the DPRK—because of Japan's negative historical legacy in World War II, it will have to pay compensation to the DPRK unlike any other normalization in modern history. Although no official estimate exists, some people expect that Japan will pay 1 trillion yen (approximately \$7.5 billion), which is roughly equivalent to the

³ Victor D. Cha, "Japan's Engagement Dilemmas with North Korea," *Asian Survey* 41, no. 4 (2001): 549–563.

current Chinese military budget for procurement of modern weapons over the next five years.⁴

Okazaki stresses that Japan should pay financial compensation to the DPRK only after it demonstrates that it is no longer a regional threat by achieving détente and disarmament on the Korean peninsula.⁵ Japan cannot normalize relations simply by paying money to the DPRK because that would jeopardize the overall security of the Korean peninsula by potentially breaking the military balance of power. For one thing, the United States and the ROK, who currently face a military threat from the North at the demilitarized zone, would not approve of Japan providing funds that could be channeled into military procurement. At the same time, the DPRK is desperately in need of cash and strongly advocates that Japan pay before it makes any concession on its military capability.

Above all else, Japan should maintain close coordination with its partners while allowing the United States and the ROK to utilize Japanese compensation as part of a larger bargaining strategy with the North. Because Japan relies on the United States and Korea's relationship with the DPRK for eventual détente and disarmament, Japan's policy cannot depart significantly from those of the other two countries. In addition, Japan is dependent on the U.S. military presence and nuclear umbrella for its overall security.

Japan has learned through trial and error that close coordination with the United States and the ROK is critical to successful negotiations. In 1990, Shin Kanemaru, a senior politician in Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led a delegation to the DPRK and promised generous compensation without bothering to coordinate his initiative with the United States or the ROK beforehand. A worried United States then sent messages to both the ROK and Japan that any agreement with the DPRK must include resolution of the nuclear issue.⁶ Upon his return, Kanemaru's three-party declaration (LDP, Japan Socialist Party, and the DPRK labor party) was severely criticized by both the ROK and the United States.⁷ Eventually, the Japanese government ignored Kanemaru's negotiations by stating that the government is not bound by an agreement solely negotiated by a political party. Since then, the DPRK has lost interest in negotiating directly with Japan as opposed to the United States.

⁴ LDP senior politician Shin Kanemaru promised \$8 billion for compensation as part of a casual bargaining process with the DPRK leader Kim Il-sung in 1990. In *Tomomitsu Shigemura, Kitachousen no Gaiko-Sennryaku* (Diplomatic Strategy of North Korea) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2000), 165–166.

⁵ Hisahiko Okazaki, “Niccho koredake-wa yuzurenai” (Japan Cannot Concede this Line to the DPRK) *Shokun*, 79–82.

⁶ Kil Jong-woo, *Nichibeikan Sanngoku no Wakugumi Kara Mita Korekarano Nicchoukankei* (The Future of U.S.-Japan-ROK Trilateral Perspectives) (Tokyo: Tokyo Foundation, 2001), 27.

⁷ Masao Okonogi, “Japan’s North Korea Policy: The Long Swing between Dialogue and Deterrence” (paper presented at North Korea Policy after the Perry Report: A Trilateral Workshop at the Sigur Center, George Washington University, March 3–4, 2000, <http://www.gwu.edu/~eastasia/events/trilat-00/okonogi-00.htm>).

Looking back at the recent policy trajectory on the Korean peninsula since 1999, Japan's policies have converged within U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral coordination despite the occasional political temptation to take an independent approach to negotiating with the DPRK for potential short-range benefit.

1999: Development of U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateral Coordination after the Taepodong Launch

The Perry Process and Japan

The Taepodong launch over Japan's territorial waters in August 1998 accelerated Japan's concerns regarding the DPRK and security vulnerability. Before the launch, the Japanese general public was largely ignorant of the DPRK's nuclear and missile threat despite the fact that the DPRK had already deployed No-dong missiles capable of reaching Japanese territory.

In addition, the DPRK was believed to have been developing a more advanced missile, the Taepodong-II, with a range of 3,500 to 6,000 km, theoretically capable of reaching U.S. land.⁸

In the same year, suspicions emerged regarding a DPRK underground nuclear-related facility at Kumchang-ni. Strong concerns within the U.S. Congress pushed the Clinton administration to direct former secretary of defense William Perry to review U.S. policy toward North Korea. Perry concluded that the United States needed a comprehensive approach toward the DPRK in order to deter the development of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. Perry closely coordinated this process with the ROK and Japan, which was later institutionalized in the TCOG for policy coordination on North Korean affairs in April 1999.

Since Japan had not been included in the U.S.-ROK-DPRK-China four-party talks, the TCOG opened a window of opportunity for it to become involved in a multilateral process. Japan had great incentive for full cooperation with the Perry Process and the TCOG, both practically and strategically following the DPRK loss of interest in solo negotiations with Japan.

Guideline Legislation

The launch of the Taepodong missile also spurred Japan's bilateral security cooperation with the United States. The Japanese constitution restricts security policy options in the Article 9 renunciation of war clause. In fact, over the past 50 years Japanese military development has been kept as minimal as possible. For instance, Japan bans the development of nuclear weapons, and has relinquished any preemptive air strike capability by giving up aerial fueling equipment. As a result of both of the above, Japan does not have an indigenous deterrence capability against a DPRK nuclear threat. In practice, though, Japan is dependent upon the U.S. nuclear umbrella protection provided by the U.S.-Japan security

⁸ Japan Defense Agency, *Defense of Japan* (Tokyo: Tokyo Urban Connections, 2001), 39.

treaty. Even within that relationship, strict guidelines define how Japan can cooperate with U.S. operations in areas surrounding Japan. This guideline legislation was domestically controversial since pacifist and liberal camps regarded it as extending defense policy beyond constitutionally mandated limits. Public fear of a missile attack from the DPRK, however, allowed the Japanese Diet to pass the domestic legal provisions. The trilateral coordination process aided this transition by providing assurances to the ROK that these steps would not spur a revival of Japanese militarism.

Year 2000: Détente on the Korean Peninsula

In August 2000, President Kim Dae-jung's sunshine policy pushed forward DPRK normalization with the historic North-South summit. Resulting developments included DPRK participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum, two ministerial-level meetings between the North and South, and exchanges among separated family members in the two Koreas. At the same time, Kim Dae-jung's forward-looking approach on history issues at the Kim-Mori summit in September 2000 brought about a more reconciliatory Japan-ROK relationship.

Due to Japan's limited options for normalization with the DPRK, the North-South détente provided a favorable opportunity for Japan to pursue its interests vis-à-vis the North within the trilateral framework. In fact, with the support and advice of President Kim Dae-jung, Prime Minister Mori resumed some relations with the DPRK. This development resulted in gains such as Japan's gift of 50,000 tons of rice as humanitarian aid, the ability for Japanese wives of DPRK citizens to visit Japan, and searches for missing (not abducted) Japanese citizens through the Red Cross in the DPRK. The talks, however, did not progress beyond Japan's concern for abducted Japanese citizens and the DPRK's desire for financial compensation. This shows, again, that structural issues prevent Japanese normalization with the DPRK without a drastic improvement in security on the Korean peninsula.

2001: Cooling Down the Reconciliation Mood in North-South and ROK-Japan Relations

In 2001, the relatively cautious attitude of the new Bush administration quashed inter-Korean reconciliation. In his March 2001 discussions with President Kim Dae-jung, President Bush expressed skepticism of the DPRK leader, Kim Jong-il. In May, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) negotiations with the DPRK failed to yield an agreement resulting in an official IAEA statement that it could not sufficiently verify DPRK compliance to the Agreed Framework.⁹ Although the Bush administration's stated DPRK policy was a continuation of the past Clinton administration's, it clearly seemed less flexible to the DPRK.

⁹ Donald G. Gross, "Good Sense in Washington, A Big Question Mark in Pyongyang," *Comparative Connections* (Second Quarter, 2001), http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/0102Qus_skorea.html.

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In April 2001, the Japanese Ministry of Education approved a controversial junior high school history textbook that contained passages justifying Japan's aggression in World War II. In protest, Seoul recalled its ambassador and postponed upcoming Japan-ROK joint maritime exercises. Besides the textbook issue, fishery conflicts around Japan's northern territory and Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, where class-A war criminals are enshrined, further cooled the improving Japan-ROK cooperative atmosphere.

Still, it should be noted that even as such events divided the parties, security coordination among the United States, the ROK, and Japan continued as usual. There was not a total severance of ties as occurred during the textbook controversy in 1985. Following September 11, both Japan and the ROK expressed their support for the U.S.-led global campaign against terrorism and offered military and other assistance. As mentioned, Japan sent its Maritime Self-Defense Force to provide logistical support for the U.S. operation in the Indian Ocean. To explain why such drastic measures were necessary and to reassure the ROK and China, Japanese prime minister Koizumi visited both countries in October. At a press conference before meeting with President Kim Dae-jung in Korea, Koizumi issued a statement of "heartfelt remorse and apology" for the suffering of South Korea under Japanese colonial rule. At the summit meeting, both leaders agreed to set up a joint forum to address divisive historical issues.

While Koizumi's rapid apology in both the ROK and China seemed to conflict with his previous visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in August, the former may have stemmed from his strong commitment to maintaining the U.S.-Japan bilateral alliance. An important point is that the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship requires Japan's leader to maintain trilateral coordination beyond personal ideological belief.

In addition, Japan maintained a cooperative relationship with the DPRK during this time. In May, a man believed to be the eldest son of Kim Jong-il was arrested with a fake passport at the Tokyo International Airport. Japan dealt with him calmly and allowed him to return through a third country, China, despite Japanese public pressure to trade him for abducted Japanese citizens. This action should not be regarded as simply appeasement but a decision to maintain the trilateral coordination framework.

At the same time, Japan refused to compromise on key issues with the DPRK. In December, the Japanese government arrested a former executive of Chosen Soren (Chongryon), a pro-DPRK residents association in Tokyo, for illegal loans. In the same month, a Japanese Coast Guard vessel sank a suspected DPRK vessel near Japanese territorial waters. These firm actions demonstrated that Japan had given up the illusion that a soft policy posture would lead to normalization with the DPRK and that the political power of the pro-DPRK Diet faction has declined.¹⁰

¹⁰ The conservative newspaper *Sankei Shimbun* reported that a senior LDP politician, Shin Kanemaru, intervened with the government to investigate Chosen Soren in 1990 before his

Prospects of Japan's Policy toward the DPRK in the Year 2002

Considering the growing desperation of the DPRK for food and money, the year 2002 might provide a window of opportunity for negotiation among the United States, the ROK, Japan, and the DPRK. Sentiment from Japan suggests that the TCOG process will now be more important than ever.

There are still some roadblocks, however. In March 2002, the ex-wife of a Japanese Red Army member, who was exiled to the DPRK for hijacking a flight, testified that she was involved in the abduction of a Japanese student from London.¹¹ Such reports fueled Japanese public concern for clarifying abduction issues with the DPRK, creating a dilemma for trilateral coordination. Other challenges might arise if politicians make the issue of abduction a higher priority than general diplomatic coordination, as Kanemaru did in 1990.

This is, however, unlikely to crop up in 2002. First, the Koizumi cabinet is unlikely to depart from close coordination with the United States for bilateral security reasons. Koizumi and his faction are generally characterized as pro-United States and less sympathetic to the DPRK. Because of former foreign minister Tanaka's poor performance and never-ending scandals within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the cabinet office has been able to single-handedly take the initiative on vital security policies such as Japan's support for the U.S. operation against terrorism. As a result, pro-DPRK conservatives have influenced this policy less.

Second, influential pro-DPRK Diet members are politically weak. Two major influential Diet members, Koichi Kato and Muneyo Suzuki, are facing huge money scandals and the potential loss of their seats. Due to the troubles of his protégé, Suzuki, another influential member, Hiromu Nonaka will be forced to keep a low profile on the DPRK issue. In addition, Chosen Soren is losing political leverage on the LDP as a result of financial problems with nonperforming assets.

Third, the Japanese public, who have been frustrated by the insincere attitude of the DPRK, will not allow much in the way of concessions to the DPRK, particularly not large amounts of compensation.

There may be some possibility for progress between Japan and the DPRK if some abducted Japanese are allowed to return and the economy rebounds. Japan-DPRK normalization, however, will most likely result only after détente and disarmament of the DPRK, and the trilateral coordination mechanism will continue to be a vital tool for Japan's policy toward the DPRK.

delegation to the DPRK, according to some unidentified witnesses. *Sankei Shimbun*, December 16, 2001.

11 *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 13, 2002.

3. U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateral Relations: A Korean Perspective

Young-Ho Park

The Security Environment in Northeast Asia

Although some signs of reconciliation and cooperation have emerged between North and South Korea, the Korean peninsula remains a potential flash point in Northeast Asia. At the center is North Korea, which has been termed a part of an “axis of evil” by President George W. Bush. In fact, no one can talk about the security environment in Northeast Asia without considering the North Korean factor.

While in favor of preserving the status quo in the region, the four powers surrounding the Korean peninsula are steadily competing with each other to expand their influence, and the strategic confrontation between the U.S.-Japan bloc and the China-Russia bloc is growing deeper. By strengthening its security alliance with Japan, the United States continues to lead the regional order, whereas China and Russia seek to expand security cooperation to restrain the increasing influence of the United States. Based on its dominant economic and military capabilities, the United States maintains superior influence in the region, but the voices of China, Japan, and Russia are comparatively becoming louder. Economic recovery in countries in the region will lend favorably to the stability of the region.

Backed by its dominant economic and military power, the United States seeks to maintain order in Northeast Asia favorable to its interests. Since the onset of the Bush administration, the United States has given priority to the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and missiles over any other policy. The U.S. implementation of national missile defense (NMD) has caused some conflicts in relations with Russia and China. In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, however, conflict between the United States and China and between the United States and Russia with regard to the NMD project has submerged. This is due in large measure to the fact that the U.S.-led war on terrorism has become the prevailing concern in global politics for at least the time being.

ROK-U.S. Relations

Although there have been some ups and downs in the past five decades, the basic characteristics of the security relationship between the ROK and the United States

have changed very little. The U.S. security commitment to South Korea has remained strong and most South Koreans have come to take the U.S.-ROK security alliance for granted. Still, political development in the form of democratization since the late 1980s has gradually given many South Koreans a chance to reconsider the existing bilateral relationship. For example, in the early 1980s, the argument that U.S. Forces in Korea should be withdrawn was rarely heard in expert circles. Today, however, the continuing presence of U.S. Forces in Korea is not necessarily a given factor when considering the long-term security environment of the Korean peninsula.

Along with the process of democratization and economic development, nationalistic sentiment among South Koreans is ever increasing. When it comes to inter-Korean relations, this trend has become more evident. A series of Korean Institute for National Unification (KINU) surveys in the 1990s showed that a growing number of South Koreans positively view North Korea as a party for cooperation (1992, 45.2 percent; 1993, 28.7 percent; 1994, 20.4 percent; 1995, 25.2 percent; 1998, 24.8 percent; 1999, 32.6 percent), rather than as a hostile party (1992, 8.2 percent; 1993, 14.3 percent; 1994, 7.1 percent; 1995, 15.9 percent; 1998, 13.8 percent; 1999, 8.2 percent). Both the U.S. and South Korean governments noticed this trend and, in January 1993, started conducting joint studies on the future direction of the U.S.-ROK security alliance at the behest of the twenty-fourth U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting of October 1992. Their conclusions were published in December 1995 in a report entitled, *A New Alliance for the Next Century: The Future of U.S.-Korean Security Cooperation*.¹²

It suggested preferred alternatives by phase: robust peninsula alliance at phase 1 (status quo); regional security alliance at phase 2; and lastly, accommodation/integration and post-unification. In general, it seems that the United States and South Korea are following those policy recommendations.

In the final days of the Clinton administration, there was a seeming rapprochement between Washington and Pyongyang, highlighted by mutual exchanges of top-level policymakers and the U.S.-DPRK Joint Communiqué. Although there was an increasing tendency in Washington to criticize President Clinton's approach to North Korea, many Koreans saw those events as a positive sign of close policy cooperation between Seoul and Washington. While maintaining a solid security alliance, the ROK and United States seemed to succeed in bringing North Korea out of its seclusion by positively pursuing engagement with North Korea. But both inter-Korean relations and U.S.-North Korean relations slowed around the onset of the Bush administration. Many South Koreans, including even a few high-ranking government officials and some highly visible experts on inter-Korean relations, have blamed the Bush administration for the stalled situation in inter-Korean relations. Particularly after President Bush named North Korea a member of the "axis of evil" on January 29, 2002, it has been no wonder to hear, among the "progressive" sectors in South

¹² Pollack, Jonathan D., et al., *A New Alliance for the Next Century: The Future of U.S.-Korean Security Cooperation*, (Santa Monica: RAND and the Korea Institute of Defense Analyses, 1995).

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Korea, that the Bush administration is the main hurdle preventing the improvement of inter-Korean relations and that the United States has no interest in Korean unification.

A recent public opinion poll conducted in March 2002 by a Korean survey company, Research and Research (R & R), clearly shows a sharp increase in anti-American sentiment in South Korean society. Those who have unfavorable feelings about the United States constitute 46.3 percent, while only 13.6 percent of respondents maintain favorable feelings. Some 61 percent of respondents answered "yes" to the question, "Are you willing to join a campaign to boycott American-made products?" Such results might have been influenced by an incident in the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, involving a Korean skater and an American skater. Following the Winter Olympic Games held in Salt Lake City, many South Koreans noted, "the United States, which we thought was our ally, snatched a gold medal from us in the men's short track speed skating final." This may be called an (Anton) Ono effect, but it is surely an alarming tendency for the United States to have to take into account in order to maintain a robust security alliance.

On the relative importance of inter-Korean relations and ROK-U.S. relations, South Koreans think that the former is more important (50.1 percent) than the latter (44.7 percent). This result contradicts the shared understanding between President Kim Dae-jung and President George W. Bush that the ROK-U.S. alliance is paramount.

The ROK Ministry of National Defense's decision on March 27, 2002, to buy Boeing F-15s as its next-generation fighters, has also ignited protests by some progressive sectors against the United States as well as the Kim Dae-jung administration. Many Koreans see the ministry's decision as the result of pressure from Washington to buy the U.S.-made Boeing F-15 over the French-made Dassault Rafale. The contract to supply 40 new warplanes by 2009 is worth \$4.2 trillion (\$3.23 billion). Even among concerned South Koreans with a neutral stance on the Bush administration, there are solid objections to selecting the older F-15, the first version of which came out in 1972. As the *Washington Post* put it on March 27, the controversy over the selection process of the next-generation fighters has taken anti-Americanism to its highest levels in years.

On March 29, 2002, South Korea and the United States signed an agreement for the land partnership plan (LPP), which calls for the U.S. Forces in Korea to close 28 of its 41 major installations and facilities over the next 10 years. The agreement may be instrumental in resolving many of the civil petitions lodged against the U.S. military bases in the past. It is also one step forward because the United States agreed to relocate some military bases currently in the centers of major cities. It is an incomplete agreement, however, because the two countries have yet to resolve either the relocation of the Yongsan military base in Seoul or the issue of the Maehyang-ri and Story bombing and strafing ranges, which have been, and continue to be, sources of anti-American sentiment. For many South

Koreans, the Yongsan military base issue is regarded as the most damaging to Korean national dignity.

Besides these problems, the U.S.-ROK Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) still remains a hot issue. It should be appreciated that the ROK and the United States have recently taken an important step toward creating an equal partnership by revising some clauses. But the recent changes to SOFA are still considered unsatisfactory by some concerned South Korean civic groups and vocal activists. For ordinary South Koreans, SOFA issues are understood as accords or regulations solely in favor of the United States, which limit South Korean jurisdiction over U.S. soldiers who commit crimes on their soil.

Although the United States sees no conflict between President Bush's view of North Korea as part of the "axis of evil" and President Kim's sunshine policy, many South Koreans, regardless of their political ideology, are concerned about the U.S. stance on North Korea. They believe that President Bush's hard-line stance cannot coexist with President Kim's soft-line posture. While Kim's version of engagement policy is based on the view that North Korea is susceptible to change, Bush's version of power-based security strategy assumes that North Korea is not amenable to U.S. rationale. And while President Bush places the highest priority on the eradication of North Korea's WMD and missiles, President Kim prefers inter-Korean reconciliation.

Under these circumstances, the continuing stalemate in relations between the United States and North Korea may contribute to anti-American sentiment on the part of ordinary South Koreans outside the circle of progressive forces and college students. Although some may feel that a firm ROK-U.S. alliance should be maintained in the process of improving inter-Korean relations, South Koreans could come to see the United States as a country primarily pursuing its own interests and hindering North and South Korean efforts toward peaceful coexistence.

ROK-Japan Relations

Since the first visit by the ROK minister of national defense to Japan in 1994, Korea and Japan have developed security relations, including exchanges of defense ministers and high-ranking officers. Under the Kim Dae-jung administration, Korea and Japan became closer than ever before by adopting the Joint Declaration on a New ROK-Japan Partnership for the Twenty-First Century in October 1998. For the first time since the normalization of relations in 1965, Korea began to implement a two-stage open-door policy for Japan.

In 1999, the two countries installed and began to operate an emergency liaison system that enables the Korean army and Japanese self-defense forces to exchange urgent information. The two countries also began conducting joint maritime surveillance and rescue exercises in the East Sea, between Cheju Island and Kyushu, mobilizing about 1,300 navy personnel, as well as 11 aircrafts and warships.

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But the issue of Japan's history textbook authorization and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine slowed the development of security relations. The Japanese government angered Korea by approving history textbooks that many Korean historians denounced as inaccurate. It also gave rise to accusations on the part of ordinary Koreans that Japan was trying to whitewash its past. The R & R survey in November 2001 showed that 56.6 percent of respondents disliked Japan. This was a sharp increase from 42.2 percent in November of the previous year, and 42.6 percent in September 1999, when Korea began to open its door to Japanese popular culture.

Primarily because of public opinion, President Kim Dae-jung was obliged to issue a strong statement to the Japanese government on the controversial textbook issue and end exchanges of military personnel in 2001. This clearly implies how influential past history remains in the relationship between South Korea and Japan. Unlike Germany, Japan has never given a straightforward apology for its wrongdoings to neighboring countries during World War II. It is undeniable that the textbook issue stirred up deep-rooted mutual distrust between South Korea and Japan. This was one of the reasons why Prime Minister Koizumi visited Seoul in March 2002. Both Seoul and Tokyo needed to reinvigorate their promise to develop a partnership for the twenty-first century because the two countries will cohost the 2002 World Cup Games. Accordingly, Seoul and Tokyo have also agreed to resume annual defense minister exchanges.

In the past few years, Japan has moved substantially toward becoming a normal state on defense. The Japanese Diet has passed several acts to implement the 1997 U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines, which called for a sharp expansion of support activities by Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to U.S. armed forces if any contingency occurs in regions surrounding Japan. The United States and Japan agreed to interpret "situations in areas surrounding Japan" as a situational reference rather than geographical. While the Bush administration places greater emphasis on U.S.-Japan security cooperation, Japan also desires to enhance the bilateral security relationship. September 11 provided an opportunity for Japan to move further toward normalization of its security policy. In the process of helping the U.S.-led war on terrorism, Japan engaged in its largest overseas military operation by far. The Diet passed laws and amendments that will facilitate future SDF deployments abroad and give more freedom of action in using force.

This freedom of action for SDF may arouse suspicion about Japan's role in formulating a stable peace in the Northeast Asian region. Many South Koreans are cautious about the potential growth of Japan's military power. This is why public opinion leaders, including top policymakers, continue to call on Japan to abide by its Constitution and exclusively self-defense-oriented policy. A recent survey of 67 lawmakers—32 Koreans and 35 Japanese—conducted by the Korea-Japan Future Studies, a joint fraternity of legislators, demonstrates this view clearly; although 65.6 percent of Korean lawmakers said Japan's recent moves to expand its military role are the greatest threat to regional security, 80 percent of Japanese respondents said North Korea and its tension with the United States are the most serious threats to regional security. Some 84 percent of Korean

respondents also represented a negative view of Japan's revision of its law to allow its SDF participation in the U.S.-led war against terrorism.¹³ Frankly, South Koreans still have mixed feelings about Japan; on one hand, they consider Japan a good neighbor, but on the other, they view Japan with suspicion.

Future Agendas for U.S.-ROK-Japan Security Cooperation

Adapting Each Country's Security Strategy to Common Interests

Since the end of the Korean War, the combined strength of U.S. and ROK forces has effectively deterred North Korea's military threat. As long as North Korea remains the most serious security threat, the U.S.-ROK alliance will continue to be the main bulwark against Northern aggression. In addition to the U.S.-Japan alliance, Japan also sees the U.S.-ROK alliance as a necessary shield for its security. In the aftermath of September 11, the U.S. role in shaping the world order has become more prominent. It is not easy to deny the fact that there practically exists an "American empire," whose influence almost all members of the UN cannot escape. South Korea and Japan are particularly bound. But the United States cannot and should not impose its own agenda unilaterally on bilateral or trilateral security relations. All three countries have their own priorities in terms of national security strategies. Whereas the United States and Japan place top priority on resolving North Korea's WMD and missiles, South Korea gives higher priority to the improvement of inter-Korean relations. This difference in policy priority does not necessarily mean that there is no room for adjustment of each other's policy agendas to promote common interests.

Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo should enhance joint efforts to find effective alternatives.

The Need for Longer-term Joint Security Planning

South Korea and the United States have launched a comprehensive study on the future role and function of U.S. Forces in Korea. As the security environment on and around the Korean peninsula changes, the two countries must prepare for the future of the ROK-U.S. alliance and a new role for the U.S. Forces in Korea. Currently, both South Korea and the United States agree that the U.S. military will remain present even after reunification of the Korean peninsula. In the long term, however, changes in internal and external factors may promote a tendency toward anti-Americanism, which may dictate U.S. policy far in advance.

Understanding Korean-style Engagement

The Bush administration remains suspicious of North Korea's change. It views North Korea as an evil state, harboring unlawful ways and means against the free and peaceful world. Japan follows the U.S. suit. And although the Kim Dae-jung administration has found some positive signs of change in North Korea, those signs could not be substantiated. Some may argue that the United States' hard-line

13 *Korea Herald*, February 25, 2002.

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stance will pay off once North Korea emerges from isolation. But there are some worries in South Korea that the Bush administration's North Korea policy has been and will continue to be unilateral in the sense that it mainly reflects the U.S. security strategy. South Korea hopes that the Bush administration will take into account the effect of North-South exchanges and cooperation. Given the lack of assured policy alternatives in dealing with North Korea, the starting point for the United States, South Korea, and Japan should be to share an understanding of North Korea and its leadership. Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington should increase joint efforts to build a greater understanding among the three nations.

Based on this, a principle of reciprocity should be applied—but applied realistically with North Korea's ability in mind. The South's large economic aid may be answered by small to medium political returns and/or confidence-building measures toward a reduction of tension, with some time lags allowed. In this context, the United States should not push North Korea too hard in order to secure concessions on its agenda.

North Korea seems well aware that improved relations with the United States is essential to ensuring security and economic assistance. Despite its rhetoric, North Korea may be preparing to resume contacts and negotiations with the United States in this context. Still, without seeing any short-term benefits, North Korea is expected to be very reluctant to deal on its nuclear and missile programs. Pyongyang will continue to maintain its stance that the development of WMD and missiles are a strategic response to the U.S. policy to suffocate North Korea. It would be very difficult for North Korea to make concessions on these issues because they are the main sources of its defense and deterrence.

As the process of presidential primary elections unfolds, South Korea is rapidly moving toward a mature democracy. Such a development can be applied to the decisionmaking process of its North Korea policy. South Korea is a very complicated society, where a variety of different opinions compete for input in policymaking in all respects. As such, the U.S. approach should be a careful one. If the South Koreans should turn their backs on the United States, the security environment in Northeast Asia would face an epoch-making transformation, which might not be favorable to the interests of the United States.

4. Status Quo: Putting It All Together

Derek J. Mitchell

As this study began in 2000, the trend in trilateral relations among the United States, Korea, and Japan appeared promising. Momentum in the relationship in the late 1990s raised hopes that the three sides would move inexorably toward a virtual alliance that would not only meet the common threat of North Korea, but also lay the groundwork for broader cooperation in the longer term on regional security issues.

Two years later, as the three papers in this report indicate, the report card on trilateralism is mixed. On one hand, it appears that the momentum toward political and strategic trilateralism has slowed. One could cite several reasons. September 11 is an obvious first candidate. As a result of September 11, U.S. policymakers turned their attention away from Asian security per se and toward international terrorists and the rogue states that support them. While such rogue states include the DPRK, the U.S. focus on the North Korean threat departed from its allies, as it became both more zealous and less coordinated.

In addition, underlying tensions within the various bilateral relationships have emerged to overshadow progress toward sustained collaboration. History textbooks, war shrines, and fishery disputes have stirred traditional nationalist sentiment in South Korea against Japan, cooling the trend in the overall relationship since the landmark 1998 Obuchi-Kim summit. Even before September 11, the onset of the Bush administration brought a harder line toward the DPRK, and to many in South Korea, including President Kim Dae-jung himself, seemed to undercut progress and raise tensions on the peninsula without due respect for ROK interests. The U.S.-Japan relationship is perhaps the only one of the three relationships to have strengthened over the past two years.

The trilateral relationship has also suffered from the emergence of profoundly divergent approaches and interests among the three nations in recent years, as the three papers in this report indicate. Japan's interests focus primarily on resolving cases of North Korean abduction of Japanese citizens as it grows increasingly frustrated with DPRK intransigence over the issue. Japan has also become resentful that the DPRK has met Japan's extensive food support to the North with continued derision and disrespect in recent years. As a result, Japan has shut down financial lifelines from its Korean community to the DPRK, slowed its food assistance, and refused to consider normalizing relations until the abduction issue is resolved. While Japan retains a profound interest in preventing collapse or instability in the North, growing popular revulsion in Japan toward the DPRK's intransigence and ingratitude and the decline of influential Diet members on

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Japan's North Korean policy (as outlined by Tsuneo Watanabe), means few advocates of engagement through compromise or concessions remain within Japanese society.

Although South Korea expresses support for Japan's interests, the ROK's primary interests remain general reduction of tension on the peninsula and stability through engaging the DPRK in a process of gradual reconciliation. Resolution of particular issues in the North-South relationship pale next to the desire for general peace, stability, and interaction between the two sides. Because President Kim has based his legacy on his sunshine policy, some have detected desperation in Blue House policy to engage the DPRK at all costs, even in the face of provocation or the lack of reciprocity. As its own economy has faltered in recent years, the South seems terrified of the prospect of a collapse in the North or reunification in the near term due to the high costs, both social and economic.

The Bush administration, meanwhile, seems much less troubled by the prospect of the DPRK's demise. As indicated above, its interests extend primarily to curbing the North's destabilizing international activities, including its continued development and export of weapons of mass destruction, missile proliferation, drug running, counterfeiting, etc. To many in the United States, North Korea is increasingly a problem to be solved rather than one to be managed—hence its inclusion in Bush's axis of evil, which also includes Iraq and Iran, where regime change is a relatively short-term U.S. goal. The administration's suspension of talks with the DPRK and harsh rhetoric toward the regime seem to run counter to efforts by the ROK to reduce tensions and promote reconciliation on the peninsula through engagement, and appear to undercut President Kim's bid for legacy. How far the United States—under Bush—is willing to pursue its hard-line approach toward the DPRK is unclear. The asymmetry that has developed, however, in basic interests, approach, and vision of DPRK policy among the three sides has played a large part in curbing momentum in trilateralism in recent years.

One might contrast this situation with the late 1990s when the Perry Process provided a common vision for dealing with the North. Presidents Clinton and Kim shared an approach to the DPRK that coincided with Japan's interests in constraining the North and developing a cooperative strategic relationship with the ROK. The result was a united front and great hope for a new trilateral processes.

Today, the united front may be holding, but it is fraying at the edges. Indeed, as domestic political conditions shift and democratic reforms ensue within both Japanese and Korean societies, the influence of popular attitudes on public policy within these nations becomes a wild card in trilateral dynamics. It was rather surprising how much representatives from Japan and South Korea focused on this issue during the trilateral workshop held in support of this project. Each side noted developments within their societies that impeded cooperation or assistance to North Korea, or even among the three nations themselves. Japanese representatives noted that the Japanese public, for instance, will not countenance

continued aid to the DPRK in the face of missiles flying over their territory and abduction of their brethren. ROK delegates bristled over perceived U.S. disrespect for ROK interests and chafed at incidents that served as reminders of Japan's inability to account for its history. They pointed to unlikely incidents such as the disqualification of an ROK speed skater in the 2002 Winter Olympics, and allegations of excessive U.S. pressure on the ROK to secure a fighter aircraft contract for Boeing as souring ROK attitudes toward the United States and overall U.S.-ROK relations. The development of popular influence over the trilateral relationship has become particularly evident over the last few years, and conference participants on each side noted that it will likely inform development of trilateral relations in the future.

Nonetheless, although in recent years trilateralism seems to have bent to the imperatives of domestic politics or individual national interests, the three sides continue to have every interest in pursuing a cooperative trilateral approach in dealing with the DPRK. Each side recognizes first that it gains more from a united front than from dealing with North Korea individually, and thus has interest in at least continuing the regular dialogue on DPRK policy. Furthermore, for the ROK, trilateralism remains a useful way to contribute to U.S. and Japanese policy deliberations and to keep an eye on Japanese strategic development, which remains a great concern for the ROK. Trilateralism potentially ties Japan into a framework that constrains its ability to act precipitously or independently to the detriment of South Korean interests and offers a forum for both the ROK and the United States to question Japan in this regard. For Japan, trilateralism enables its security concerns to have a proper hearing and to engage the other nations on its own behalf. For the United States, trilateralism remains an excellent vehicle for strengthening its alliance network in Northeast Asia and for facilitating reconciliation between its two key allies to enable cooperation on broader security interests in the long term. These goals remain critical to U.S. long-term strategic interests.

One might consider trilateralism to exist most productively today in the institutional processes that continue to facilitate dialogue among the three sides. The Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group, or TCOG, established in 1999, continues to meet regularly to discuss common approaches to North Korea. While the TCOG served a critical function during the late Clinton years in coordinating respective policies toward the DPRK—and in specific areas, such as food aid to North Korea or information sharing on the implications of particular developments in the DPRK, proved a relevant mechanism for trilateralism—it has recently become simply a forum for dialogue as much for cooperation. Over the past year, some meetings have focused as much on relations among the three sides as on common approaches to the DPRK. This function, however, might serve as useful a purpose as any over the long run in promoting trilateral relations, particularly if it facilitates dialogue and creates a habit of cooperation between Japan and South Korea. Today, the TCOG stands as an important symbol of unity and communication—a placeholder for closer relations and dialogue among the three powers when cooperation is required in the future.

Finally, one should note that even as tensions have developed and momentum has stalled in strategic discussions among the three sides, defense relations have quietly improved, broadening beyond the North Korean threat. The military relationships have acquired greater depth and substance than may be seen on the surface, with regular political-military dialogue under the Defense Trilateral process, and operational cooperation growing among their defense establishments in such areas as search and rescue, peacekeeping, and operations other than war.

The challenge for sustained trilateralism over the long term is that each nation must overcome lingering tensions among themselves and together articulate a cooperative policy for something rather than against North Korea as the primary motivation for deeper relations. Continuing to develop trilateral processes alone can itself facilitate realization of these goals. The United States, however, should consider several initiatives to further institutionalize and revitalize the process. In his paper, L. Gordon Flake sets forth several useful ideas, including the resumption of regular trilateral summit meetings, perhaps on the margins of regional forums such as APEC, the WTO, and the United Nations; the enhancement of TCOG beyond its focus on deterring the DPRK; expanded defense cooperation among the three sides on regional non-war-fighting contingencies such as piracy, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief; increased trilateral meetings among defense and military officials; and the expansion of the scope of trilateral discussion beyond traditional security concerns to include additional issues of common interest like the environment, energy security, and trade. The latter might include not only senior-level representatives from the relevant ministries but also regular trilateral meetings among more junior members of the bureaucracy and legislatures to facilitate a habit of cooperation among future decision and opinion leaders. Institutionalization of trilateral processes is critical, but ultimately regularization at many levels will ensure long-term investment and appreciation for trilateralism that will endure even during periods of tension among the partners themselves.

In the end, the United States serves as the essential motor of trilateralism, and it may only continue to develop as long as the United States remains strongly committed to the process. If U.S. leadership (as distinct from U.S. power) falters, if the United States is viewed as as much a part of the problem as the solution, as suggested by surveys cited in Young-ho Park's paper, the prospect for productive trilateral consultation and coordination will likewise suffer. Trilateralism does not require retreat or compromise of principle, but rather the coordination, at least, of one's policy initiatives with those of the other nations—the essence of allied diplomacy. Merely notifying the other two nations of one's decisions, as threatens to be the case in the current state of trilateralism, does not conform to this principle. The apparent disregard for allied sensibilities displayed by the United States, most egregiously in its axis of evil formulation, for instance, runs counter to the trust necessary to constructing a real trilateral framework. Trilateralism may survive in form but will not thrive in practice under these conditions.

One might argue that the U.S. approach to North Korean policy over the past 18 months has led to trilateralism's decline. Nonetheless, the prospect of change

both in domestic and international DPRK policies and in the domestic political situation in South Korea in coming years may once again lead to the development of common perspectives and policies toward North Korea among the three nations and thus provide a fresh opportunity for reviving active trilateral cooperation should the United States decide to recommit itself to the process.

About the Authors

L. Gordon Flake was appointed executive director of the Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs in February 1999. Prior to joining the Mansfield Center, he was a senior fellow and associate director of the Program on Conflict Resolution at the Atlantic Council of the United States. Before moving to the Atlantic Council, he served as director for research and academic affairs at the Korea Economic Institute of America. Mr. Flake travels frequently to Japan, Korea, China, and other countries in Asia as a conference participant and lecturer. He is a regular contributor on Korea issues in the U.S. and Asian press, and he has traveled to North Korea on four occasions. Mr. Flake has published extensively on policy issues in Asia. He received his B.A. degree in Korean with a minor in international relations from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. He completed his M.A. at the David M. Kennedy Center for International and Area Studies, also at B.Y.U. His master's thesis was on economic reform in Laos. He lived in Korea for a number of years and speaks both fluent Korean and Laotian.

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