

# CONFIDENCE BUILDING IN THE US-KOREA-JAPAN TRILATERAL SECURITY RELATIONSHIP



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# Confidence Building in the U.S.-Korea-Japan Trilateral Security Relationship

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## **Disclaimer**

The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.

## **Honor Pledge**

On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donna Reynolds". The signature is highly stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Donna Reynolds, Master of Public Policy Candidate

## Executive Summary

The U.S.-Japan alliance has long been considered the “cornerstone” of Asian security and the U.S.-South Korea alliance is similarly critical as Korea is among the few nations and the only Asian ally with whom the US shares an integrated military and security command and control structure (Retooling America’s Alliances, n.d.). However, these strong bilateral alliances that South Korea and Japan hold with the U.S. has not been able to translate into a trilateral security collaboration due to the bilateral strains between South Korea and Japan.

These strains are largely due to historical contentions between South Korea and Japan during Japanese colonization of South Korea from 1910 to 1945. Since the end of colonialism, Korea has demanded reparations and apologies from Japan and Japan – partially due to the U.S.’ economic and political support in rebuilding in the post-war era – has failed to provide a complete and satisfactory response. The issue of historical memory has been heavily politicized, particularly by South Korea, where elected officials and hopefuls use history to garner mass support and patriotism. Japan has provided somewhat lackluster apologies and reparations deals over the years leading Korea to continue to perceive Japan as unrepentant, and Japan to perceive Korean grievances are insatiable. These tensions have had impacts beyond rhetoric, but materialize in cutting diplomatic, trade, and security deals and collaboration over the years.

In examining what the definition of confidence and trust in alliances are and how to develop them, four key categories emerge as critical: the existence of a mutual external risk, political and economic factors – with shared political systems and high interaction and interdependence economically lending itself to high cohesion, effective organizational structures and processes, and shared core values – which in the U.S. alliance context are liberal-democratic values.

With this background of U.S.-South Korea-Japan relations and evidence around the importance and development of alliances, this report proposes three policy alternatives to address the issue of a lack of confidence in a U.S.-South Korea-Japan trilateral security relationship:

- 1) **Alternative 1: Status Quo, allowing the Camp David Summit to Play Out** – Maintain current efforts, collaborations, meetings, and more as outlined in the recent groundbreaking Camp David Summit.
- 2) **Alternative 2: Addressing and Resolving Historical Differences** – Holding a summit to conclusively address and find redress for the historical conflicts between South Korea and Japan finally and conclusively.
- 3) **Alternative 3: Trilateral Shipbuilding Collaboration** – Translate the existing discussions on bilateral shipping contracts with the U.S. and Japan and the U.S. and South Korea into a trilateral shipping collaboration.

These policy alternatives are then evaluated by three criteria:

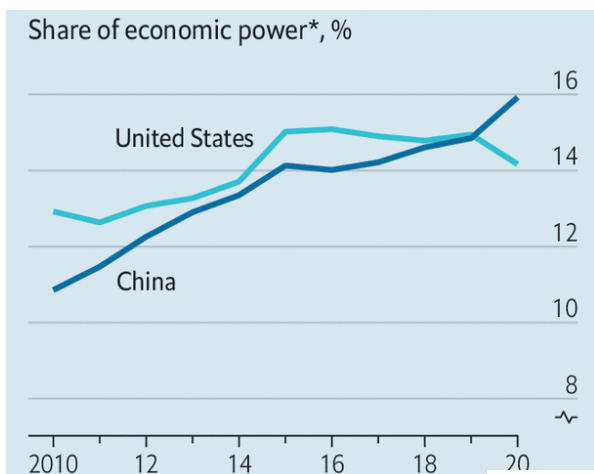
- 1) **Effectiveness** – to measure how successfully a policy alternative strengthens confidence in the U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral security relationship.
- 2) **Administrative Feasibility** – to measure the likelihood and capacity of the military to accept and carry out each of the policy alternatives.
- 3) **Sustainability** -- to measure the likelihood of sustained impact and longevity of a policy alternative.

After a careful analysis of the alternatives with these three criteria this report recommends **Alternative 3: Trilateral Shipbuilding Collaboration** as it received the highest total rating of the three alternatives. This option receives a *High on Effectiveness* as it addresses and incorporates all four of the critical components to build confidence and strengthen trilateral relations, a *High on Administrative Feasibility* as it builds upon both regional and global precedent for similar agreements, and a *Medium on Sustainability* as this would be a policy difficult to exit from based on a political regime change and the ebbs and flows of Korea-Japan relations.

To implement this recommendation, the United States should follow the model of how AUKUS was developed and implemented. This would comprise of first an extensive consultation period to determine best practices and prepare for an extensive and collaborative partnership. Then, following this consultation period, Congress would determine the provisions and allowances granted for the partnership in a bill that after a few months in the legislative process hopefully, and seems likely to, emerge as law.

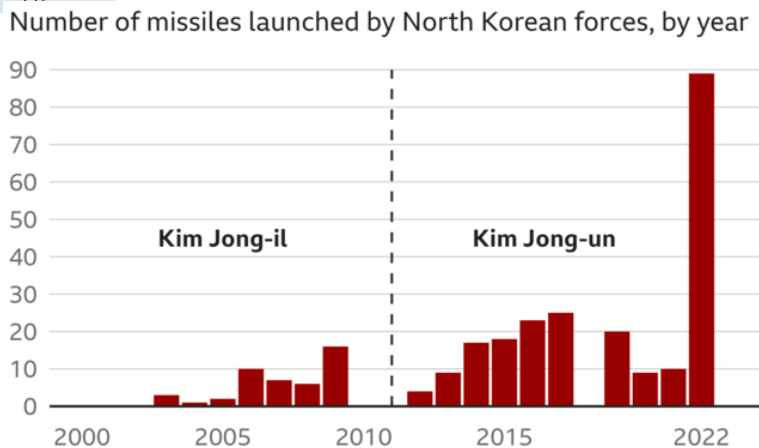
## Introduction

The U.S.-Japan alliance has long been considered the “cornerstone” of Asian security and the U.S.-South Korea alliance is similarly critical as Korea is among the few nations and the only Asian ally with whom the US shares an integrated military and security command and control structure (Retooling America’s Alliances, n.d.). Korea and Japan are vested security allies, each country spending several billion dollars a year to maintain and support U.S. forces and bases in their respective states (U.S.-South Korea Relations, n.d.; Pursuing a Comprehensive Vision, n.d.; Excerpt: U.S.-South Korea, n.d.). Outside of the close bilateral ties existing between the United States and South Korea and the United States and Japan, however, South Korea and Japan have not been able to develop a strong bilateral relationship preventing the progression of this ‘hub-and-spokes’ alliance system to a trilateral security partnership (Next Generation, n.d.; Building Bridges, n.d.). Japan and South Korea share important similarities and interests that would make increased collaboration and ties incredibly beneficial and, at the very least, sensible. From having a shared military partner and ally in the United States, facing common geopolitical challenges in the rise of China and increasingly military threats from North Korea, and holding similar core democratic and cultural values -- the widely reported contentious and frosty relations between the two countries is strategically confounding and impedes greater regional security (Aum, 2022; Sakaguchi & Kobara, 2023).



*Figure 1 on the left: This graph displays percent share of global economic power of the U.S. and China measured based off of world trade, net capital exports, and global GDP in which the China eclipsed the US in 2019 and is continuing to increase at an exponential rate (China Already Dominant, 2021).*

*Figure 2 to the right: This chart displays rising missile tests by North Korea from 2000 to 2022, illustrating the growing capabilities of the state’s WMD programs (North Korea, 2023).*



This well-known tense relationship is not simply a political issue but a social one with public polls consistently reporting historical memory issues to be the dominating reason for mutual negative perceptions. When Koreans were asked why they had a bad impression of Japan in 2019, over 75 percent of respondents stated that it was due to Japan's failure to "properly reflect on its history of invading South Korea" (Public Opinion Poll, 2019). Similarly, 52 percent of Japanese respondents in the same year and study stated that South Korea's continued criticism of Japan on historical issues was the reason for their bad impressions of Korea (Public Opinion Poll, 2019). In both countries, the issue of historical memory was by far the most prevalent reason for 'bad impressions.' Another poll found that South Korean "favorable perception towards Japan" continues to "plummet," with "young generations leading the trend," and 85 percent of Koreans responding that they "believe the current Japanese government is not remorseful about its colonial rule or historical issues" (8<sup>th</sup> Joint Poll, n.d.). Thus, it is clear that in the Japan-South Korea relationship, despite the many factors that would encourage collaboration and closeness, mutual contentions in historical memory of the colonial period has been and remains to be *the* inhibiting variable.

### **Problem Statement**

Year after year, the United States highlights East Asia, from the geopolitical tensions with China to North Korea's WMD capabilities, as possessing among the greatest security risks facing the world making a trilateral security relationship between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan -- its strongest democratic allies in the region -- necessary (Assessment of Terrorist Threat, 2023). However, despite shared economic and security interests, there are significant bilateral tensions affecting confidence between Japan and South Korea preventing the critical formation of a strong and sustainable trilateral alliance (Cha, 2019).

### **Client Overview**

This Applied Policy Project has been prepared for Mr. Douglas Acoba, a GS15 Strategy Director at United States Forces Korea (USFK). The mission of USFK is to work together with the Republic of Korea to "deter aggression" and "maintain stability in Northeast Asia" (USFK, n.d.). USFK has been present in South Korea for the better part of a century, maintaining the terms of the Korean War Armistice under the Status of Forces Agreement signed in 1966 (USFK SOFA, n.d.). Along with the Combined Forces Command and the United Nations Command, USFK is a third institutional pillar charged with the security of South Korea and is further comprised of five units: Eighth Army, Seventh Air Force, Special Operations Command Korea (SOCKOR), U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Korea (MARFOR-K), and Commander, U.S. Navy Region Korea (CNFK). The issue of trilateral relations between the U.S., Korea, and Japan is of critical importance to the work and mission of USFK as it is a key component of maintain security and stability in Northeast Asia.



## **Structure of the Report**

In addressing the issue of confidence building in the U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral security relationship, this report will begin by presenting a background of the relations between the three countries and examine the root causes of present-day conflicts and lackluster confidence. Next, the report will present evidence and existing research on alliances and confidence building within alliances. Then, three evaluative criteria and three policy alternatives to address this issue will be presented and analyzed using the outlined criteria. After an analysis and comparison of the criteria, the report will propose a final recommendation among the three policy alternatives and briefly discuss implementation steps.

## **Background on the Problem**

### **Japan's Colonization of South Korea**

For much of Korea and Japan's history, the two states oscillated between periods of closer relations where trade and culture were exchanged and periods of high tensions. These tensions resulted in occasional invasions and skirmishes, the Imjin War in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in which Japan engaged in a failed invasion on Korea the most notable (Cooney & Scarbrough, 2008). What was key in this long-term relationship, however, was a mutually recognized sense of equality between the two nations as tributary states to China (McNamara, 1986). This dynamic changed with Japan's Meiji Restoration in 1876, where, in imitation of Western gunboat diplomacy, Japan forced Korea to sign the unequal Treaty of Ganghwa opening up the 'hermit kingdom' of Korea to the world under Japanese influence and dominance (Korea: A Legal History, n.d.). This treaty was the beginning of Japan's incursion into Korea and eventually resulted in formal annexation and colonialism under the 1910 Japan-Korea Treaty (Korea: A Legal History, n.d.). Japanese colonial rule lasted in Korea from 1910 to its surrender in World War Two (WW2) in 1945, under which Korea faced brutal colonial policies centering on modernization, industrialization, and Japanization (Mizoguchi, 1979; Cha, n.d.). The most controversial and heavily resisted of these was the 'Japanization' effort, also known as the Kominka Movement, which sought to destroy Korean identity and culture through policies such as making Japanese the national language of Korea, enforcing Shintoism worship, and giving Koreans Japanese names (Caprio, 2009). Additionally, through the course of colonial rule, approximately 750,000 men served as forced laborers and an estimated 200,000 women as sex slaves – or 'comfort women' (Jo, 2023). The issue of forced laborers and comfort women remain the most contentious and politicized between Japan and South Korea today (The Rough State, 2021).

### **A U.S. Supported Lack of Japanese Accountability**

Following Japanese surrender in WW2, The San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 was signed marking the formal end to war and set the stage for the rebuilding and reintegration of Japan. This treaty also settled Japanese reparation obligations for their wartime acts despite excluding the primary victims, including South Korea, from its development and ratification (Sneider, Chirot, & Shin, 2014). The 1951 treaty was not alone in this exclusion, however, with other 'consequences' placed upon Japan following surrender like the International Military Tribunal for the Far East also focusing on Western suffering from Japanese war crimes and cast colonial Asian victims to the side (Burton, 2020). This omission of Asian victims, including South Korea, reflected the United States' prioritization of reconstructing Japan as a stable and cooperative democratic nation against the emerging wave of communism in Asia in 1951 over the concerns and demands of the previously colonized (Miller, 2019).

The consequences of this post-war lack of Japanese accountability have lasting ramifications on Japanese interactions and interpretation of its imperial and war-time history. In 2007, Japan's Supreme Court relied upon the San Francisco Treaty and passed a ruling "foreclose(ing) all pending and future lawsuits arising from actions taken by Japan in the course of colonialism and

war” arguing that Japan was not culpable for reparation demands not accounted for in the 1951 treaty (Treaty of Peace, 1951). Additionally, in territorial conflicts between Korea and Japan – specifically the ongoing controversial debate over the ownership of Dokdo or Takeshima Island – Japan justifies its right to the island via the treaty and the United States’ statement at the time that the island “does not appear ever before to have been claimed by Korea” as affirming Japan’s right to the island (Treatment of Takeshima, n.d.).

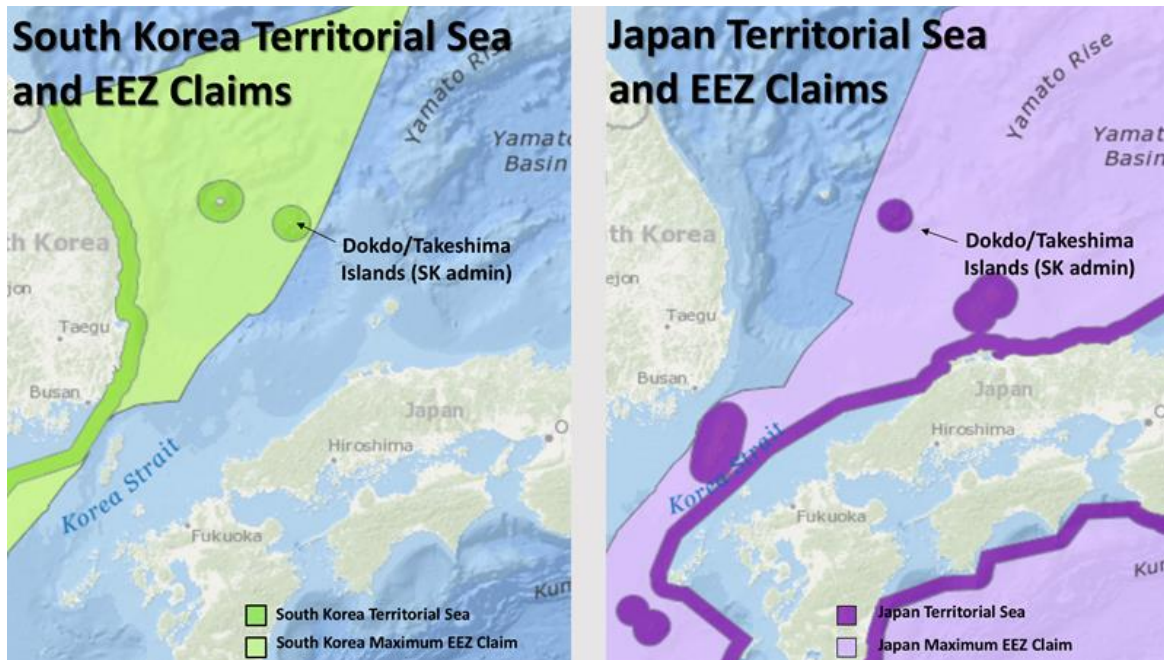


Figure 3: This map illustrates the overlapping territorial claims of Japan and South Korea (The Rough State, 2021).

In Japan’s post-war vulnerable state, the United States was its sword and shield, facilitating Japan’s regrowth into Asia’s regional hegemon and the world’s second largest economic power in the 1980s (Japan-overview, n.d.). Whether this was through mismanaging treaty agreements, failing to thoroughly prosecute war crimes, or allowing Japanese wartime leaders to regain political power and influence during U.S. occupation: with American presence and support, Japan had no need to resolve conflicts with South Korea and its Asian neighbors to subsist (Occupation and Reconstruction, n.d.). After Japan became a thriving state, it held a political and economic upper hand in relations with other Asian nations – especially through its ability to provide economic assistance to struggling neighbors – and it was not necessary to Japan’s safety and survival that it address or apologize for its war crimes (Wu & Yang, 2016). While it would be false to claim that Japan has *never* taken any steps towards accepting responsibility and providing reparations for its actions in South Korea and other states, the pervasive far right-wing subsection in Japanese politics that not only refuses to take accountability for but promotes remembrance and admiration for aspects of the imperial era, has detracted from international belief in Japanese sincerity (Morris-Suzuki, 2023).

## **The Failure to Develop Strong Japan-Korea Bilateral Relations**

The path towards establishing diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan itself was contentious, beginning in 1951 and taking fourteen long years, seven conferences, and heavy U.S. pressure through its military presence and alliance with both countries to conclude with the signing of the Treaty on Basic Relations in 1965. The primary reason the process took so long was the issue of Japanese colonial behavior in Korea and the Korean demands for apology and reparation which Japan refused (The Far East, 1959; Shin, 1958). These barriers were only overcome by the election of a new, less antagonistic regime in South Korea under President Park Chung-hee who sought Japan's economic support and partnership, and a begrudging apology from Japan. This apology, while not completely satisfactory, was the first instance of Japan at least 'expressing regret' over "unhappy relations" and promising to "engag(e) in serious self-reflection" (Cha, 1996). The treaty had two primary provisions: that previous unequal treaties between Japan and South Korea were "already null and void" at the time of their signing and a \$845 million Japanese financial package to South Korea (Treaty on Basic Relations, 1965; Agreement on Settlement, 1965). This was beneficial to both governments, South Korea's fledgling economy receiving an influx of capital and Japan creating a strong export destination – all contributing to the Korean economic boom, referred to as the "Miracle of the Han River," which transformed Korea from a destitute, least developed nation to a developed, leading global economy in the span of just a few decades (Agreement on Settlement, 1965; Kim, n.d.).

Despite the economic relief the treaty provided, it was a "top-down agreement not adequately supported by bottom-up reconciliation efforts" and not widely supported by the public due to its lackluster conclusions on and acknowledgment of Japanese wartime transgressions (Easley, 2023). Thus, soon after the 1965 Treaty, the issue of historical memory soon rose again and began the cycle seen today in which South Korea has periods of heightened historical awareness where politicians and the public claim that Japan has never taken accountability for its war crimes (Morris-Suzuki, 2023). Japan typically responds to these accusations by referring to its past declarations of apology and reparation provisions, reiterating that it regrets its behavior -- feelings of remorse "upheld as unshakable," and that, feeling they have already paid their dues, are tired of repeated demands for apology (History Issues, n.d.).

2019 saw an unprecedented low point in relations stemming from these historical conflicts, particularly heightened by South Korean lawsuits and court rulings in which comfort women and forced laborers sued Japan and Japanese companies for restitution. A 2018 Korean Supreme Court ruling affirmed that the Japanese Mitsubishi firm was responsible for paying forced wartime laborers, and a similar 2021 ruling ordered Japan to pay compensation to comfort women (Sang-hun, 2018; Sang-hun, 2021). Despite the largely symbolic nature of these rulings, Japan reacted by accusing South Korea of breaching international law and undermining treaty (Sang-hun, 2021). Furthermore, both countries reacted in this period by ending the GSOMIA intelligence sharing agreements, cutting diplomatic ties, removing each other from preferred positions on trade 'whitelists,' and more (Johnson & Murakami, 2019; Kim, 2019; Katz, n.d.).

### **A New Era of Relations? The Camp David U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Summit.**

Following the 2022 election of the conservative party's President Yoon Suk Yeol in South Korea, there has been significant improvement in the bilateral relations of South Korea with both the U.S. and Japan. This improvement has aligned with Yoon's campaign promise to strengthen these alliances and "elevate South Korea's standing in the world" (President of the ROK, n.d.; Foreign Policy, 2022; East Asian Forum, 2023). In terms of the Korea-Japan relationship, both President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida have stated that they are 'willing' to improve the relationship, that the two countries are 'close neighbors' and 'should' ideally work together, and that *this time* there will *truly* be a new starting point in the bilateral relationship (Choe, 2023). Yet, these are age-old promises echoing similar rhetoric of past political leaders of both nations. Such rhetoric has come at a cost to Yoon's domestic approval in South Korea, with high public disapproval towards his controversial approach to Japan in which Yoon brushes past the many historical issues that have long plagued the Korea-Japan relationship (Ruling Party, 2023). However, regardless of any domestic tensions or controversy, with Yoon and Kishida at the helm and President Biden eager to support a strengthening of both individual bilateral ties and a trilateral relationship, significant steps have been taken to increase ties and strengthen the alliances. These steps have included: joint exercises between the U.S., Korea, and Japan in Hawaii in August of 2022; increased official political visits to the other country which included two bilateral summits; a resigning of GSOMIA to increase military inform sharing; South Korea and Japan restoring each other's status as a preferred trading partner; and more (Choe, 2023). In the United States, the Biden Administration has taken various steps to repair international alliances, agreements, and other relationships in the aftermath of the Trump presidency – with Joe Biden declaring that "America is back" and dedicated to "rebuilding the muscle of democratic alliances that have atrophied over the past few years of neglect and... abuse" (Biden and Allies, 2022).

Among the most significant of these steps in strengthening and ushering in a "new era of partnership" in the trilateral relations between the U.S., Korea, and Japan is the Camp David summit that occurred on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (Remarks by President, 2023; Biden Declares, 2023). Camp David was the culmination of several meeting between senior officials across the U.S., Korea, and Japan and the fourth meeting between President Biden, President Yoon, and PM Kishida (Remarks by President, 2023). The summit touched on a wide variety of topics addressing and stating the need to cooperate on: military and security interests, shared economic prosperity, energy security, technology, human rights issues in North Korea, and more in the broader discussion of promoting and supporting regional stability and prosperity. In terms of tangible policy proposals and plans, there were several conclusions made by the summit.

- 1) For the high-level and broad trilateral relations goals the summit outlined, there are plans to: hold a similar meeting between leaders annually, have high-level senior officials also meet annually, create a direct communication channel to be able to quickly consult with each other on regional issues and challenges, and hold an annual Assistant Secretary-led

Indo-Pacific Dialogue to coordinate their strategies in the Indo-Pacific (Camp David Principles, 2023; Fact Sheet, 2023).<sup>1</sup>

- 2) In terms of specific security cooperation objectives, the summit outlined: a multi-year trilateral exercise plan, cooperation on missile defense efforts through strengthened data-sharing along other plans to increase defense information sharing, and the creation of a trilateral working group to counter DPRK cybercrimes (Fact Sheet, 2023).
- 3) To collaborate on economic and technology interests, the summit discussed instituting: a program to support Women's economic empowerment through international partnerships, creating a system through increased information sharing to share potential risks and disruptions to supply chains, collaborating on energy security and emerging technology projects, and more (Fact Sheet, 2023).
- 4) For more societal level policies dealing with health and youth, the summit outlined plans for a: Department of State sponsored U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateral Global Leadership Youth Summit, trilateral cancer dialogue to increase cooperation and partnership to develop innovating cancer therapies, and an opportunity for mid-level government officials from the three countries to meet and train on technology usage at the Trilateral Technology Leaders Training Program at Johns Hopkins (East-West Center, n.d.; Fact Sheet, 2023).

### **Conclusion: The Importance of Strong U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Relations**

This background has presented the reasons for the current relationship between Korea and Japan and has made it evident that, without a resolution of the historical memory issue between the two nations, significant and lasting progress cannot be made on improving relations. Mutual restorations of relations and agreements to collaborate are meaningless when, with the next spike in conflict on historical grievances, progress is yet again reversed. The modern history of Korea-Japan relations has shown that each Korean president and each Japanese Prime Minister has resoundingly failed in this regard despite their better efforts. The crux of why this is the case, and the main reason why historical memory conflicts seem never-ending and insurmountable is a mutual disconnect between the two counties: Korea perceives Japan as unrepentant, and Japan believes Korean grievances are insatiable. Without a resolution in the bilateral tensions between South Korea and Japan, the emergence of a strong and collaborative trilateral alliance between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan will not be possible to the detriment of security concerns and goals in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Other discussions of and plans for coordination in the Indo-Pacific include the development of the Trilateral Development Finance Cooperation, the Trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation Framework, the development of and dialogue surrounding the formation of a collaborative humanitarian response policy, and more to support the Indo-Pacific region.

## **Evidence on Potential Solutions**

### **Comparing Japan and Germany Postwar Perceptions**

In the aftermath of the World Wars, different regions formed ‘collective memories’ of their wartime experiences – especially in interpretations of German Nazism in Europe and Japanese Imperialism in Asia. In Europe, Germany continues to apologize and provide reparations to nations and populations affected by the Nazi regime. These reparations and demonstrations of sincere regret have included: pursuing thorough legal convictions of Nazi criminals with trials occurring as recently as 2022, Chancellor Brandt falling to his knees at a memorial in Poland in the 1970s – an iconic symbol of German contrition, concentration camps and infamous sites of Nazi crime being memorialized, continued speeches in which German leaders openly ‘beg for forgiveness’ from countries impacted by Nazism year after year, mandatory education about the Holocaust and the dangers of fascism in its schools, and continued reparations and compensation to Holocaust survivors (NPR, 2022). In 2022, Germany agreed to one of the “largest financial reparations packages ever” worth \$1.2 billion – with total estimated reparations since 1945 nearing \$100 billion (Solomon, 2022; Department of State, 2020). These extensive and seemingly genuine efforts to apologize and atone for the crimes of their past has left the present foreign relations of Germany, as evidenced through the strong regional partnerships developed through organizations such as NATO and the European Union, neither marred nor significantly affected by the historical memory of Nazi atrocities (Evans 2023).

This success, however, has not been replicated in Japan and its efforts to overcome its own brutal imperial and colonial past in Asia. Rather than the German approach of repeatedly taking full accountability and offering apologies to the nations and people harmed by Imperial Japan, Japan has experienced ‘apology fatigue.’ The government responds to renewed protests and incitement over Japanese wartime behavior as a bygone issue that has already been addressed with official recognition, apology, and reparations, making further discussion of and demands for further atonement no longer relevant and even “illegal” (Yamaguchi, 2021). The resulting regional relationship of Asia, rather than a largely united and tightly knit system of cooperative nations like Europe -- in which Germany has been an integral leader and member, is characterized by pervasively low levels of trust and collaboration beyond high economic cooperation and interdependence (Wu & Yang, 2016).

Building on this comparison between Germany and its strong bilateral and multilateral relationships and alliance networks in Europe versus Japan and the comparative lack of strong bilateral and multilateral alliances in East Asia, outside of only issues of historical memory and contrition, it is necessary to examine what the components are to developing strong alliances.

### **Defining and Developing Confidence and Trust between Allies**

Alliances in the international system are a critical tool in balancing geopolitical powers and tensions that have historically both stymied and driven wars and global development.

Throughout history, and especially so in our polarized world today, alliances provide states advantages and security by acting as “force multipliers” enhancing military powers, economic benefits, strategic posturing against opposing states and ally networks, and more (Geostrategy, n.d.; Alliance Politics, n.d.). Following WW2 and increasingly during the Cold War, the United States has been the preeminent player in this alliance system through relationships such as NATO, ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, and U.S. Security Treaty), and the bilateral ‘hub and spokes’ or ‘San Francisco’ system of alliances in Asia (Tow, 2023; Ochmanek & Shlapak, 2023; Alliances vs. Partnerships, n.d.). Despite the risks and operational and tactical costs of maintaining alliances – the most prominent being when a member of the alliance, by obligation, pulls other members into war – these political benefits and securities provided outweigh the costs and have created the modern extensive system of alliances (Bensahel, 2007).

Alliances most commonly form in the face of a common threat in which states join in ‘balancing’ against a mutual threat, or the less common development of alliance, ‘bandwagoning’ – or aligning -- with the state that presents said threat (Walt, 1985). This was certainly the case the U.S. decision, and conversely the South Korean and Japanese decision, to form bilateral alliances during the Cold War to form firm democratic allies against the communist threat in Asia. Secondary are alliances forming due to “ideological solidarity,” especially prevalent in the rhetoric of political leaders seeking to build support for and justify an alliance with or, on the other hand, an opposition to a certain state (Fedder, 1968; Osgood, 1968). In early American support for South Korea, such rhetoric was employed with John Dulles highlighting the fact the President Syngman Rhee – the first president of South Korea – was worthy of support as he was a “Christian gentleman” who had “suffered for his faith” (Townsend Hoopes, 1973). Again this ideological consideration, while playing a role in alliance formation and maintenance, when faced with security threats and other dangers, falls secondary to the more pressing and pragmatic concerns of common threats.

To develop stronger alliances, common policy tools that states employ are providing economic and military aid to create a leverage over those receiving aid – the U.S.-Korea and U.S.-Japan alliances originally stemming from this type of relationship. However, this dynamic is not as simple as ‘aid creates allies’ with most significant aid relationships being “the result of alignment than a cause of it” (Walt, 1985). Economic and military aid are tools that make existing alignments and alliances stronger and more effective but has shown to do little in forming and determining the fate of alliances itself. In terms of how economic interdependence and economic relations impact alliances, there are some who argue that a close economic relationship can strengthen alliances even in contexts of interstate political tensions (Hamilton & Quinlan, 2005; McNamara, 2008). However, while economic relations plays a role in strengthening relationships to a degree, it is “no superglue” and, like the provision of aid, cannot maintain a alliance in and of itself (Scherpenberg, 2008).

Alliance cohesion, or confidence, can thus be defined as a set of states sharing a common goal or interest – most commonly in the form of a threat – and their willingness and ability collaborate



on the activities and strategies to fulfill these shared goals (Weitsman, 2013; Holsti & Sullivan, 1973). When placed under pressure either through political and social tensions and conflict, this level of ‘cohesion’ is what holds an alliance system together (Army University, 2018).

Developing this cohesion requires and consists of a variety of factors that can be generalized into four broad categories listed in order of impact and importance: the existence of a mutual external risk, political and economic factors – with shared political systems and high interaction and interdependence economically lending itself to high cohesion, effective organizational structures and processes, and shared core values – which in the U.S. alliance context are liberal-democratic values (Army University, 2018).

In conclusion, alliances have been a “crucial and enduring source of advantage for the United States” through the extensive and powerful network the U.S. created during the Cold War: preventing war through driving up costs of aggression and creating a balanced status quo world order, controlling both rivals and those the U.S. is allied with, and more (Montgomery, 2009; Heritage, n.d.). The U.S. continues to affirm its alliance network and ties through emphasizing common threats, from the military and security threats from China, Russia, North Korea and more to global crises like climate change that necessitate the continuation of the alliance system, especially in East Asia with Korea and Japan where many of these threats stem from (Reaffirming and Reimagining, n.d.; Retooling America’s Alliances, n.d.).

## **Evaluative Criteria**

USFK aims to encourage and facilitate confidence building in the U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral security relationship. This is for two reasons: one, the strong individual alliances between the U.S. and Korea and between the U.S. and Japan; and two, Korea and Japan's role as central partners in maintaining democracy and freedom in East Asia and the world. This is especially the case in two major security concerns in East Asia: the rise and nuclearization of North Korea and China's "dangerous and escalatory behavior" in the South China Sea (Joint Statement, n.d.). Policy alternatives to foster stronger partnership will be examined through the following criteria:

### **Effectiveness**

The effectiveness criterion will measure how successfully a policy alternative strengthens confidence in the U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral security relationship. The factors that go into a strong alliance and security relationship are many and vary depending on the individual contexts of the alliance in question. According to the existing research and literature, critical components of major multilateral alliances and specifically the U.S.-Korea-Japan alliance are: 1) mutually shared interests, concerns, and goals, 2) demonstrated commitment from all parties, 3) deepening interoperability and interconnected operations, and 4) clear evidence of economic, political, and security benefits (Military Alliances, n.d.; NATO Interoperability, n.d.; European Union, n.d.).

The effectiveness of policy alternatives will be analyzed according to these four components of a strong alliance and measured on a high-medium-low scale. A high effectiveness rating means that a policy addresses three or four of the four components of developing a strong security alliance. A policy with a medium rating addresses two of the four components of developing a strong security alliance. Lastly, a policy with a low rating addresses only one or none of the four components of developing a strong security alliance.

### **Administrative Feasibility**

The administrative feasibility criteria will measure the likelihood and capacity of the military to accept and carry out each of the policy alternatives. Likelihood and capacity will be examined and conclusions drawn from previously implemented policies, the conclusions and stated goals of previous trilateral conferences, and public statements from both military and political leaders. Capacity will be measured in not only the Department of Defense's capacity to implement strategy but the capacity and potential involvement of the President and the Executive Office. This is due to the strength of the U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral security relationship being of critical importance to broader U.S. defense strategy and interests and the evident attention given to this issue from the President as exemplified in the historic summit at Camp David between President Biden, President Yoon of South Korea, and PM Kishida of Japan on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (Spirit of Camp David, 2023; Camp David, n.d.).

The administrative feasibility of policy alternatives will be analyzed on precedence of the same or similar policies and measured on a high-medium-low scale. A high administrative feasibility rating means that there is precedence for the alternative in the region and would thus be likely for

a similar policy to be implemented again. A policy with a medium administrative feasibility rating means that there is precedence for the alternative but not within the region and it, therefore, might be possible for a similar policy to be crafted and altered to fit the contexts and needs of the region. Lastly, a low rating for a policy means that the proposed policy has no precedence in the region or anywhere else in the world and might, therefore, be difficult to administratively find approval, support, and execution for the policy.

### **Sustainability**

The sustainability criteria will measure the likelihood of sustained impact and longevity of a policy alternative. Major challenges in developing a strong and lasting U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral security relationship are: 1) the U.S. and South Korean policy being heavily contingent on domestic political elections and who the president is and 2) the continued periods and ebbs and flows of Korea-Japan bilateral conflict which results in one or both of the parties pulling out of major security and economic cooperation agreements. Significant examples of this include Japan and Korea repeatedly adding and removing each other from preferred trader partner lists also known as ‘whitelists,’ South Korea failing to renew the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2019, South Korean banning of various Japanese imports across the years – most recently including Japanese seafood in 2023, and much more (South Korea Court, n.d.; Many Disputes, 2023; Fukushima Seafood, 2023).

As it is impossible to accurately theorize the status of U.S.-Korea-Japan relations and future geopolitical contexts in a current and likely continuing unstable climate and their impact on policy alternatives, sustainability will be analyzed by the ease in which a party can withdraw from and terminate a policy. The variables to analyze what would make an agreement very difficult versus somewhat challenging versus very easy to withdraw from are: 1) the type of agreement and 2) the amount of resource investment it would require from Korea and Japan. Sustainability will be measured on a high-medium-low scale. A highly sustainable policy would develop critical and U.S.-involved interdependence and make an agreement or partnership very difficult to withdraw from. A sustainable policy with a medium ranking would create a degree of interdependence and mutually beneficial partnership and make an agreement or partnership somewhat challenging to withdraw from. Finally, a low-ranking for sustainability would mean a policy has not created any sort of tangible consequence for withdrawal and makes an agreement or partnership very easy to withdraw from.

## **Policy Alternatives and Assessment**

### **Alternative 1: Status Quo, allowing the Camp David Summit to Play Out**

While the historic Camp David summit neither promised nor mandated any specific and concrete policy change or action, the three allies have conducted over 30 meetings addressing and collaborating on a range of topics as outlined in the Camp David mandate set for collaboration and alignment including (State Department Officials, n.d.):

- 1) The inaugural trilateral Indo-Pacific Dialogue in Washington, D.C. on January 5, 2024 in which leaders celebrated their ongoing successes in collaboration and highlighted upcoming opportunities to cooperate at the UN in 2024 with all three countries holding Security Council seats, discussed their respective country's approach to the Indo-Pacific, examined where there was space for cooperation, shared assessments on geopolitical trends, planned ways to counter foreign information manipulation while protecting the right to speech, and more (Joint Statement, n.d.).
- 2) On January 18<sup>th</sup>, the University of Tokyo, Seoul National University, and University of Chicago signed a trilateral quantum partnership with the goal of developing a strong quantum workforce and creating a collective advantage and competitiveness in the field. The development of scientific collaboration and cooperation reflects the mission of the Camp David summit to provide and demonstrate tangible benefits of trilateral cooperation outside of explicitly security and military matters (Quantum Collaboration, 2024).
- 3) The applications for the inaugural Department of State sponsored U.S.-ROK-Japan Trilateral Global Leadership Youth Summit received an "overwhelming response" and is being held in this year in Busan, South Korea from July 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>. The summit will have 15 participants from each of the countries along with a few representatives from Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands for a total of 50 delegates. The summit aims to provide youth leaders the unique opportunity to meet, discuss, and work together on the world's most pressing challenges (Global Leadership Youth, n.d.).

There have been several other points of progress and the three outlined above represent the various areas in which work has been done to improve collaboration and confidence in the U.S.-Korea-Japan alliance. While many of these steps have had less clear and tangible progress and impact as it involves further meetings, discussions, and statements of importance, fostering consistent and strong dialogue is an important part of fostering confidence in relations (Experts React, n.d.). Such unprecedented collaboration and progress exemplify the strength of the Camp David agreement which arose in a continuing context of increased communication and desire to foster strong ties from the highest levels of U.S., Korean, and Japanese government (Camp David Summit, n.d.; Biden's Summit, n.d.).

### *Effectiveness*

In examining the status quo's effectiveness by the four critical components of developing confidence in trilateral ties, this policy alternative has a *high ranking*. The summit has stated the various shared interests, concerns, and goals of the three nations and both verbally and through substantial action after the summit displayed a commitment to these shared interests. The personal attention given to the goal of creating strong trilateral collaboration by each country's executive leaders and many meetings held and collaborations developed prior to and following the Camp David summit has demonstrated commitment from all parties. The aforementioned examples are just a few of the steps taken towards deepening interoperability and interconnected operations in the wake of the summit through trilateral information sharing efforts and joint

exercises being held. Lastly, as this is a relatively new point of progress – only accomplished in the fall of 2023 -- evidence of economic, political, and security benefits have yet to emerge. However, if current trends continue, it seems likely that increased communication and meetings turn into even more tangible policies that increase trilateral cooperation and create economic, political, and security benefits.

### *Administrative Feasibility*

As a status quo policy alternative and having already been put into place and supported by the leadership of the U.S., Japan, and Korea, while President Biden is in office and continues to support the summit and its conclusions, this policy alternative has a *high ranking*. Prior to the summit taking place, despite the stated desires from the leaders of each of these nations to restore fruitful relations and impactful collaborations to pursue mutual security interests, the policy would have ranked as a medium as there was a lack of precedence for a standalone trilateral summit between the U.S., Japan, and Korea having ever occurred. The U.S. has, however, engaged in similar summits in Europe with England and France, Mexico, and Canada, and more, giving precedence to the U.S. taking similar steps with other regional allies in the past.

### *Sustainability*

While Camp David has certainly represented a watershed moment in U.S.-Korea-Japan relations and confidence building efforts in fostering a stronger security alliance, there is a question of whether it can survive in the long-term or even just beyond the terms of President Biden, President Yoon, and PM Kishida. Japan is the least likely to succumb to drastic political party changes with the Liberal Democratic Party being the overwhelmingly dominating political party in Japan holding the Prime Ministership and party dominance since the establishment of Japan's democracy and without interruption since 2012 (LDP Dominates, 2021; Electoral advantage, 1992). The United States and Korea, however, are completely different stories. Elections often switch executive power from one party to the other, the U.S. between the Democratic and Republican Party and Korea between the more liberal Democratic Party of Liberal (DPK) and the more conservative People Power Party (PPP). Depending on the party and individual foreign policy priorities and interests, the engagement of the United States and Korea drastically differs, with Democratic presidents in the US and conservative PPP presidents in Korea generally being the friendliest to and invested in bolstering trilateral relations. With the presidential election in the United States in 2024 and a presidential election in South Korea in 2027 – with history suggesting a switching the conservative PPP back to the liberal DPK -- the longevity and sustainability of the Camp David summit are at high risk of either the U.S. or South Korea partially or even completely withdrawing, ending this 'new era' and setting the stage of trilateral relations back to ground zero. Therefore, the sustainability of maintaining the status quo and allowing the Camp David Summit to Play Out is *rated as low*, as due to its formation by

executive leaders' interests and agreement when those executive leaders leave office there is a high risk that the Camp David progress leaves with them.

## **Alternative 2: Addressing and Resolving Historical Differences**

Scholars and the public alike agree that the root cause of tensions between South Korea and Japan are historical grievances that South Korea holds about Japanese. While South Korea is not the only country holding historical animosity – China, the Philippines, and Taiwan holding various degrees of ire – its historical grievances have had the most evident and dramatic impacts on modern foreign policy decisions. Without the context of historical grievances between the two countries, bilateral relations of Japan and South Korea post WW2 make little logical sense.

One policy alternative is for the United States to take advantage of the increased meetings and communication between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan to facilitate the organization of a summit between the leaders, other major political actors, and the victims and organizations representing and advocating for the victims of the historical grievances focused specifically on addressing this root issue of historical tension. There have been various attempts in the past for South Korea and Japan to settle these issues – particularly the issue of comfort women – but these attempts have all been later rejected by either the Korean public or the elected president (Relitigating the Past, 2024; KBS World, n.d.; DW News). The reasons for rejection are typically accusations or feelings of:

- 1) Japanese political leaders issuing only disingenuous and incomplete acknowledgments, offering half-hearted apologies to only a section of the crimes they committed or offering a public apology but privately reneging and displaying disingenuous intent by visiting the controversial Yasukuni Shrine which memorializes Japanese war criminals.
- 2) A lack of voice and involvement of affected parties, where political leaders make settlements and declare the issues settled and complete. This results in minimal payments from Japan to impacted parties without an acknowledgment and apology for crimes.

Current literature on historical memory emphasizes its importance in giving countries a “national identity” and allowing states to “channel the values and purposes that chart the future in the name of the past” (Gong, 2001). Prominent memory scholar, Zheng Wang, has taken the initial steps in forming a comprehensive and measurable theory of how historical memory is formed and plays a role in foreign relations (Wang, 2018). He argues that four measurements determine how and to what extent historical memory affects a state: 1) the level of historical consciousness, 2) how much political usage there is of historical memory, 3) whether there has been a reconciliation of past conflicts, and 4) the openness and diversity of opinion of a society.

Historical consciousness is difficult to quantify, but broadly seeks to measure whether historical events have a lasting and ongoing impact on present public discourse and national identity. In South Korea this is very much the case with historical grievances against Japan being a central aspect of South Korea political and societal perceptions and feelings towards Japan to this day. A recent poll has found that South Korean “favorable perception towards Japan” continues to

“plummet,” with “young generations leading the trend,” and 85 percent of Koreans responding that they “believe the current Japanese government is not remorseful about its colonial rule or historical issues” (EAI, n.d.; Kyodo & Jiji, 2023). This also plays into the ‘diversity of opinion’ measurement, in that the Korean opinion on the issue of historical grievances is nearly unified as illustrated by the public opinion polls and statements.

The political usage of historical memory is an indicator for if and how political leaders employ historical events to mobilize voter bases and advance their, often unrelated, political agendas. Again, in South Korea the historical grievance issue is always a topic in the campaign trail and promises of presidential candidates, with candidates typically promising to be tough on Japan and finally resolve the issue. Examples include President Park Geun-Hye who called for Japan to acknowledge its wartime aggression, stating “history can never be covered up” and that Japanese statements were “unacceptable” (South Korea President, 2015).

The reconciliation measure is critical in determining the power historical memory holds over current relations, with lower reconciliation levels resulting in dangerous potential for a compounded resentment between nations, with there being “direct correlation between the level of post conflict reconciliation and the current status between the two feuding states” (Wang, 2018). Between South Korea and Japan, while there have been attempts at reconciliation, they have all lacked in different avenues and have consistently failed to satisfy the Korean public.

Thus, to address and overcome the issue of historical grievances, the United States has the opportunity seize current positive relations, open dialogue, and annual meetings to plan a summit to discuss and find a resolution to historical issues properly and finally (How History Can Solve, n.d.; Resolving Tensions, n.d.). Besides seeking to include all relevant actors and voices from government officials, historians, to grassroots organization and victims, the summit should aim to create tangible products and plans to move forward. Besides a discussion of financial reparations and monetary grants from Japan, the summit might work on creating agreed upon teaching materials for students in Korea and Japan to learn about the colonial and wartime period to put an end to conflict about school textbooks and the ways in which children are taught, or rather not taught, about this time period (NBAR, 2016). The summit might also hold meetings between museum directors and those who create exhibitions and narratives of the wartime period to make sure Japanese and Korean presentations are honest and fair depictions of the period (NBAR, 2016). These are just two examples of tangible work and products the U.S. supported summit might develop to push the historical contentions forward into mutual acknowledgment and agreement between South Korea and Japan.

### *Effectiveness*

In examining the effectiveness of a summit addressing historical grievances, it must be first examined under how the summit would change historical grievances under Wang’s four measurements. Then, the policy can be analyzed under the four critical components of building

confidence and strength in the U.S.-Korea-Japan alliance. Ultimately, this policy alternative *rates as a 'Medium'* as it only accomplishes two of the components: 1) supporting mutually shared interests, concerns, and goals, and 2) demonstrating commitment from all parties.

A summit to address historical grievances that engages in open dialogue directly addresses Wang's third measurement: whether there has been a reconciliation of past conflicts. It also provides the base for the other three measures to positively shift towards historical memory no longer being the critical linchpin in South Korea-Japan bilateral relations. Assuming satisfactory results from the summit, this reconciliation would shift South Korean societal historical consciousness towards accepting Japan's apology and full acknowledgment of their wrongs. This in turn would make historical memory a less attractive and effective tool for Korean politicians to garner public support and achieve election.

In terms of the effectiveness criteria in supporting confidence building in the trilateral alliance, this summit and its impact would improve the mutually shared interests, concerns, and goals of the U.S., Korea, and Japan as it would allow a greater focus and efforts to be placed on these components of the alliance rather than balancing fragile historical tensions. The summit, attended by political and social leaders top-down, would certainly demonstrate a clear commitment from all parties to resolve the issue of historical grievances to move into an era of better relations. However, what the summit and this policy alternative surrounding a resolution of historical grievances fail to do is have much direct and immediate tangible impact on the shared security, economic, and political operations and benefits (criteria 3 and 4). While there is a likelihood of the resolution of historical grievances leading to policies and partnerships that result in these tangible impacts, a summit on historical issues itself would not result in this policy outcome. Therefore, this policy rates as 'Medium' on the efficacy criteria, as it only fulfills two out of four critical components of confidence building in the trilateral relationship.

#### *Administrative Feasibility*

The administrative feasibility of a summit addressing historical grievances is *rated as 'Low'* due to the lack of precedence in both the region and anywhere else in the world of the U.S. facilitating a summit to reconcile historical grievances. The U.S. has been tangentially involved in situations in which aggrieved countries might bring historical legal grievances to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as a member nation and part of the judicial panel – Judge Sarah Cleveland assuming office in 2024 – and has encouraged Japan and South Korea to discuss and overcome historical grievance issues (Current Members, n.d.). Additionally, in 2007 the U.S. Senate heard the cases of comfort women and passed a H.Res.121 urging Japan to “formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces' coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as "comfort women” (Calling on Japanese, 2007). However, it has never inserted itself into the discussions and agreements between South Korea and Japan nor anywhere else in the world dealing with issues of historical grievance. Thus, with a lack of both regional and global precedent for this policy action, administrative feasibility as rated as 'low.'



## *Sustainability*

The sustainability and longevity of a summit to reconcile historical grievances *rates* “*Low*” for sustainability. This is because a summit and verbal agreements -- even if it does result in the creation of educational, museum, and other similar materials -- does not create tangible interdependence or consequences, making withdrawal relatively simple to do. Additionally, this policy is at high risk of vulnerability from the two major reasons for lack of sustainability in current Korea-Japan agreements. Depending on who the political leaders are in the United States, South Korea, and – to a lesser degree – Japan, the agreement holding validity and finality is heavily contingent on the politician’s beliefs and desire to use historical memory as a political tool to rile up public support. This is reflected in the history of how agreements and discussions that sought to end the discussion on historical grievances have been valid in periods of positive relations between and considered incomplete and invalid in periods of strained relations. Thus, even with the involvement of the U.S. and a ‘perfect’ conference in which there is full acknowledgment, genuine apology, and concrete plans for reparations, this policy is still at high risk of being invalidated in the next political cycle and thus rates ‘low’ on sustainability.

### **Alternative 3: Trilateral Shipbuilding Collaboration**

There have been recent U.S. considerations to outsource shipbuilding to Korean and Japanese shipbuilders to boost shipbuilding and buildup maritime competitiveness to counter China’s own naval buildup – China now possessing the world’s largest navy – and belligerency in the South China Sea (Chinese Navy, 2024). Individually, the U.S. has courted the possibility of collaborating with Japanese and South Korean shipbuilding capabilities to maintain and repair U.S. vessels as both countries are renowned world leaders in shipbuilding capabilities along with being a strategic ally and well placed near China (US Navy Looking, 2024). South Korea oscillates with China for first place in shipbuilding orders and capabilities, with South Korea’s shipbuilding industry possessing several of the world’s largest and most productive shipyards, including Hyundai Heavy Industries, Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering, and Samsung Heavy Industries (Maritime Executive, n.d.; AsiaFundManagers, n.d.). Ship repair is a significant portion of Korea’s ship industry, South Korea possessing the world’s largest ship repair yard, and many countries and major companies choosing to have their ships repaired and maintained in Korea (TrustedDocks South Korea, n.d.). Japan is not far behind, consistently being in the top three of leading shipbuilders, particularly dominant in the production of cargo vessels, through heavyweight companies Japan Marine United and Imabari Shipbuilding and are also a popular choice for ship maintenance and repair (Shipbuilding Industry, n.d.; TrustedDocks Japan, n.d.).

Since 2023 the U.S. has been studying and in discussions with Japan on the potential use of Japan’s shipyards to maintain and repair warships along with a more ambitious goal to potentially expand capacity to increase vessel fleet size (Ota, 2023). Additionally, military and

political leaders from the U.S. and Japan have argued that the collaboration between the U.S. and Japan in shipbuilding would further strengthen and cement the strategic military alliance between the U.S. and Japan (Ota, 2023). In early 2024, the U.S. set the stage for a collaboration with Japan with a working group set up to prepare Japanese shipyards and begin the process of allowing U.S. Naval vessels to be maintained and repaired (Ota, 2024). With South Korea, the U.S. has held talks about shipbuilding collaboration since 2023 and while there has yet to be a public agreement, a unit was created under the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) to manage and progress security partnerships and collaborations with the United States along with one of South Korea's most prominent naval defense contractors, Hanwha Ocean, creating a subsidiary in the United States indicating the likelihood of the U.S. also individually collaborating with South Korea on ship maintenance, repairs, and expansion (Larter, 2024).

A policy building on these individual discussions and plans to collaborate with Korean and Japan to bolster American shipbuilding that would increase confidence and collaboration in the trilateral relationship between the three countries would be a trilateral agreement akin to the likes of AUKUS. This would turn a strengthening and collaboration of bilateral relations between the U.S. and Japan and the U.S. and Korea into a more unified approach that would benefit the trilateral security relationship. This policy has the opportunity to build and increase confidence in the South Korea and Japan bilateral relationship, through collaborating on the complex process of repairing and maintaining ships, and even perhaps the building of new ships for the U.S. and joint security concerns in the region. This is especially this case if the shipbuilding program is implemented so that Korea and Japan specialize in different phases on construction, thus necessitating careful communication and collaboration to fully maintain and complete construction on a single vessel (Mirror AUKUS, 2023).

### *Effectiveness*

This policy alternative *is rated 'High'* in effectiveness as it addresses and incorporates all four of the critical components to build confidence and strengthen trilateral relations. Shipbuilding collaboration is a mutually shared interest, concern, and goal, of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea as it is critical to counter the increasing buildup and presence of the Chinese Navy in the region which is a deep concern for all three nations. Having a vested interested and role in repairing and maintaining the ships takes clear commitment from all parties and demonstrates an ability for the trilateral alliance to effectively collaborate and successfully accomplish a unified task. To maintain and repair the ships, a deepened interoperability and interconnected operations is necessary to maintain clear and effective communication channels successfully and effectively. Lastly, there is clear evidence of economic, political, and security benefits, as shipbuilding is a very tangible activity with immediate impact on the security of the region (Military Alliances, 2020; Interoperability, n.d.; Sovereignty Pool, n.d.).

### *Administrative Feasibility*

Shipbuilding collaboration is *rated 'High'* for administrative feasibility as it builds upon both regional and global precedent for similar agreements. In terms of regional precedence, the U.S. is already in the early stages of establishing individual shipbuilding collaborations with South Korea and Japan, so a policy extending these individual discussions to a trilateral proposal would logically extend this preexisting policy. Additionally, there is global precedence to a trilateral collaboration surrounding shipbuilding with AUKUS, lending credence to the ability of a U.S., Japan, South Korea collaboration being supported by Congress and able to be executed by the government. This is especially true as it mainly focuses on the repair of existing ships and not the construction of new vessels which has complicated and stymied the AUKUS deal.

### *Sustainability*

South Korea and Japan working together on a critical aspect of security considerations in the region outside of bilateral agreement, but of tangible impact and importance with the U.S. fleet makes the policy difficult to exit from based on a political regime change or the ebbs and flows of Korea-Japan relations. This somewhat 'forced' long-standing commitment to a shared project requiring extensive communication and collaboration would necessarily build a degree of confidence between Korea and Japan and benefit the trilateral security relations. However, there is a risk associated with the United States being the center of this policy and its sustainability as, depending on the political regime of the U.S., this agreement to collaborate on shipbuilding might suddenly end if the U.S. foreign policy no longer sees the Pacific region as of central security importance. The likelihood that this agreement would face similar production constraints, issues, and delays like the AUKUS deal has, however, is less likely as this agreement's purpose is not the construction of new ships but rather collaborating on the maintenance of existing fleets. However, given the largely bipartisan agreement on the concern surrounding the rise of China, the instability of North Korea, and for Naval build up in general, there is a degree of stability granted to this policy. Thus, the U.S. creating a shipbuilding collaboration between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea would *rate as a 'Medium'* on the sustainability criteria.

### **Outcomes Matrix**

	<b>Status Quo</b>	<b>Resolving Historical Grievances</b>	<b>Shipbuilding Collaboration</b>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	High	Medium	High
<b>Administrative Feasibility</b>	High	Low	High

<b>Sustainability</b>	Low	Low	Medium
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## Recommendation

Based on the analysis of the three proposed policy alternatives, I recommend the USFK pursue **Alternative 3: South Korean and Japanese investment into and collaboration on U.S. Naval Shipbuilding**. As Alternative 2, is rated lower on every criterion than Alternative 1 and 3, despite seeking to address root causes of the Korea-Japan conflict it is not the recommended policy though it would be something of value to pursue. The question then becomes a comparison between the recommended Alternative 3 and Alternative 1: The Status Quo.

Both are rated as having high efficacy in strengthening the U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral alliance as they both accomplish the four critical components of developing confidence in trilateral ties of: 1) mutually shared interests, concerns, and goals, 2) demonstrated commitment from all parties -- especially the United States, 3) deepening interoperability and interconnected operations, and 4) clear evidence of economic, political, and security benefits.

In terms of administrative feasibility, Alternative 1 and Alternative 3 both rate as 'High.' Alternative 1, being the Status Quo, is already thoroughly supported and currently well-implemented by various branches of federal government without signs of an overburdening or unmanageability of the policy efforts following the Camp David Summit. Alternative 3, has precedence in partnerships like AUKUS which created a multinational construction program between Australia, the U.K., and the U.S. for guided-missile destroyers. It also has precedence in the region, with the U.S. individually considering and engaging in the early stages of collaborating in shipbuilding and maintenance efforts (Hendrix, 2023; Austal, n.d.; Australia Announces, n.d.).

Sustainability is where Alternative 3 prevails against Alternative 1, however, holding a 'Medium' rating as opposed to Alternative 1's 'Low' rating. This is because an interdependent shipbuilding agreement and investment is something largely beyond the scope and inconsistent streams of politics and societal sentiments. Conversely, current Alternative 1's status quo of annual conferences and trilateral agreements pledging cooperation can be relatively easily exited by any of the three nations and similar agreements overthrown countless times in the past.

Therefore, with a high efficacy rating, and medium rating for administrative feasibility, and a medium rating for sustainability, Alternative 3: U.S.-Korea-Japan collaboration and mutual investment in in shipbuilding efforts would be the optimal policy to develop strong and lasting trilateral relations.

## **Implementation**

In following the model of how AUKUS was developed and implemented -- though this trilateral collaboration is less complicated and resource intensive as it is not proposing the construction of entirely new vessels -- there are various executive led, informal exchanges between powers that must occur prior to any need or involvement of the legislative bodies of each of the nations (Fact Sheet: Implementation AUKUS, 2022). For AUKUS, this was the agreement signed on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, where Australia, UK, and the U.S. agreed on an 18-month consultation period to identify “the optimal pathway for Australia to acquire this (submarine) capability” (Fact Sheet: Trilateral AUKUS, 2023). The U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral collaboration, though already in talks bilaterally, would likely require a similar consultation period to determine the specificities of the collaboration.

Once an optimal path towards shipbuilding collaboration is determined U.S. Congressional approval is necessary. For AUKUS, that came through H.R.2670 which became Public Law No: 118-31 or the ‘National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024’ introduced on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and becoming law on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 (H.R.2670, 2024). The act outlined substantial provisions for the AUKUS program – listing the UK and Australia as ‘priorities’ in U.S. military sales, exempting them from controls and standards, expedited export licenses for advanced technologies, authorized the sale of Virginia Class submarines, added Australia and the UK to the Defense Production Act, permitted Australian maintenance of U.S. submarines, and more (Text of H.R.2670, 2024; Passage of Priority, 2023).

Implementation for the U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral collaboration would likely follow a similar structure in which after the consultation period to determine best practices, Congress would determine the provisions and allowances granted for the partnership in a bill that -- after a few months in the legislative process -- is hopefully passed and emerges as a law. Another step that slightly complicates this process, however, is the need to amend the Jones Act which currently restricts the ability of foreign, private shipyards to perform the required yearly overhaul of vessels (Hicks, 2023). While this legislative change to allow Japanese and Korean shipyards to perform these repairs and overhauls is not impossible or even unlikely, it is another administrative step that would further delay this process. These congressional and legislative delays increase the risk of potentially missing the current window of opportunity present in the improved relations and unprecedented dialogue and trilateral collaboration between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan that might unexpectedly close in any given moment.

Additionally, there might be further barriers from opponents to this change which include domestic shipbuilders and Naval leaders who oppose the outsourcing of naval shipbuilding, arguing that it weakens and undermines U.S industry (Outsourcing Navy, 2024). U.S. shipyards have made repeated requests for comprehensive policy overhaul and funding support for the past several years which have largely gone unmet, with several U.S. shipyards closing as a result despite intense backlogs in shipbuilding programs of up to three years (Harper, 2024; Larter,

2024). Despite these potential challenges that a U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral shipbuilding collaboration policy might face, however, there are substantial steps already in place and sufficient motivation to push this policy forward through legislative barriers and a precedent is international shipbuilding collaboration set by AUKUS to smooth the path towards implementation.

### **Conclusion**

Without the context of historical grievances between the two countries, bilateral relations of Japan and South Korea post World War Two make little logical sense. As two of the strongest democracies in the Asian region with united political systems, economic interests, similar cultural values, and a shared ally and security partner in the United States one would expect South Korea and Japan to be close partners – especially given the instability and various tensions in East Asia currently with the rise of a belligerent China and dangerous North Korea. However, with a history instead of lawsuits, blacklists, political withdrawal, conflict, and more, despite the wishes and urges of the United States, South Korea and Japan have yet to develop a strong and sustainable alliance due to colonial historical grievances. This bilateral conflict has prevented the formation of a strong and sustainable trilateral alliance between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan that is becoming increasingly critical due to growing geopolitical tensions. The recommended policy alternative of a trilateral collaboration on shipbuilding would be an effective first step in building confidence in the bilateral South Korea and Japan relationship and the trilateral U.S.-ROK-Japan capabilities.

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