



**The US-Japan Alliance as a Regional
Problem Solving Mechanism**

A Conference Report

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Executive Summary

Asia lacks a coherent security architecture. Despite a rich overlay of structures that address a spectrum of security concerns, no single institution or organization has the membership or the capacity to address urgent security challenges. One of the most important elements of Asia's current and future security system is the US alliance network. That network is indispensable to the protection of US interests in the region, as well as those of its allies and other regional states; it has provided the stability that makes regional security and prosperity possible. For others, however, and despite those benefits, those alliances are "Cold War relics," instruments of US hegemony and primacy or shields that allow allies to shirk their responsibility to contribute to regional security.

The US and its allies continue to modernize those alliances, updating and adapting them to new realities and the capabilities of each partner. They are pillars of the "rebalance to Asia," and offer opportunities for outreach and efforts to work with like-minded countries. That cooperation includes potential adversaries, reasoning that the possibility of conflicts in some situations doesn't preclude cooperation in others – and hoping that cooperative efforts will build trust and confidence that reduces tensions.

In recent years, Japan has accelerated its efforts to "normalize" its security policies, a process that make it better able to defend itself, facilitate more contributions to regional security, and allow it to be a better partner and ally of the United States. Japan seeks to be a more responsible nation, and is moving in that direction, although significant constraints persist. One of the most important is the need to build trust with its most vital security partners, South Korea and China.

The US, Japan, South Korea, and China – and others – share interests and security concerns in Asia. They see the status quo as unsustainable and they are looking for workable and enduring solutions. They all acknowledge that common sense and empathy is required to find them. Too often, however, conversations are monologues in which participants speak past each other, hearing only that which confirms pre-existing views. All are inclined to use the instruments of power and order that support their case without looking for mutually beneficial outcomes. In short, zero-sum thinking prevails.

South Koreans display considerable ambivalence toward the US-Japan alliance. They understand the importance of a forward-looking relationship with Japan and many assume that the alliance will play a vital role in a crisis on the Korean Peninsula, while subsidiary to that of the US-ROK alliance. Since the security outlook in Seoul is dominated by peninsular concerns, the utility of an alliance that deals with problems elsewhere is diminished because the urgency of those problems is diminished as well. Korean ambivalence is compounded by the rancor created by Japan's brutal behavior on the Korean Peninsula during the first half of the 20th century, residual anxieties about Japanese intentions, and some resentment about Washington's privileging of Tokyo's relationship with the US over that of Seoul.

Winning Chinese acquiescence to an expanded alliance role will be difficult. China's rise has rendered it, in the eyes of many in Washington and Tokyo (and to a lesser degree in Seoul), a revisionist power that seeks to upend the regional status quo. For security planners in those capitals, Beijing is a target of the alliance, not a partner. Not surprisingly, that delegitimizes the alliance in Chinese thinking; it is considered an instrument of containment, not a problem-solving mechanism. Self-aware Chinese concede that their rhetoric and behavior have created suspicions about Beijing's intentions and in some cases backed China into a corner. The recognition that all parties have contributed to regional tensions is essential to progress in forging cooperation to regional challenges.

Greater transparency is sought by all countries and the readiness of the US and Japan to use their alliance as a tool to enable regional cooperation could serve that end. Washington and Tokyo must disabuse China of two ideas: first, that there is any prospect of the alliance's deterioration or end – anything that might support the idea that it might be approaching the end of its lifespan and the claim that it is indeed “a Cold War relic” – and second, that it is implacably hostile to China and that there is no room for cooperation or joint action. Beijing must be encouraged to envision ways that the US-Japan partnership can work with China on behalf of Chinese interests.

There was support for more military exercises by the US with allies and partners, along with observers from other countries. Militaries and security establishments need more dialogues – official and track two – to facilitate communication, encourage frank discussion, and build confidence, as well as prepare for a range of contingencies. Maritime domain awareness is one area in which the four countries (and others) can work together. The four governments could also begin to identify, in as much detail as possible, potential crises throughout Asia, their triggers, their impact, and ways the region can respond.

Multilateral cooperation is an increasingly essential component of the Asian security outlook. The US alliance system is for many the most obvious and enticing mechanism for multilateral coordination. Washington and Tokyo must ensure that their alliance remains relevant to and ready for the entire spectrum of regional security challenges. They should offer opportunities and partnerships to all regional governments that are prepared to cooperate to counter instability and maintain peace. Securing Chinese participation in such efforts is a long shot, but it is not impossible, especially if that offer is part of a larger package of measures that provides Beijing a role in regional security management.

The US-Japan Alliance as a Regional Problem Solving Mechanism

A Conference Report

By Brad Glosserman*

The most important question for the Asia Pacific region is: what architecture will be crafted to address the range of enduring and emerging security problems? The answer will have to account for new and old threats; regional dynamics that portend a shift in the balance of power between the United States, its allies and partners and regional challengers; a diffusion of capabilities that allows for more burden sharing among like-minded nations; and fiscal realities that demand a more distributed approach to the production of international public goods. Despite growing attention to the many novelties of this new security environment, its tried and tested components will feature prominently in any response.

Central to any discussion of regional futures will be the US alliance system. For many, if not most Americans and many others, those bilateral relationships are indispensable to the protection of US interests in the region, as well as those of its allies and other regional states. For others, those alliances are “Cold War relics,” instruments of US hegemony and primacy or shields that allow allies to shirk their responsibility to contribute to regional security. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has modernized those alliances, updating and adapting them to new realities and the capabilities of each partner. They serve as pillars of the “rebalance to Asia”; that policy embraces new and deeper linkages among the six allies (the US, Japan, the ROK, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand) and the inclusion of other regional partners. The rebalance also calls for outreach and efforts to work with countries that might be adversaries in certain circumstances, reasoning that the possibility of conflicts in some situations doesn’t preclude cooperation in others – and the hope that cooperative efforts will build trust and confidence that reduces tensions and the inclination toward adversarial relationships.

Can the US find common ground with other nations that allows them all to recognize the value of US alliances and to work together to address and minimize regional threats? Experts from the US, Japan, the ROK and China joined two days of candid and sometimes surprising discussions in Tokyo, June 27-28, to explore this question. Despite many compelling and obvious differences, the meeting, co-hosted by the Pacific Forum CSIS and the Tokyo Foundation, and supported by the US Embassy in Tokyo, identified common interests that suggested that, with a genuine commitment to problem solving, the four countries may be able to work together to tackle those security challenges. While the US-Japan alliance could serve as the cornerstone of those efforts, it will be an uphill battle to get South Koreans and Chinese to agree. At a minimum, Washington and Tokyo must do more to convince both governments that working with their alliance will pay dividends and that outright opposition will have limited impact on their plans.

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Security perspectives

Joint action requires a shared perspective and agreement on security concerns. There is agreement in the most general way on the nature of the regional security environment – it is complex, multilayered and looks little like that envisioned at the end of the Cold War. Longstanding flashpoints – a divided Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Straits, disputed territory throughout the maritime domain – persist, and have in some cases intensified. North Korea’s leader, Kim Jung Un, is inexperienced and largely unknown. His administration has been marked by continuing nuclear and missile modernization programs, a series of provocations and indifference to their international consequences. Pyongyang’s isolation is increasing, yet that appears to be having no effect on its behavior (or its economy). Sadly, there was agreement at our meeting that there is neither urgency nor creativity as governments try to grapple with this problem. All the while, military budgets throughout the region are increasing and capabilities are expanding as weapons systems improve and proliferate.

At the same time, nontraditional security threats have assumed increasing prominence for security establishments. Terrorism, piracy, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction demand attention, as do natural disasters, pandemic diseases, and the impacts of climate change.

Governments must address these distinct threats while grappling with structural shifts in the national security environment. Of these, the rise of China is the most compelling; it has, said one Japanese participant, “reset our strategic thinking.” China’s status as the world’s second largest economy – and its trajectory to overtake the United States in sheer size within a decade, if current trends continue – has transformed regional thinking about relationships, obliging many governments to recalibrate their security and economic ties. Two decades of double-digit defense spending increases – a phenomenon that eased in recent years – have yielded an increasingly capable military, which adds yet more weight to the scale when assessing Chinese capabilities and the regional balance of power.

China’s intent is unclear: what role does it seek to play in the Asia Pacific and how does it see the future US role in the region? (In Beijing, similar questions are asked about US thinking.) There are fears that China wants to be the regional hegemon and to supplant the US as regional security guarantor. In its most fervid incarnation, one US participant explained, “there is fear of US exclusion from the region, the end of alliances and partnerships, and the loss of the foundation of US security.” Officially, Beijing denies any such ambitions – as did Chinese participants at our meeting – although there is evidence to feed those suspicions. Worryingly, China does not have to articulate a desire for primacy to upend the regional security equilibrium: suspicions and uncertainty may be enough to do the trick.

Compounding the complexity is Russia’s reassertion of great power ambitions and its desire to play a larger role in the Asia Pacific: as one Japanese participant

explained, Russian President Vladimir Putin retains “the DNA of empire.” While there is often an inclination to see Russia as a declining power, it has a large and modernizing military arsenal with a substantial nuclear capability. Moscow has joined Beijing to call for the reform of the institutions of international governance as a way of magnifying its own influence and checking US power. Russia’s role as a source of energy for the region, its territorial dispute with Japan, and its longstanding presence in Central Asia all mean that its preferences and policies cannot be ignored.

Astute observers are quick to point out that Chinese and Russian preferences do not always align; in some cases, their national interests clash. History suggests that skepticism about the nature of the China-Russia relationship is warranted, but for the time being, more unites those two governments than forces them into opposition. Other regional rivalries complicate the regional security equation. Changes in Japanese security policy (taken up in more detail below) have the potential to widen the scope of Japan-China competition in Asia. To a lesser degree, Tokyo and Seoul compete, although theirs is a much more constrained form of competition. To the south, India’s rise obliges Chinese strategists to factor developments there into their thinking. In no case is conflict a given or even a likely outcome; nevertheless, for the first time in modern history, major powers within Asia are all getting stronger and are better able to assert their national interests.

Finally, and to some degree a result of this last development, nationalism is on the rise throughout the Asia Pacific. Economic successes feed national pride – and in many cases military budgets that grow in tandem with that sentiment. “Burning nationalism [throughout the region] is the biggest threat to Japan,” worried one Japanese participant – although national security decisionmakers in every country must take it into account.

This dark outlook is only half the story, however, there is, as a Chinese participant noted, “great resilience” in the region. For all the potential conflicts, regional governments remain committed to the pursuit of greater interdependence and there are a number of multilateral forums that offer mechanisms for dialogue as well as trust and confidence building. While they are subject to constant criticism and complaint, no one has given up on those institutions and they continue to expand in membership and responsibilities. After all, 12 governments concluded the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal, a marked contrast to the failures of global trade negotiations. That success, and the enduring commitment to multilateralism, reflects “common sense at work.” This takes the form not just of joint military exercises, but actual cooperation among militaries when, for example, aircraft or fishing boats crash or go missing and search and rescue efforts are organized.

One little appreciated shock absorber for the tensions outlined above is people-to-people contacts that result from increasingly affluent societies, an extended production network, and the desire to tap new markets as the traditional markets of final demand within the region (in Northeast Asia) age and slow from once breakneck growth. This grassroots perspective is a powerful contrast to the distancing triggered by elite perceptions that focus on differences. In theory, it could provide an angle for tackling

some “hard” security problems: one avenue for addressing the North Korean nuclear program is to focus on nuclear safety concerns, an issue that would affect ordinary citizens and could be used to mobilize political capital and constituencies.

Curiously, Taiwan wasn’t a topic of concern at our meeting. Eight years of improving cross-strait relations have desensitized this issue. The return to power in Taipei of the independence-minded Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) portends an end to the calm, however, and all regional governments should prepare for renewed tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

There was considerable agreement on the nature of regional security challenges. Even as participants squared off over the central question of China’s role and responsibilities in the region, most acknowledged the need for some accommodation of Beijing that reflected its vastly different status and capabilities. Doing so, however, is complicated by the echo chamber in which that discussion occurs: all sides engage in “selective listening,” or hearing what they choose to, typically that which confirms pre-existing outlooks or biases. All sides privilege their own concerns and diminish those of others. A Chinese participant noted that Americans complain about PLA efforts to surveil or harass US warships that sail in waters declared by China as its own or denounce the Chinese nationalism that protests such operations; they fail to recognize “the terrible bind the PLA is in” – despite all the money and rhetoric, China has not been able to stop the US from spying.

The challenge is evident in the language that is used. Talk of “accommodating China,” its role as a “responsible stakeholder,” or the protection of interests to which Beijing is “entitled” presume a framework that China is put into but has little say in creating. Chinese often balk at Western presumptions about what constitutes “responsible” behavior or China’s “legitimate” interests. The larger point is that there needs to be a repurposing of conversations about interests and a rethinking of how those discussions are transformed into policy. There should be less litigation and more integration. In this sense, the many forums in East Asia are vastly underutilized.

Changes in Japanese security policy

China’s rise is one of the most important drivers of recent changes in Japanese security policy, but it is only a factor. Tokyo has never had a static defense policy: Even as some complained about its vigor and sweep, there were incremental adjustments in Japanese security policy throughout the Cold War. That process accelerated when the Soviet Union collapsed. The Peacekeeping Operations Law was passed in 1992 and Self-Defense Forces were dispatched to Cambodia soon after to facilitate that country’s transition from civil war to peace. As one Japanese participant explained, Japan has sought to restore and maintain the regional balance of power to address traditional security challenges. This effort reflects a desire to create security communities of like-minded actors: the most recent articulation of this organizing principle is US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter’s call for “a principled security network.”

Historically, Japanese security policy has been derided as “one-nation pacifism.” A more accurate description would be “one-nation defense”: a belief that Japan can focus on its own defense and be indifferent to developments in the wider security environment. The July 2014 reinterpretation of the constitution regarding the exercise of the right of collective self-defense (CSD) and the legislation passed in September 2015 that implements that change recognize and correct some of the limits of that approach (although many, some quite significant, persist). Japanese (and US) participants applauded the new opportunities afforded their country to contribute more to regional security and support multilateral efforts to that end – including those with China if the two countries’ interests coincide. Some critics hyperventilate about the impact of that legislation. In fact, Japan’s options remain constrained by conditions for the use of the military set in those bills, and as one Japanese participant reminded the group, “democracy is a continuing check on Japan’s behavior.”

Fortunately, said one Japanese participant, “the Japanese public is waking up to the problem of defending the country through the use of force.” Unfortunately, doing that effectively will require substantially more resources than the SDF currently has. Defense budget increases of less than 1 percent will not suffice, especially as SDF missions expand. Deploying troops overseas and the logistical capabilities required to support them – global communications networks as well as long-range transport – demand more money. Expanding SDF responsibilities in the defense of the Japanese homeland will demand more money. Dealing with “gray zone challenges” that fall below the threshold of a military response demands more money. Not surprisingly, some Japanese participants worried that these missions will compete for funds and keep the SDF from doing any of them well.

One way to overcome these limitations is more effective cooperation with partners – an option made possible by the CSD reinterpretation and subsequent legislation. Like-minded governments should be working together to strengthen the “rules based order.” That cooperation should not only be more extensive in geographic scope – European countries have a role to play – but also in the means by which they contribute. At a time of growing gray zone challenges, more creativity is needed and policy makers should be using all the tools in the foreign policy toolbox, not just the military.

Despite the soothing talk, doubts persist about Japanese intentions. As one Korean participant noted, “other countries perceive Japanese actions differently.” Pointing to the noisy protests that accompanied the security legislation, he wondered about the democratic bona fides of a government determined to ignore such opposition. He got three rejoinders: first, that Prime Minister Abe Shinzo received a mandate in the election of 2014; second, that Japan today is completely different from Imperial Japan and that its peace diplomacy since the Pacific War is unparalleled; and third, that the decisionmaking process created by the security legislation is transparent and requires National Security Council approval, Cabinet approval, and finally that of the Diet itself. Ultimately, a Chinese participant noted that Japan “of course” has the right to revise its constitution – a

gratifying comment that subtly undercuts criticism of China's own modernization efforts and the protection of its "legitimate" rights and interests.

Changes in the US-Japan alliance

One of the most important rationales for changing Japan's security policy is that it allows Tokyo to be a better ally and partner of the US. As a Japanese participant explained, "only Japan shares all security challenges with the United States. We share values. We are home to a significant number of US troops and permit their deployment throughout the region." Yet throughout the existence of the alliance, the partnership has been tested by fundamental asymmetries in the power of each ally as well as the responsibilities each has assumed. While some imbalance is inevitable – every country will be a junior partner to the world's pre-eminent military – there has long been a sense in both Tokyo and Washington that Japan can do more to better share the burdens of alliance and contribute more to regional security.

Both governments have worked together to fix that problem. The guidelines for bilateral defense cooperation have been updated several times throughout the alliance's existence. When the Cold War ended 25 years ago, Washington and Tokyo worked to forge a new rationale for their security partnership. Today, the US-Japan alliance addresses threats that many view as emanating from China and constitutes a hedge against destabilizing Chinese behavior. But the alliance, as well as its modernization and growing capability, predate the rise of China. Absent this modernization, the alliance could be considered a "Cold War relic"; the security partnership's adaptation to 21st century realities means it is anything but.

Today, the chief purpose of the US-Japan alliance is bolstering deterrence, protecting the territorial status quo and supporting the existing regional order. To that end, the bilateral partnership helps Japan defend its homeland, serves as an instrument of strategic communications, and provides a framework for regional coordination beyond purely bilateral cooperation.

A Japanese expert argued that the most significant elements of the new guidelines for bilateral cooperation are the new Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM), a standing committee that is intended to facilitate bilateral whole of government responses to crises, and the Bilateral Planning Mechanism (BPM), set up under the Security Coordinating Committee (often known as the "2+2 Meeting") which will allow more consistent and regular evolution of plans for bilateral operations, as well as the requirements to work together effectively. Both allow the two governments to prepare for a wider range of contingencies across the spectrum from peace to war; peacetime has historically been excluded from the planning process. As a US participant explained, the ACM is "always on" and doesn't need to be activated. Americans and Japanese lamented the working of bilateral coordination mechanisms established by the 1997 guidelines prior to the ACM; a US participant described the initial response by the alliance to the March 11 triple catastrophe as "a complete disaster" – an assessment echoed by Japanese in the room. In fact, when that crisis occurred, the Japanese government did not activate

the Bilateral Coordinating Mechanism (the previous alliance coordinating tool) because of concerns that it would be seen as provocative both within Japan and in the region, since the BCM was intended for responding to an armed attack situation.

Regional security architecture

While the defining characteristic of the Asian security environment is the absence of a single institution that covers the entire region, like NATO in Europe, there is a thick weave of structures that addresses various subregional concerns. The most important such organization is ASEAN, which, while focused on Southeast Asia, has evolved an expansive (geographically speaking) architecture. ASEAN has promoted and demanded fealty to the notion of “ASEAN centrality” to put it at the center of regional diplomacy, minimizing great power competition in the region – or, more accurately, focusing and constraining it – while maximizing the influence and maneuverability of the states that constitute its membership. ASEAN is often derided as a “talk shop,” but it provides the core of an expanding set of venues – the ASEAN dialogues, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting, etc. – that serve as forums for discussions about and activities to address regional security issues. Other institutions – the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Six-Party Talks, the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Initiative, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) – dot the horizon but their scope, ambitions, and effectiveness are limited.

The only security structure that spans the region and addresses “hard security concerns” is the US alliance system. While it has traditionally operated as a dyadic, “hub and spokes” system, the most important elements of its recent evolution and modernization are increasing interaction among the “spokes,” the development of trilateral and plurilateral relations among the allies, and outreach to regional partners with shared interests and concerns. This process of adaptation signals not only a commitment by the US and its allies to effective partnerships, but enduring ones as well. The alliances are not going away. “We have to adjust to this reality,” acknowledged one Chinese participant.

There was some ambivalence about the utility of the US-Japan alliance as a purely bilateral construct for regional security problems. “The alliance is doing a relatively poor job in terms of problem solving capacity,” complained one South Korean participant. The logic behind that appraisal was clear as he proceeded down a list of problems. The North Korea “problem” continues to fester. The key actors in the South China Sea are China, Vietnam and the Philippines and neither the US nor Japan can remove or resolve those problems. In the East China Sea, the alliance provides psychological support for Japan but Tokyo, Washington and Beijing all consider it a bilateral territorial issue with limited room for the US to intervene. A Japanese participant countered that the alliance provides a stable regional security environment; from that other countries can tackle those issues.

The alliance can serve as a locus for broader regional cooperation, but the obstacles to substantive progress in this effort are formidable. Dealing with Korean Peninsula problems demands real cooperation among the US, Japan, South Korea and China but the political and historical issues that have poisoned relations between Tokyo and Seoul undercut that prospect. As a result, there is “lots of rhetoric but no real practical effort,” explained one ROK participant. The fate of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) is testimony to the depth of the ill will. Without that rudimentary infrastructure, meaningful cooperation is constricted. A solution to that problem is, as one South Korean suggested, the creation of a sense of security interdependence among the two publics. An essential starting point for cooperation is routine, joint efforts in peacetime. That, however, demands leadership in both countries that puts national interests above short-term political calculations; that will not be easy.

What does this mean for China? Traditionally, the US-Japan alliance has maintained the regional balance of power. With the end of the US-Soviet Union superpower standoff, the alliance’s focus has shifted to China – “it is only natural,” suggested a Chinese speaker – since regional security concerns are increasingly “hard” security problems and Beijing is directly involved in several of them, making it a source of insecurity in the eyes of several governments. Accordingly, the idea that the alliance could engage China positively is problematic for both allied governments and Beijing. Beijing has no desire to legitimize an instrument that could be used against it, while Washington and Tokyo fear that giving Beijing access to alliance information could impact its effectiveness in a situation that attempts to deter China. Or to put it more simply, the security competition between the US and China, and China and Japan, threatens to spill over and prevent cooperation on other issues.

Other countries face their own dilemmas. They are torn between security concerns and commitments to the US and the economic benefits they get from good relations with China. A sense of greater vulnerability in their relations with China creates still more ambivalence. Chinese complaints that the US alliance network in general and the US-Japan alliance in particular are intended to contain China raise the stakes for those governments, even when the alliance proposes activities that would benefit those governments, and when it reaches out to China to join those efforts

One answer could lie in a redefinition and characterization of problems. Asia’s security problems are complex; they defy the simple ideological frame of the Cold War. Complexity invites multidimensional and multidirectional responses. So, a US participant suggested, the South China Sea might be reformulated as a human security problem, one that addresses food security, resource management and environmental challenges, rather than as a territorial dispute. (Almost all maritime issues can be framed as problems of the commons rather than hard security disputes. With 2.1 billion people living within 400 km of Asian coasts that is a potentially powerful argument.) This formulation plays to Asia’s strengths. It moves from the zero-sum characterization that reinforces the tendency for self-help (a corollary of a system that has no way to enforce rules) and instead emphasizes common rules and practical cooperation. It encourages collective analysis to

agree on the status of the commons, which then provides a basis for collective action. It emphasizes functional cooperation that builds trust and confidence, while respecting the diversity of regional nations.

For the US and Japan, this approach makes sense. The two countries could offer leadership and facilitate capacity building, while embedding those efforts within a regional framework. It blunts the tip of the alliance spear by surrounding it with like-minded nations. China would have equally compelling reasons to join such an endeavor. It defuses a potential problem with nationalism – in other words, it expands Beijing’s freedom of action – by framing the issue as that of protection of the commons rather than a territorial challenge and it offers a framework to work through problems rather than turning every incident into a challenge to national sovereignty.

Chinese participants warned against over-reliance on a regional diplomatic approach that emphasizes values. Not only is this strategy transparently anti-Chinese and thus likely to antagonize Chinese as well as other governments inclined to hedge their diplomacy, but it reinforces suspicions, mistrust, and hypernationalist thinking in China. Instead, regional governments should press a functionalist approach to security concerns. As a Chinese participant recommended, “seizing low hanging fruit will demonstrate the value of cooperation.” While that approach has considerable support, an ROK participant cautioned that political obstacles remain formidable and that the critical variable remains leadership – of which there is no guarantee.

Framing the problem as a human security issue offers several advantages. First, as a Chinese participant noted, “Everyone is for cooperation on human security.” Second, it allows China to link regional cooperation to its domestic program to lift millions out of poverty, affording Beijing some ownership of the effort. Third, it opens the door to a potentially expansive agenda: One ROK participant suggested that a human security dialogue could also include discussions of contingencies on the Korean Peninsula as neighboring countries attempt to grapple with the impact of large-scale crises in North Korea.

Commons issues are discussed in the ASEAN plus Three forum and there is already a South China Sea cooperation fund, of which nearly two dozen projects deal with fisheries. Consistent with the argument by several speakers that it makes more sense to build on existing mechanisms than build new ones, it was suggested that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) be the implementing mechanism for resource (at least fisheries) protection. Alternatively, affected countries could adopt a regional fisheries model like that used in the North Atlantic.

Maritime security

The need for new and creative approaches to regional security thinking was plain in the discussion of maritime security. This discussion was overshadowed by the eminent ruling by the international tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) sought by the Republic of the Philippines regarding the status of features in the South China Sea and

the territorial claims that they facilitated. (The ruling came two weeks after the meeting.) The South China Sea has become the most contentious piece of real estate in East Asia, even overshadowing North Korea in the minds of security officials, given the many parties involved and the potential impact of miscalculation. The most likely site of a clash between the United States and China is here.

Our Chinese presenter asserted – and was proved correct when the decision was announced – that Beijing would reject any ruling that undermines its territorial claims. He insisted that the international media narrative regarding the Chinese position was wrong: Beijing does not claim all waters within the U-shaped line, nor does it want to turn the sea into a Chinese lake. He rejected the claim that China is using the South China Sea to challenge US regional supremacy or push the US out of the region: “Nothing could be more ridiculous or reckless.” Chinese land reclamation projects are for Beijing and its supporters defensive efforts to protect neglected Chinese interests. They should not be interpreted as a window on nefarious Chinese intentions.

Chinese participants charged that tensions surrounding the disputes reflect hype by the US (the Pentagon and Pacific Command, in particular) as well as Beijing’s failure to appreciate the sensitivities of other countries or anticipate the response of the US. Like-minded countries would do well to recognize China’s sensitivities and not back Beijing into a corner. The ruling, even one that rejects Chinese claims, could provide an opportunity for the resumption of diplomatic initiatives if all sides demonstrate flexibility. Chinese participants warned against the “historical fundamentalism” (the Chinese position) and the “legal fundamentalism” (the Western position) that locks both sides into positions from which they cannot deviate.

The arbitral tribunal’s ruling is a reminder, albeit somewhat obscured, that there are a number of maritime security mechanisms in the Western Pacific. In addition to the larger, more visible institutions and organizations mentioned earlier – the ARF and other ASEAN efforts, UNCLOS and US alliances, to name but three – there is the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (RECAAP), the Western Pacific Naval Symposium, along with confidence building measures such as the code for unplanned encounters at sea, (CUES), military exercises, and crisis hotlines. While beneficial, the effectiveness of this welter of programs is hindered by the absence of agreed and enforceable rules to address noncompliance by states. Again, there is concern – justifiable, given comments around the table – that China will not accept a regional order that tells Beijing what its legitimate and lawful interests are. China wants a say in the creation of that order and will determine the legitimacy of its own national interests.

The US insistence (and repetition by other countries) that it (and they) doesn’t seek to contain Beijing and that the existing order serves Chinese interests rings hollow to many Chinese. China will make its own determinations about the compatibility or hostility of those institutions, norms, etc. to its interests. One way to influence that assessment is to include China in as many mechanisms as possible. Inclusion can blunt Chinese fears that they are the target of such activities. That presumes that the Chinese

are willing to have their anxieties lessened. In some cases – the Proliferation Security Initiative, for example – it seems as though Chinese thinking is fixed. A Chinese participant added that domestic politics constrains the consideration of options in Beijing: the consolidation of power by Xi Jinping reduces the space for dissent and the articulation of creative solutions that stray from the accepted orthodoxy. This tendency is buttressed by references to moral imperatives within the Chinese narrative and, he conceded, China’s inexperience with power politics: “we are still learning how to be a mature power.”

Ironically, then, in the areas most immediate to Chinese concerns – and where the need for confidence building measures is most pressing – Beijing is most reluctant to have its anxieties allayed. Instead, the “low hanging fruit” that will inaugurate security cooperation will be found more distant from hard security problems. So, for example, China could join the US and its allies and partners in efforts to protect sea lines of communications outside Asia, such as in the Gulf of Aden. Ad hoc multilateralism should be pursued with an eye to institutionalization, first among coast guards and then to include navy forces, with an eye to joint efforts in East Asia. Humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HADR) efforts could include a multilateral hospital ship flotilla. Bilateral crisis management mechanisms have been created or are being discussed (although their utility is largely untested; hotlines only work if someone answers the phone). Several participants called for greater transparency in maritime domain awareness (MDA), and endorsed the creation of a common operational picture on the seas. The periodic accidents and incidents that have occurred in and near the South China Sea highlight the importance of more accurate and complete real-time coverage of those waterways. Sensors, beacons, and other safety measures are equally important elements of this effort.

Antipiracy operations provide an interesting window on prospects for cooperation. One participant suggested a Northeast Asian antipiracy coalition in the Gulf of Aden could serve as a confidence building mechanism. Yet, such cooperation has limited effects and piracy is diminishing. Moreover, “solving” the piracy problem demands attention to the root causes of such phenomena, which requires much more than the combined work of law enforcement agencies. That of course could be an opportunity of its own. A Japanese participant noted that the Indian Ocean is “vast and unguarded,” home to a large and growing population; the challenges in that area also present opportunities for humanitarian cooperation

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR)

An easy, obvious, and often resorted to hook for multilateral cooperation is HADR: who opposes coordinated efforts to assist individuals in need after a disaster? (Sadly, a depressing number of governments have opposed assistance and declined aid from particular donors: the then government of Myanmar refused US help after Typhoon Nargis.) Typically, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief are combined in a single package but it makes sense to separate the two and focus on disaster relief when discussing military cooperation.

There is much that the US-Japan alliance can contribute to such endeavors. The two countries have worked together on the entire spectrum of disaster relief programs, from prevention and mitigation to relief of affected populations. The searing experience of the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake taught both countries a great deal and provided powerful lessons that they have used in responses to subsequent disasters. Key among them is the need for coordination across the entire range of actors – from various elements of government to the civilian and NGO sectors – and interoperability among allies and partners. While there is an instinctive tendency to turn to the military in such moments – after all, they train for such contingencies and they are the fastest moving and most capable first responders –it is important to acknowledge the sensitivities triggered by the involvement of armed forces. When preparing for such contingencies, emphasis should be on maximizing the strategic impact of training and eventual deployments. Governments should seek to build national capacity and resilience while promoting collaboration and cooperation. Central to success is a communications infrastructure that all participants can use and ensuring that affected governments can handle the influx of support.

As befits an “obvious” focus of cooperation, there are many opportunities for regional governments to build capacity. Most every regional military exercise has an HADR component. Unfortunately, there is a real risk of “disaster relief fatigue” as military establishments risk being overwhelmed by the expanding number of regional exercises that demand attention and drain resources. The centrality of the US and its network of alliances and partnerships to Asian security affairs creates a unique opportunity for Washington and Japan to put their alliance at the heart of regional DR efforts. The two governments can establish their partnership as a cornerstone of capacity building in this context and demonstrate leadership as that effort gains momentum. Their interaction with a diverse array of actors and governments means that they can more easily disseminate lessons and standardize operating procedures (while recognizing that every disaster is different and every response is unique). Putting Japan at the center of regional cooperation efforts offers the additional benefit of forcing Japan to look outward and to engage more fully in regional security affairs.

Increasingly central to HADR efforts is the private sector. The growing focus on resilience and capacity building demands cooperation and inputs that the military cannot provide. Most importantly, it demands substantial resources for infrastructure and the commitment of regional businesses. Success throughout the region requires more resources than even the US and Japan can provide; for many observers, China is an obvious third partner in this endeavor. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Asia Development Bank and nongovernmental organizations should be working together to fill the many gaps that are increasingly evident. A Japanese participant called for the aggressive use of new technologies that can be mass produced (to drive down costs) and then deployed throughout the region to provide a communications infrastructure along with advanced warning capabilities.

While Americans and Japanese consider the US-Japan alliance the obvious cornerstone of regional HADR coordination, that thinking is not universal. For some,

ASEAN is better suited for this role – perhaps along the lines of Malaysia’s proposed ASEAN Response Force – and if that is deemed inadequate, then the ASEAN Plus Three grouping could do the trick. Regardless of what serves as the eventual core of this effort, Taiwan’s involvement will be problematic. Some experts consider Taiwan’s search and rescue team the best in the world, but the involvement of Taiwan’s military in any multilateral effort will be a nonstarter for China and most countries in the region. NGO involvement might be another matter, however. Creative thinking is needed to figure out how to get Taiwan involved in such programs.

The workshop assumed that Southeast Asia would be the geographic focus for cooperation since strategic concerns in Northeast Asia would inhibit the four governments from tackling contingencies there. That thinking was validated by the suggestion of a Korean participant that Japan, South Korea and China work together on global humanitarian concerns because finding common ground on Asian issues would be too hard. But that assumption crumbled when a Chinese participant suggested that the four governments think hard – together – about how they would respond to an HADR contingency that involved North Korea. A maritime focus would make sense as they tried to figure out how to deal with a tide of refugees on the Yellow Sea triggered by a crisis in the DPRK. “This would create the opportunity for a multinational mission to address this problem.”

While such a contingency would be freighted with political concerns and calculations, all participants agreed that such scenarios should be explored. This begs the question, however: what constitutes a crisis in North Korea? A Chinese participant suggested that every day is a crisis for many North Koreans. While virtually all participants agreed with that characterization, it highlighted the political considerations that shape any discussion of contingency planning on the Korean Peninsula. That prospect raises the more ominous question of the role played by the Pyongyang government in any crisis – as the immediate and direct cause or in the response – and how that shapes US, Japanese, Chinese, and South Korea thinking about what to do.

Complicating the optics and the planning is the degree to which decisions would impact the status of the Peninsula: how might intervention promote or impede the prospects for reunification? Would US and ROK action, especially by their militaries, permanently alter future deployments? What is the impact of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program in any scenario? It is easy to envision a humanitarian crisis triggered by a nuclear accident; for many Chinese, this is the top concern when they assess North Korea. At a minimum, the US and China have to avoid any conflict as they address the many uncertainties. (One ROK participant cautioned that anything short of a political crisis that risked the collapse of the North Korean state is capable of being handled by Seoul. That belief is hardened, another South Korean participant explained, by the memory of the “poor job” the UN did protecting Korea from division. That skepticism notwithstanding, a third Korean participant pointed out that Pyongyang has historically demonstrated a readiness to accept aid from the UN.)

Chinese participants cautioned against seeing great opportunities in a crisis, implicitly warning that the more sweeping the ambition in the response to a DPRK contingency, the greater will be Beijing's hesitancy to cooperate with other countries. In such circumstances and in the spur of the moment, Chinese fear that their geopolitical preferences will be ignored. This would seem to make the case for advanced planning.

Those concerns raise a larger issue for the four governments: to what degree do they agree on outcomes for regional challenges? If the goal of intervention in a North Korean contingency is to force a resolution of the division of the peninsula, then Beijing is unlikely to join any effort. If the aim in dealing with the South China Sea issues is to humiliate or "defeat" China – forcing it to back down and renounce its claims – then there is not going to be an acceptable or durable solution to those problems. Rather, the focus should be on a resolution of the problem at hand in ways that offer satisfaction to all concerned parties. At its root, this requires recognition of the interests of all parties – and acknowledgement that those interests must be determined by each party for itself. Just as no country can question Japan's right to play a regional security role, similar respect should be shown for Chinese rights and interests.

Final thoughts

The US, Japan, South Korea, and China – and others – share interests and security concerns in Asia. They see the status quo as unsustainable and they are looking for workable and enduring solutions. They all acknowledge that common sense and empathy is required to find them. Too often, however, conversations are monologues in which participants speak past each other, hearing only that which confirms pre-existing views. All are inclined to use the instruments of power and order that support their case without looking for mutually beneficial outcomes. In short, zero-sum thinking prevails.

For South Korea, there is considerable ambivalence when thinking about the US-Japan alliance. It is taken for granted that the alliance will play an important role in a crisis on the Korean Peninsula but subsidiary to that of the US-ROK alliance. Since the security outlook in Seoul is dominated by peninsular concerns, the utility of the US-Japan alliance to deal with problems elsewhere is diminished because the urgency of those problems is diminished as well. Korean ambivalence is compounded by residual anxieties about Japanese intentions and some resentment about Washington's privileging of Tokyo's relationship with the US over that of Seoul.

Getting Chinese acquiescence to an expanded alliance role is even tougher. The inclination in Washington and Tokyo (and to a lesser degree in Seoul) to see China as challenging the regional order makes it difficult for Beijing to view the US alliance network as a problem-solving mechanism. The tendency of officials and experts to use the rule of law as an instrument to counter China contributes to this aversion and raises suspicions in Beijing about any reference to "principles." For their part, self-aware Chinese concede that their rhetoric and behavior have created suspicions about intentions and in some cases backed them into a corner.

Still, there are reasons for hope. Our meeting was marked by the absence of the usual rhetoric dismissing the US-Japan alliance and the US alliance system as relics that have outlived their purpose. Japan's right to pursue a higher profile regional security role was not challenged – in fact, many participants encouraged it – although some sought great transparency into what Tokyo is doing and why. Greater transparency is sought by all countries and the readiness of the US and Japan to use their alliance as a tool to enable regional cooperation could serve that end. Washington and Tokyo must disabuse China of two ideas: first, that there is any prospect of the alliance's deterioration or end – anything that might support the idea that it might be approaching the end of its lifespan and the claim that it is “a Cold War relic” – and second, that it is implacably hostile to China and that there is no room for cooperation or joint action. Beijing must be encouraged to envision ways that the US-Japan partnership can work with China on behalf of Chinese interests.

There was support for more military exercises by the US with allies and partners, along with the dispatch of observers from other countries. Militaries and security establishments need more dialogues – official and nonofficial ones such as this one – to facilitate communication, encourage frank discussion, and build confidence, as well as prepare for a range of contingencies. Maritime domain awareness is one area in which the four countries (and others) can work together. The four governments could begin to identify, in as much detail as possible, crises throughout Asia. Can they agree on triggers, impacts, and ways to avert or contain them?

Multilateral cooperation is an increasingly essential component of the Asian security outlook. The ways in which that cooperation is to be secured continues to be debated. The US alliance system is for many the most obvious and enticing mechanism for multilateral coordination. Washington and Tokyo must ensure that their alliance remains relevant to and ready for the entire spectrum of regional security challenges. They should offer opportunities and partnerships to all regional governments that are prepared to cooperate to counter instability and maintain peace. Securing Chinese participation in such efforts is a long shot, but it is not impossible, especially if that offer is part of a larger package of measures that provides Beijing a role in regional security management.

APPENDIX A

**THE US-JAPAN ALLIANCE
AS A REGIONAL PROBLEM SOLVING MECHANISM
June 27-28, 2016
Tokyo, Japan**

*Sponsored by the Tokyo Foundation in partnership with
the Pacific Forum CSIS and the US Embassy Tokyo*

AGENDA

Monday, June 27

8:30-9:00AM Registration

9:00-9:05AM Opening
General Remarks: Ippeita NISHIDA

9:05-10:20AM **Session 1: Security Perspectives**
Each presenter will explain how his/her country assesses East Asian threats. What are the most imminent challenges and concerns? What are medium-term and longer-term threats? What could cause escalation to a military engagement in the region? What are the most likely escalation risks? Which are most worrisome? Presenters should be as detailed as possible.
China presenter: ZHA Daojiong
Japan presenter: Yoji KODA
ROK presenter: KIM Young Ho
US presenter: Grant NEWSHAM

10:20-10:30AM Break

10:30-12:00PM **Session 2: Changes in Japanese Security Policy**
A Japanese presenter will explain recent changes in Japanese national security policy, their implications for Japan and the region, and what can be expected to come next. Discussion in this session will focus on the impact of a more active Japanese regional security role; alliance issues will be taken up in the next session.
Japan presenter: Hideshi TOKUCHI

12:00-1:30PM Lunch

1:30-3:00PM

Session 3: Changes in the US-Japan Alliance

Speakers will assess the impact of recent changes in the US-Japan alliance and how they can and should affect regional security. What are their objectives and how will they be operationalized? What has been accomplished since the new Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation were agreed? How can or will this affect cooperation with other countries in the region? What more needs to be done?

Japan presenter: Satoru MORI

ROK presenter: KIM Tae Hyo

US presenter: Adam LIFF

3:00-3:15PM

Break

3:15-4:45PM

Session 4: Regional Security Architecture

Presenters will assess the existing regional security architecture. What are its core components? What is missing? What can be done to fill gaps to address the concerns identified in session 1? What is the role of US alliances in the Asia Pacific in general and the US-Japan alliance in particular?

China presenter: ZHU Feng

US presenter: Jim SCHOFF

ROK presenter: LEE Shin-wha

5:00-7:00PM

Dinner Reception

Tuesday, June 28

8:30-9:00AM

Registration

9:00-10:15AM

Session 5: Maritime Security

What mechanisms exist to maintain and ensure maritime security? What are their limits? How can they be surmounted? What specifically can the alliance do and in what context? What other options are available and why are they to be preferred?

Presenter: ZHU Feng

Presenter: Weston KONISHI

10:15-10:30AM

Break

10:30M-12:00PM

Session 6: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

This session looks specifically at the mechanisms to address HADR. What tools are available to deal with this problem? What limits their effectiveness? What can be done to overcome these limits? What specifically can the alliance do? What more should it do? This discussion and the one after should be as specific as possible.

Presenter: Jim SCHOFF

Presenter: Takashi KAWAMOTO

12:00-1:30PM	Lunch
1:30-3:00PM	<u>Session 7: Wrap-up and Next Steps</u> (End of the closed-door event)
4:00-5:30PM	<u>Public Panel Session</u> 102nd Tokyo Foundation Forum on “The Regional Role of the Japan-US Alliance”
6:30PM	Dinner
3:15PM	Meeting adjourns

APPENDIX B

**THE US-JAPAN ALLIANCE
AS A REGIONAL PROBLEM SOLVING MECHANISM
June 27-28, 2016
2nd Floor, The Nippon Foundation Building, Tokyo, Japan**

*Sponsored by the Tokyo Foundation in partnership with
the Pacific Forum CSIS and the US Embassy Tokyo*

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