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***Session II:
US-centered triangles: US - Japan - South Korea***

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Deep Structure and Logic of Japan-ROK Security Cooperation

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Why Japan-ROK Security Cooperation is Natural

From pure security and geopolitical logics, security cooperation between Japan and South Korea is only natural. Today, all the East Asian countries are struggling to find an optimal strategy in the context of a shifting power balance between the United States and China. Against this backdrop, Japan and South Korea stand out as two countries whose levels of economic and political development, regional and global agendas, and even national interests are comparable. For many years to come, Japan and South Korea will continue to need to cope with various aspects of concerns and uncertainties emanating from China (and perhaps from the United States as well), while having to pursue a medium and long-term strategy to coexist with China whatever forms its future might take. After all, we cannot move away from the region where the rise of China is a central organizing principle for many countries' future strategies, for better or worse.

It is against this overall background that I have long advocated Japan's middle power strategy and middle power cooperation between Japan and South Korea. Here, "middle power" is not about the size of a nation. It is a strategic concept, implying a particular style of diplomacy or a characteristic of a national strategy backed by a commitment to the liberal international order. As such, a middle-power country does not have the option of directly engaging in the balance-of-power game among great powers. Therefore, there is no such option for Japan and South Korea, or for that matter for Japan-ROK security cooperation, as "ganging up" against China.

For one thing, due to the importance of vested interests in the post-World War II liberal international order, as well as the magnitude of uncertainties associated with the rise of China and, not to mention, the North Korean problem, the choice for Japan and South Korea has been and is likely to remain to maintain strong security relationships with the United States. An ultimate strategic clash between the United States and China, if it were to actually happen would deprive both Japan and South Korea of the freedom of decision as well as action. Ultimately, this is why Japan and South Korea would need to work together and establish effective security cooperation with the long-term goal of strengthening an infrastructure of East Asian international order by our own initiatives.

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Myths and Realities of Japanese Diplomacy and Security Policy

Japan has had an image problem, particularly in Northeast Asia if not elsewhere, which has prevented many observers from focusing on and appreciating the real strengths of its de facto middle-power national strategy. In fact, Japan has been using its financial and diplomatic resources in many of the typical areas of middle-power strategy. This includes participation in various activities of the United Nations and other global institutions in nuclear and conventional nonproliferation, economic governance, social welfare and education, poverty reduction, and more recently human security. Illustrative of this reality, a senior South Korean official working in the United Nations once mentioned in our private conversation that when the South Korean government proposes draft resolutions on various regional and global issues, often Japanese support is taken for granted. The same should be true to the Japanese government.

Very often, changes in Japanese security policies after the end of the Cold War, in general, and Japan's response to the rise of China, in particular, have been depicted as Japan's moves toward a "normal" Japan. Typically, these views argue that Japan aspires to play a "normal military role" in the game of power politics, and would finally cast off the postwar constraints on its security policy deriving from the Peace Constitution. Many observers interpreted any aspect of Japan's move, including the increasing debate, toward changing the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution as indicating such overall trend.

During the last almost three decades after the end of the Cold War, however, the U.S.-Japan alliance have been strengthened rather than weakened, where Japan's dependence on the United States has constantly increased, rendering the point about Japan's military independence virtually meaningless at the time of the rise of China. Japan's efforts in the domain of national defense have in fact been upgraded, but, equally or more importantly, the constitutional constraints still remain intact and many of these military efforts are closely institutionalized in the U.S. -Japan alliance setup.

In fact, this phenomenon or such outcome of policy process is not entirely new and there are a few similar cases in the postwar evolution of Japanese defense and security policies almost like *déjà vu*. The initial case has to do with the establishment of the JSDF in July 1954 and the new interpretation of Article 9 in December 1954 announced by the Ichiro Hatoyama administration, formerly a strong advocate for revising Article 9. Before this, it was almost common sense that in order for Japan to have a military, Article 9 would need to be changed. After actually establishing the JSDF, this logic quickly receded in the background and the argument as well as political moves to revise Article 9 subsided throughout much of the postwar years.

Another similar case is the revision of the U.S.-Japan security treaty in 1960 by Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, grandfather of Shinzo Abe. It was no secret that Prime Minister Kishi wanted to change the constitution if at all possible. However, as a result of the new interpretation made by the Hatoyama administration, supported by the increasing power of the political left as well as a strong culture of anti-militarism among the general public, constitutional revision virtually became a taboo issue in domestic politics. Then, Kishi's aspiration for Japanese "autonomy" went toward the revision of the U.S.-Japan security treaty of 1951, which, in the eyes of Kishi as a nationalist, was too one-sided at the cost of Japan's self-esteem and "autonomy." In the name of achieving an "equal partnership" with the United States, Kishi succeeded in regaining some "autonomy" on the Japanese side to the extent Japan moved toward an "equal" position with the United States in the revised security treaty. More substantially, however, the outcome was further institutionalization of the U.S.-Japan security relationship, with Article 9 remaining intact.

As seen next, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, equally a strong advocate of constitutional revision like his grandfather, achieved the exercise of the right to collective self-defense in the new security legislation in September 2015. This, however, was realized within the scope of Article 9, and resulted in further strengthening of the U.S.-Japan security ties; maybe another *déjà vu*.

Japan's New Security Legislation as a Basis of Japan-ROK Security Cooperation

The Legislation for Peace and Security, passed in the National Diet in September 2015, covers three areas of Japanese security and defense policies: (1) situations threatening Japan's survival, (2) situations of important influence, and (3) international peace cooperation. The first category of situations relates to the question of the right to collective self-defense, which will be discussed later. Category two—situations of important influence—concerns situations that have an important influence on Japan's peace and security. This essentially brought about the expansion of the Guidelines for Defense Cooperation between Japan and the United States revised in the late 1990s.

Revision of the existing laws in this category should have equally important implications for Japan-South Korea security cooperation. This is because the new law now allows Japan to provide logistical support (short of the actual use of force) to foreign countries' armed forces beyond the United States. Now, therefore, at least legally and theoretically, Japan is able to work not only with the United States but also with South Korea, or even trilaterally, in case of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, to conduct various logistical support activities.

Category one, which pertains to the limited exercise of the right to collective self-defense, could theoretically give much more important impact on the Korean Peninsula and South Korean security. As a result of the new security legislation, the revised “three conditions for the use of force for self-defense” now allow for the use of force under the following conditions:

1. When an armed attack against Japan occurs or *when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness* (emphasis mine).
2. When there is no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan’s survival and protect its people.
3. The use of force should be limited to the minimum extent.

The italicized passage is about what the Japanese government calls “existential crisis,” which justifies the exercise of the right to collective self-defense. Successive Japanese governments have previously rejected this choice due to the limitations arising from Article 9 of the Japanese constitution. Now, the Shinzo Abe administration has crafted a new interpretation of the constitution, stating that the self-defense allowed by Article 9 consists of both self-defense and collective self-defense. Indeed, the right to collective self-defense is a legitimate one for all sovereign states in the world, which is justified by Article 51 of the UN Charter.

Moreover, regarding a Korean Peninsula contingency, such an event would clearly be interpreted as a threat to Japan’s survival, i.e., Japan’s existential crisis. With this new legislation, therefore, at least legally speaking, Japan would now be able to fight side by side with the United States and South Korea in the unwanted event of a military conflict on the peninsula. Of course, politically and otherwise, it is hard to imagine that such military cooperation, involving Japan’s actual use of force in a Korean contingency, would be realized even between Japan and the United States, let alone between Japan and South Korea or trilaterally.

Against these backgrounds, the task of trilateral cooperation involving category two of the new security legislation—situations of important influence—is more urgent and should be given more attention. Examples would include logistical support activities by Japanese self-defense forces for the U.S. and South Korean forces such as provision of food, fuel and communication equipment. The United States and Japan have already revised the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) on the basis of the new security legislation (signed in September 2016, and ratified in April 2017). Involving South Korean in this arrangement seems politically unrealistic for some time

to come, but this is perfectly logical and rational from an operational perspective in the event of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula.

Realistically speaking, therefore, virtual lack of effective security cooperation between Japan and South Korea is indeed a huge loss for the sake of peace and stability in Northeast Asia and by extension the entire Asia-Pacific region. *

*Note:

Arguments and thoughts in this paper draw much on my previous articles including the following:

“A ‘Normal’ Middle Power: Interpreting Changes in Japanese Security Policy in the 1990s and After,” in Yoshihide Soeya, Masayuki Tadokoro, David Welch, eds, *Japan as a ‘Normal Country’?: A Country in Search of its Place in the World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011)

“The Future of U.S.-Japan-ROK Trilateral Cooperation: A Japanese Perspective,” in Daniel C. Sneider, Yul Sohn and Yoshihide Soeya, U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateralism: *Building Bridges and Strengthening Cooperation*, NBR Special Report #59 (July 2016)

“The Case for an Alternative Strategy for Japan: Beyond the Article 9-Alliance Regime,” in Michael J. Green and Zack Cooper, eds., *Postwar Japan: Growth, Security and Uncertainty since 1945* (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017)