

## **Chapter 7**

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### **Japan**

# **The US-Japan Alliance Amid Uncertainty**

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With the victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential election of November 2016, greater uncertainty was predicted for the security environment of the Asia-Pacific region, including the US-Japan alliance. During the election campaign, Trump suggested that he would approve Japan's nuclear armament and withdraw US forces from Japan. This had the potential to overthrow the traditional structure of the US-Japan alliance, under which Japan aims to protect its national security and expand its regional and global role while the United States continues to provide extended deterrence and maintain its military presence in the region.

After the inauguration of President Trump, however, the new administration has continued to emphasize the importance of the US-Japan alliance as previous administrations. In addition to the deterioration of the North Korea situation, this is due to the growing geopolitical importance of the US-Japan alliance with the rise of China, the key persons selected by the Trump administration to implement its security policies, and the approach of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who placed great emphasis on personal communication with President Trump. By maintaining its close alliance relationship with the Trump administration, Japan is required to play the role of leading the United States toward a more constructive foreign policy.

In 2017, North Korea continued to ramp up its provocations, such as the test-firing of ballistic missiles and conducting of nuclear tests. In response, the United States and Japan have strengthened their deterrent capabilities through: (1) close and seamless coordination, including joint exercises and warning and surveillance activities; (2) cooperation based on Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security; and (3) coordination among Japan, the United States, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). To prepare for more provocations by North Korea, it is necessary to enhance deterrence and further strengthen response capabilities based on the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation and on joint planning. The improvement of damage limitation capability including the defense of US bases and infrastructure in Japan will also be important.

The Trump administration has continued to strengthen the approach of promoting the security of the region through the US-Japan alliance. As well as enhancing the presence of the alliance through close coordination between Japan and the United States in Southeast Asia in particular, Japan and the United States have conducted joint exercises with other countries in the region and provided

capacity building support. At the Japan-US summit meeting in November 2017, the United States confirmed that it would cooperate in promoting the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” advocated by Japan. “Minilateral” cooperation such as the tripartite alliances among Japan, the US and Australia and among Japan, the US and India have also continued to be enhanced. In particular, to promote the United States’ engagement in the region, it will be necessary for Japan to take further initiatives towards the strengthening and expansion of its alliance network.

## **1. The Trump Administration and the US-Japan Alliance**

### **(1) Japan’s Expanding Role within the US-Japan Alliance**

Since the Second World War, and particularly since the 1970s, Japan has expanded its role in the alliance quantitatively, qualitatively, and geographically. The United States, on the other hand, has made continuous defense commitments to Japan and the region in response to changes in the international environment. For instance, the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation announced in 1978, which had been formulated in accordance with the international situation following the rapprochement between the United States and China in 1972, confirmed the United States’ continuing defense commitment to Japan. The guidelines clearly described the joint operations to be conducted by the two countries in response to an armed attack against Japan. On the other hand, the Guidelines also stated that Japan, along with the United States, would conduct joint maritime operations for the defense of surrounding waters and the protection of sea lines of communication, and that Japan would “primarily conduct” antisubmarine operations and operations for the protection of ships in surrounding waters.<sup>1)</sup>

Following the reconsideration of the significance of the US-Japan alliance in the post-Cold War world, the Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security issued in April 1996 stated that the United States would maintain a force of about 100,000 forward-deployed military personnel. The Declaration also stated that the two sides would begin “studies on bilateral cooperation in dealing with situations that may emerge in the areas surrounding Japan and which will have an important influence on the peace and security of Japan.” It further confirmed that, together with the United States, Japan would contribute to the resolution of problems both in the Asia-Pacific region and on a global scale.<sup>2)</sup> The Guidelines formulated in the following year in response to the Joint Declaration provided for Japan’s

logistical support for the US Armed Forces in “situations in areas surrounding Japan” and stated that Japan would also cooperate with the United States for “the creation of a more stable international security environment.”<sup>3)</sup> Following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, these activities expanded into the global arena. In addition to supplying fuel to US and other armed forces conducting minesweeping operations in the Indian Ocean, Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF) conducted humanitarian and reconstruction assistance operations in Samawah after the Iraq War.

In the Legislation for Peace and Security (referred to below as “Security Legislation”) formulated in an increasingly severe security environment around Japan, “situations in areas surrounding Japan” was changed to “situations that will have an important influence on Japan’s peace and security.” Geographical restrictions on Japan’s logistical support for the United States in such situations were effectively removed and the types of support were expanded. Furthermore, through the partial approval of the exercise of the right of collective self-defense in “situations posing threats to the survival of the nation,” it became possible under certain conditions for Japan to conduct support operations for armed forces of the United States and other countries even if Japan itself was not subjected to direct attack.<sup>4)</sup> The new 2015 Guidelines formulated at the same time as the Security Legislation confirmed that the United States would provide extended deterrence through “the full range of capabilities, including US nuclear forces” and maintain the capability to employ forward-deployed forces in the Asia-Pacific region. It also outlined the actions to be taken by the SDF in the event of an armed attack on a country other than Japan and stated that Japan and the United States would cooperate closely to ensure regional and global peace and security.<sup>5)</sup>

While assuming that the United States provided extended deterrence, the alliance’s asymmetric division of labor, often described as an “exchange between manpower and facilities,” thus gradually changed into a more mutual relationship. This became even more so as Japan’s security role and obligations expanded from its own defense to the Asia-Pacific region and to the world. Behind this transformation lay the growing need for Japan to play a more appropriate role in accordance with its economic growth and the increasing direct threat to Japan itself in the post-Cold War world. As a result, while adhering to Article 9 of the Constitution and the US-Japan Security Treaty, Japan has shifted direction to playing a more independent role in response to “gray zone situations” that are

neither attacks using conventional forces nor emergencies in peacetime. This has resulted in both reducing the burden of the United States and undermining criticism that Japan was “enjoying a free ride,” and it has come to be hoped that this will further strengthen the United States’ commitment to Japan and the region, including the provision of extended deterrence.

## **(2) The Trump Administration’s Alliance Policy**

The advent of President Trump following his victory in the US presidential election of November 2016 had the potential to overturn the basic framework of role sharing in the US-Japan alliance outlined above. Since before he became President, in election debates and other forums, Trump had alluded to Japan’s trade imbalance with the United States and accused it of attempting to devalue its currency. In the area of security too, he demanded that Japan bear the full cost of the US Armed Forces based on its soil, hinting that the United States would withdraw its troops if Japan could not do so. He also suggested that the United States might permit Japan’s nuclear armament in order to reduce its burden in the defense of Japan.<sup>6)</sup> Such views were a clear departure from the traditional arrangement whereby Japan expanded its role within the alliance while the United States continuously provided extended deterrence.

However, since the inauguration of the new US administration in January 2017, such criticisms of Japan have faded into the background and, for the time being, the United States’ alliance policy seems to be returning to traditional alignments. At the first US-Japan defense ministers meeting after the start of the Trump administration, Secretary of Defense James Mattis made no mention of increasing Japan’s burden of the costs of stationing US troops in Japan. On the contrary, at the press conference after the meeting, he surprised Japanese participants by praising Japan as a “model of cost sharing” among its allies.<sup>7)</sup> Furthermore, both Secretary of Defense Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declared that the Senkaku Islands fall under Article 5 of the US-Japan Security Treaty and reconfirmed the United States’ obligation to defend the islands.<sup>8)</sup> Following the US-Japan summit meeting held after President Trump’s inauguration, the two leaders agreed to further strengthen the bonds of the US-Japan alliance and affirmed that “Japan and the United States will play a leading role in ensuring peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the world.”<sup>9)</sup>

The joint statement issued after the summit meeting, beginning with the

declaration that “the unshakable US-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of peace, prosperity, and freedom in the Asia-Pacific region,” affirmed that “the US commitment to defend Japan through the full range of US military capabilities, both nuclear and conventional, is unwavering” and that “amid an increasingly difficult security environment in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States will strengthen its presence in the region and Japan will assume larger roles and responsibilities in the alliance.” It further stated that “the United States and Japan will continue to implement and expand defense cooperation as laid out in the 2015 US-Japan Defense Guidelines” and that they will “further enhance cooperation with allies and partners in the region.”<sup>10)</sup> At a joint US-Japan press conference hurriedly convened the day after the summit meeting in response to North Korea’s firing of a ballistic missile towards the Sea of Japan, President Trump stated that the United States is “behind Japan, our great ally, 100 percent.”<sup>11)</sup>

The Joint Statement of the Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (“2+2”), held in August, provided more details regarding the “larger roles and responsibilities” of Japan referred to in the joint statement issued after the summit meeting. According to this joint statement, while the United States “remains committed to deploying its most advanced capabilities to Japan,” Japan intends to “expand its role in the alliance and augment its defense capabilities, with an eye on the next planning period for its Mid-Term Defense Program.” To achieve these objectives, the ministers urged their staffs to “accelerate implementation of the 2015 Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation and pursue additional types of cooperation under Japan’s Legislation for Peace and Security” and to “explore new and expanded activities in various areas, such as Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), training and exercises, research and development, capacity building, and the joint/shared use of facilities.”<sup>12)</sup>

Since some of these initiatives have been pursued since the time of the Obama administration, they did not necessarily begin under the Trump administration. In this sense, the role that Japan is to play in the

US-Japan alliance under the Trump administration, rather than being viewed as something new, should be interpreted as a further extension of the role in Japan's defense and the region that has arisen through the steady implementation of the Guidelines and the Security Legislation determined at the time of the Obama administration. Specifically, as also stated in the 2+2 Joint Statement, Japan will take on a larger role than before in such areas as bilateral planning, air and missile defense, noncombatant evacuation operations, defense equipment and technology cooperation, intelligence cooperation and information security. This can be expected both to further correct the "asymmetry" of the US-Japan alliance and to lead to the maintenance and strengthening of the reliability of the United States' extended deterrence and its presence in the region.

Several factors can be considered as reasons for this adherence to conventional alliance policy under the Trump administration. The most crucial factor is the geopolitical importance of the US-Japan alliance for the United States. In Japan there are approximately 40,000 personnel of the US Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines and 78 US Armed Forces facilities and areas (excluding the facilities and areas used for limited periods of time according to Article II, 4(b) of the Status of Forces Agreement), and Japan is said to bear most of the cost of stationing those troops (facility maintenance costs, labor costs, etc.). Furthermore, large amounts of logistical support materials are stockpiled at these facilities, making them important bases that provide support for US operations in the region. In particular, the United States Forces Japan (USFJ) play a decisively important role not only in confronting China and North Korea, but also in maintaining the stability of the regions (where the United States has strategic interests) from the South China Sea to the Middle East, the Indian Ocean and Africa. With the recent undermining of international order based on the "rule of law" particularly through China's unilateral alteration of the status quo by force in the East China Sea and South China Sea, the geopolitical value of the US-Japan alliance has further increased as a presence guaranteeing this order. It is highly likely that President Trump recognized this fact after he came to power.

Secondly, the human factor should be emphasized. The persons appointed to the key security positions in the Trump administration (such as Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Herbert Raymond McMaster, and John Kelly, who succeeded Reince Priebus as White House chief of staff) all place emphasis on the international role of the



United States and its relationship with the US-Japan alliance. They are also said to be deeply trusted by President Trump.<sup>13)</sup> In particular, Secretary of Defense Mattis stated at his confirmation hearing at the US Senate Committee on Armed Services that “the Pacific theater remains a priority in my mind.”<sup>14)</sup> In fact, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) were the first foreign destinations visited by the secretary of state after his appointment. Mattis stressed the importance of the US-Japan alliance at the IISS Asian Security Summit (Shangri-La Dialogue) and has clearly taken the position of emphasizing the involvement of the United States in Asia, as shown by his criticism of China’s build-up of military facilities on artificial islands in the South China Sea. From this it can be anticipated that the US-Japan alliance will continue to be strengthened, provided that Secretary of Defense Mattis and the National Security Council (NSC) maintain a certain influence there.

The third factor is the approach of the Abe government to President Trump. In November 2016, immediately after Donald Trump’s victory in the presidential election, Prime Minister Abe visited the new US president at his home in New York. In addition to being the first foreign head of state to hold discussions with him after his election, Prime Minister Abe has made efforts to forge a relationship of trust with President Trump, such as playing 27 holes of golf with him during his visit to the United States in February 2017. On the economic front, Japan proposed the launching of a US-Japan economic dialogue between Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Taro Aso, and US Vice President Mike Pence, and the first economic dialogue meeting was held in Tokyo in April. These initiatives of the Abe government can be said to have played an important role in removing President Trump’s misunderstandings concerning Japan and in detaching security policy from economic policy.<sup>15)</sup> This seems even clearer from his speeches and other statements after his inauguration, in which President Trump often praised Prime Minister Abe, in contrast with the temporary worsening of US-Australia relations concerning an agreement on the acceptance of refugees and President Trump’s strong dissatisfaction with the president of the ROK concerning its response to trade problems and North Korea.

### **(3) Japan’s Increasingly Important Role**

While the US-Japan alliance has been maintained and strengthened under the Trump administration, there still exist certain unstable elements. If there is no

conspicuous progress in the reduction of the US trade deficit, it is quite possible that President Trump might resume his criticism of Japan regarding this issue. In fact, it is reported that President Trump has again expressed his dissatisfaction with trade with Japan. For example, at a meeting with Japanese and American business leaders during his visit to Japan in November, he commented, “Right now, our trade with Japan is not fair, and it’s not open.”<sup>16)</sup> Considering that the extent of US-Japan trade friction has diminished significantly compared to the 1980s and 1990s and that China, not Japan, is now the main target of US criticism, Japan may not need to worry unduly about this problem. However, it may be necessary to exercise a certain caution regarding President Trump’s tendency to link economic issues with security issues, such as his urging of Japan to increase its purchases of military equipment from the United States.<sup>17)</sup>

While he advocates an “America-first” policy, there is little sign of a consistent policy or principle in President Trump’s approach, which is often described as “transactional.” Accordingly, even if the Trump administration were to maintain a policy of placing importance on Asia, this does not completely eliminate the concern that it might “do a deal” with a potentially hostile nation for short-term gain. The first National Security Strategy of the Trump administration released in December 2017 stressed that US security policy is ultimately founded on freedom and democracy by advocating “principled realism.”<sup>18)</sup> Nonetheless, it remains unclear how much President Trump himself is restrained by those principles.

Another cause for concern is that, compared with previous US administrations, there are few officials in the Trump administration who are Asia specialists. The Trump administration finally announced the Pentagon appointments of Randall Schriver, a former deputy assistant secretary of state, as assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs in October 2017 and of Susan Thornton as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs in December. However, the influence of the so-called “Japan hands” who had strong connections with Japanese political and business circles and were deeply familiar with Japanese politics and security, has clearly decreased with the advent of the Trump administration. While it has strengthened its commitment to Asia in the military domain in the name of “peace through strength,” the Trump administration has also tended not to emphasize the international order based on free trade and multilateralism as much as the Obama administration. This is reflected in its withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Agreement, an

international framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It is still not known what impact these policies will have on the order in Asia as a whole.

In this sense too, it is all the more important for the security of both Japan and the region that Japan actively seeks mutual understanding with the US government through the close relationships of the US-Japan alliance. In addition to its external function of deterring potential enemy nations, the alliance has the internal function of influencing the ally's decision making and of restraining and controlling its behavior.<sup>19)</sup> Accordingly, based on the close US-Japan alliance, Japan is required to lead US policy so that it moves in a positive direction for Japan and the international order as a whole.

To this end, it will be necessary to enhance Japan's voice in its relationship with the United States by further strengthening its role in the alliance. It is also important that Japan steps up its efforts to ensure that the United States maintains its involvement in the region and extended deterrence by strengthening its cooperation with other US allies such as the ROK and Australia. This will serve to make the US-Japan alliance more "certain" in a regional situation of increasing uncertainty, thereby contributing to the security not only of Japan but of the region as a whole. Under the Trump administration, Japan's role in the US-Japan alliance has become more important than ever.

## **2. Response to the Crisis on the Korean Peninsula**

### **(1) Threat of a "New Dimension"**

The situation on the Korean Peninsula in 2017 could be described as the "third nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula," following on from the first nuclear crisis from 1993, when North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to 1994 and the second nuclear crisis, which began in 2002 with North Korea's nuclear development plan using highly enriched uranium. At the beginning of 2017, missile tests by North Korea were in a state of abeyance, with the last test being conducted in October 2016. However, after the inauguration of President Trump, North Korea fired two Pukkusong-2 missiles, a new solid-fuel ballistic missile, in February followed by the simultaneous firing of four ballistic missiles thought to be Scud-ER missiles in March. After that, North Korea conducted ballistic missile firing tests almost every month until November. From May to September, North Korea conducted tests of new-type ballistic missiles

thought to be intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM) or inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBM). Among these, in the tests of August and September, the missiles passed over Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean. In September, North Korea further stepped up its provocative actions, conducting its sixth and largest-ever nuclear test.

In the first nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, the United States increased its forces around the peninsula and is said to have been close to taking military action, drawing up a detailed emergency operations plan for the bombing of the nuclear facility in Yongbyon.<sup>20)</sup> In response to North Korea's recent successive missile firings and nuclear tests, the United States has also increased military pressure on North Korea by dispatching a nuclear aircraft carrier to waters near the Korean Peninsula and flying B-1B bombers in international airspace east of North Korea. At the same time, pressure on North Korea from the international community has reached unprecedented levels through the strengthening of sanctions based on UN Security Council resolutions in response to its successive missile and nuclear tests. Needless to say, an attack by North Korea on the ROK or Japan could cause immense damage if a conflict actually broke out on the Korean Peninsula. This is why the United States has maintained a restrained response. By sending the message that, so long as North Korea's leaders do not start a war, the United States will not seek regime change, Secretary of State Tillerson has sought to instill a certain peace of mind on the North Korean side, opening up the possibility of dialogue.<sup>21)</sup>

On the other hand, President Trump has emphasized a confrontational posture, reflected in his comment on social media that the Secretary of State's negotiations with North Korea were "a waste of time."<sup>22)</sup> Furthermore, Secretary of Defense Mattis stated that "all options are on the table," including the use of military force, and that these options included a way of ensuring that the ROK capital of Seoul would not be put at risk in the event of retaliatory strikes by North Korea.<sup>23)</sup> The options alluded to by the United States, apart from a preemptive attack on North Korea, include measures to intercept incoming missiles. Yet it has been pointed out that the situation might quickly escalate depending on North Korea's response to such measures. Since it is highly unlikely that the United States would ever permit North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons, particularly considering the possibility of their spread to terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or to other countries, it would not be easy to find any

point of compromise even if dialogue were to commence between the United States and North Korea. It has also been argued that, as long as it remains difficult to find a solution either through the use of military force or dialogue, Japan, the United States, and the ROK should prepare to implement a new “containment” strategy.<sup>24)</sup>

For Japan, a more serious problem is that North Korea’s nuclear and missile technologies have significantly advanced since the time of the first nuclear crisis. As far as missiles are concerned, in addition to the improvement of accuracy and increase in range, North Korea is thought to have made advances in surprise attack capability and diversification of launch systems through the improvement of launch technology, including the development of solid fuel, and in missile survivability through the development of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) and mobile launch pads. In particular, it has been pointed out that the aim of simultaneous firing test of four missiles in March 2017, in addition to indicating a simultaneous launch capability that can realize a saturation missile attack by North Korea, was to demonstrate an improvement in accuracy by having the four missiles land at points close to each other. Furthermore, it was confirmed that, since the IRBM and ICBM missiles launched every month from May to November were fired at higher angles and altitudes than usual, they achieved a “lofted trajectory” that would make them more difficult to intercept.

North Korea has also made significant progress in the miniaturization of its nuclear warheads, and it is said to be only a matter of time before it can deploy ballistic missiles carrying nuclear warheads that are within range of both Japan and United States. North Korea has clearly listed as potential targets of attack not only the ROK but also US bases in Japan, the Japanese mainland, and even the US mainland. It has been noted that if North Korea were to possess an ICBM that could reach the US mainland, this might actually increase the likelihood of armed conflict using conventional weapons—the so-called “stability-instability paradox”—as a result of inducing the “decoupling” of alliance countries and the establishment of a system of mutual nuclear deterrence.<sup>25)</sup>

As examined in the previous section, the United States has repeatedly emphasized its provision of extended deterrence to Japan, including its nuclear capability. In view of the presence of USFJ and the strategic value of the US-Japan alliance, it is of course unlikely that the credibility of US extended deterrence for Japan would be suddenly undermined if North Korea were to possess ICBM capable of

reaching the US mainland. Since it is not easy to penetrate the missile defense network on the US mainland, it has also been noted that North Korea's acquisition of limited ICBM strike capability would not be a "game changer."<sup>26</sup> However, it cannot be denied that North Korea, having gained excessive confidence from its possession of nuclear weapons, might step up smaller-scale provocations, being less concerned than before about US retaliation or escalation of the conflict. There is also a greater danger that a low-level conflict arising from North Korea's provocations and responses to them could escalate into a high-level conflict through a misunderstanding by one or both sides. In this sense, the North Korean threat has undoubtedly entered a new phase and a different dimension.

## **(2) Response of Japan and the United States**

The response of the United States and Japan to the North Korean threat and Japan's role in that response have both developed significantly since the first nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. At the time of the first crisis, the United States is said to have submitted to Japan a 1,900-item list of requests for support for the US Armed Forces in an emergency. However, Japan was not able to respond positively to most of these requests, since compliance would have involved exercise of the right of collective self-defense, which was prohibited by the Japanese government at the time.<sup>27</sup> Against this background, the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation revised in 1997 stated that, in "situations in areas surrounding Japan," Japan would ensure the US military's temporary use of SDF facilities and civilian airports and ports, as well as providing logistical support, and that the United States and Japan would cooperate in areas such as intelligence gathering, surveillance, and minesweeping. In fiscal 2004, Japan began developing its ballistic missile defense system. Since then it has developed its own multilayered defense system against ballistic missile attacks, including the equipment of Aegis destroyers with ballistic missile response capabilities and the deployment of Patriot PAC-3 missiles.

The enforcement of the above-mentioned Security Legislation enabled the protection in peacetime of "the weapons and other equipment of the United States and other countries' armed forces" engaged in operations for the defense of Japan in coordination with the SDF. The legislation also made it possible, in the event that an emergency on the Korean Peninsula is recognized as a situation that will have an important influence on Japan's peace and security, that the SDF, in

addition to its usual operations, can provide ammunition and “maintenance and fueling of aircraft ready to take off for combat operations” for US armed forces, as well as providing logistical support to the armed forces of other foreign countries. In situations posing threats to the survival of Japan, the legislation has also enabled the SDF to protect US warships engaged in operations to prevent the escalation of a situation or bring it quickly under control, including ships responding to ballistic missile warnings, as well as engaging in minesweeping operations over a wider area. Furthermore, through the partial permission of the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, it is said to have made it legally possible for Japan to conduct close information sharing with the United States and the ROK, such as use of data of the ROK, which possesses many radar or sensor facilities close to North Korea’s missile launch sites.<sup>28)</sup>

The US-Japan response to provocations by North Korea, particularly in recent years, has three characteristics. The first is the enhancement of seamless coordination from peacetime through gray zone situations to emergencies. After each missile launch or nuclear test by North Korea, Prime Minister Abe and President Trump have confirmed each other’s actions in response to the threat by meeting in person or conferring by telephone. According to media reports among other sources, from President Trump’s inauguration up to the time of North Korea’s nuclear test in mid-September, Prime Minister Abe and President Trump have met in person three times and talked on the telephone thirteen times. The number of telephone discussions (thirteen in eight months) is reported to be higher than the total number during the four years of President Obama’s second term.<sup>29)</sup>

In response to the intensification of the situation on the Korean Peninsula, the SDF and US Armed Forces have stepped up their joint exercises and drills in the seas around Japan. In April 2017, the US aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson*, sailing north towards waters near the Korean Peninsula, and destroyers of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) conducted joint exercises in the vicinity of the East China Sea, while aircraft of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) and US Air Force B-1B bombers engaged in joint drills in air space near Kyushu.<sup>30)</sup> In June, two JMSDF destroyers and JASDF F-15 fighters conducted joint exercises with two US Navy aircraft carrier strike groups led by the USS *Carl Vinson* and USS *Ronald Reagan*. In November, two JMSDF destroyers and JASDF F-15 fighters again conducted joint exercises with US Navy forces, including three aircraft carriers, in the Sea of Japan, East China Sea, and waters and airspace

around Okinawa.<sup>31)</sup> At the time, it was unusual for SDF vessels and fighters to take part in exercises together with US aircraft carriers. Other new types of exercise have been held with the aim of strengthening coordination between the SDF and the US Armed Forces, including PAC-3 missile defense drills at US bases in Japan in August and the exceptionally long joint naval exercises by the JMSDF and US Navy held over 20 days from September to October.

These drills and exercises are seen as part of the flexible deterrent options (FDO) incorporated in the new Guidelines released in April 2015. According to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, the aims of FDO are to avoid a crisis by correctly conveying one's intentions and decisions to the enemy through diplomatic, informational, military and economic means or, if a crisis occurs, quickly reducing tension or showing a way to resolving the crisis by strengthening deterrence towards further incursions. The military options among FDO include enhancement of reconnaissance activities, display of military force, advance deployment of equipment, and deployment of a carrier strike group or surface action group to the region. These are all being considered as actions to be taken jointly by the United States and Japan from peacetime.<sup>32)</sup> The coordination of joint exercises is being conducted through the Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM) established in the new Guidelines. From this viewpoint too, it is apparent that seamless coordination between the United States and Japan has been further strengthened.

The second distinctive characteristic of the US-Japan response is this strengthening of coordination under the new Security Legislation. Regarding the protection of weapons and other equipment of the United States and other countries' armed forces mentioned in the previous section, the operational guidelines stipulating the specific operations that could be conducted together with the United States were determined by the National Security Council of Japan in December 2016 and these operations become possible. With the enforcement of the new Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) between the United States and Japan in April, it was reported that supply ships of the JMSDF have been conducting refueling missions for US Navy Aegis ships watching out for North Korea ballistic missile launches in the Sea of Japan.<sup>33)</sup> Although the SDF had previously refueled US ships engaged in antiterrorist operations in accordance with the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law enacted in October 2001, the conclusion of the Security Legislation and other related domestic legislation and the new ACSA mechanism has made it possible for Japan to refuel US Navy ships



without recourse to a Special Measures Law. According to media and other reports, the SDF has been conducting training in the rescue of US nationals together with Japanese nationals since the fall of 2016. If these reports are true, it can be assumed that steady advances are being made in the strengthening of US-Japan coordination based on the Security Legislation.<sup>34)</sup>

The third distinctive characteristic is coordination among Japan, the United States, and the ROK. Based on the Trilateral Information Sharing Agreement (TISA) among Japan, the United States and South Korea concluded in December 2014 and the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), which was automatically extended in August 2017, the three countries have been sharing detailed information on North Korea's nuclear and missile development. In response to the intensification of the situation on the Korean Peninsula, close tripartite discussions have been held since the beginning of 2017, as reflected in the joint statement issued after the summit meeting between the United States, Japan, and the ROK held in July 2017—the first joint statement to be issued by the three countries for fifteen years. It has also been confirmed that trilateral cooperation will be implemented not only at the summit level but also among the three countries' respective defense authorities in order to exert “maximum pressure” on North Korea.<sup>35)</sup> Regarding trilateral joint exercises, the three countries conducted their first joint antisubmarine exercises in April 2017 and their sixth joint missile tracking drills in December.

Amid these developments, the new Moon Jae-in government elected in May 2017 in effect abandoned the course Moon had urged as leader of the opposition, such as canceling the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system and revising the GSOMIA with Japan, and changed direction to a more realistic security policy. Although the overall picture of the Moon Jae-in government's policy towards Japan is still unclear, it appears to be maintaining the “two-track strategy” of separating history-related issues from security and other policies. As long as the ROK government continues with this approach, the continuous strengthening of security cooperation between Japan and the ROK, as well as trilateral cooperation between them and the United States, can be expected.

### **(3) Future Tasks**

Amid this steady deepening of coordination between the United States and Japan, and among the United States, ROK, and Japan, North Korea has repeatedly

launched ballistic missiles, including ICBMs, and conducted nuclear tests. As of December 2017, there was no sign of any abatement of this tense situation. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the FDO-based US-Japan deterrence structure is not functioning properly. As we have seen, FDO is not limited to military deterrence but is a comprehensive concept incorporating economics and information. What makes it effective is the appropriate combination of military means with the nonmilitary means of economic sanctions and international criticism against North Korea. However, in order for the United States and Japan to increase pressure on North Korea and prevent further provocations, the further strengthening of their military response is required.

Specifically, in addition to the enhancement of deterrence through US demonstration of its nuclear capabilities and close US-Japan dialogue and coordination concerning extended deterrence, it will be necessary to improve joint crisis response capabilities through the formulation and updating of the joint operations plans stipulated in the Guidelines. It is also essential to convey this unity between Japan and the United States, including the enhancement of capabilities, as a message to North Korea. Rather than reflecting a strong inclination of the United States and Japan towards war, this will give the US-Japan deterrence structure greater credibility and is important in nipping any potential crisis in the bud.

It will also be necessary to improve attack response capabilities so that any missile or other attack by North Korea is rendered ineffective or the damage is limited. Among these, missile defense capability is of great importance. In order to radically improve missile defense capability, the Japanese government has decided to acquire two land-based Aegis missile defense systems (Aegis Ashore) that can constantly and sustainably defend Japan from ballistic missile attacks, which will be deployed at Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) facilities.<sup>36)</sup> It is said that the two Aegis Ashore systems will be sufficient to cover the whole of Japan and that they will have the effect of reducing the burden of the destroyers currently deployed for missile defense. In addition, under the system of cooperation with the United States, the Ministry of Defense is promoting the development of SM-3 Block IIA interceptors, increase of the number of Aegis ships with ballistic missile defense capabilities, and modification of existing Aegis ships to fully equip them with ballistic missile defense systems.

With regard to the enhancement of damage limitation capability, in addition to the strengthening of Tokyo metropolitan area defense functions and the defense of

nuclear power facilities, improvement of the resiliency of US military bases in Japan is an important task. Specifically, it has been pointed out that it will be necessary to construct underground facilities and thick concrete runways that can withstand a North Korean missile attack, enhance recovery capabilities in the aftermath of a missile attack, and develop a system for using other air bases or civilian airports in the event of an attack on key US military bases such as Kadena, Iwakuni, and Misawa.<sup>37)</sup> Another important task to consider is the development of a system for defense of society as a whole against not only nuclear weapons or missiles, but also the new threats of biological weapons and cyberattacks (including, as well as strengthening resiliency, the examination of means of response if such weapons are used).

Coordination and the allocation of roles among the United States, Japan, and the ROK is also becoming increasingly important. In addition to the enhancement of information sharing and interoperability mentioned above, the joint development by the three countries of a missile defense system and crisis management system will lead both to the creation of “full-spectrum deterrence of North Korea from lower-level to high-level contingencies” and undermine North Korea’s intention of promoting alienation among the three countries.<sup>38)</sup> It will also be important to keep the approaches of the three allies to North Korea in step and to ensure that they share the same vision for the future unification of the Korean Peninsula. In their current approaches to North Korea, there is a certain difference in degree of enthusiasm between the United States and Japan, which place strong emphasis on exerting pressure, and the ROK, which is seeking dialogue. This difference in enthusiasm ultimately springs from a difference in the long-term vision of how the parties view the future of the Korean Peninsula. In this sense too, reconciling the long-term visions of the United States, Japan, and the ROK and strengthening cooperation towards this goal will be very important in strengthening trilateral coordination in the future.

### **3. Approach to the Region**

#### **(1) Cooperation in Southeast Asia**

Not long after the start of the Trump administration, some commentators expressed fears that, while it emphasized the importance of Northeast Asia, the new administration was showing little interest in Southeast Asia. However, it

appears that the Trump administration has not only maintained US engagement in the same regions that were stressed by the Obama administration, but is even moving in the direction of partially increasing that involvement. In April, Vice President Mike Pence made the first visit to Southeast Asia of a high official of the Trump administration, holding a meeting with the secretary-general of ASEAN. In May, Secretary of State Tillerson met with ASEAN foreign ministers and a summit meeting was held between President Trump and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc. President Trump also had telephone discussions with the leaders of Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand, inviting them to visit the White House.<sup>39)</sup> As a result, meetings were held at the White House with the leaders of both Thailand and Singapore the following October.

Since the beginning, the Trump administration has also shown the posture of continuous engagement in South China Sea issues. As of December 2017, the US Navy conducted four Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) (in May, June, August, and October) in the South China Sea and US Air Force strategic bombers conducted overflights in the South China Sea in June and July. In August, Secretary of Defense Mattis reached an agreement with Vietnam Minister of National Defense Ngo Xuan Lich for the first-ever visit of a US aircraft carrier to a Vietnamese port in 2018.<sup>40)</sup> In November, President Trump attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting in Vietnam and took part in the ASEAN summit meeting held after it in the Philippines, where he again emphasized the continuation of US relations with Southeast Asia and the ASEAN. In his speech in Vietnam, President Trump stressed the importance of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" as Japan had done and indicated a policy of strengthening coordination with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region including Southeast Asia. This demonstrated that Japan's strategy of encouraging US involvement in Asia is yielding results to some extent.<sup>41)</sup>

In order to proceed in step with these US actions, Japan is continuing with its recent efforts to strengthen its presence in the Indo-Pacific region (see Chapter 8 of *East Asian Strategic Review 2017*). Following the dispatch to Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean regions of the JMSDF destroyer JS *Ise* in 2016, the JMSDF's largest destroyer JS *Izumo*, commissioned in March 2015, was sent to the same regions from May to July 2017, engaging in defense exchange activities with other countries in the region. In May, together with its consort ship JS *Sazanami*, *Izumo* took part in an international maritime review celebrating fiftieth anniversary

of the founding of the Republic of Singapore Navy, and in the same month *Izumo* made a port call in Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam as part of the Pacific Partnership mission, holding a seminar on search and rescue procedures.

In June, JS *Izumo* visited Subic Bay in the Philippines, where after welcoming Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on board, it implemented the Japan-ASEAN Ship Rider Program (a program to promote capacity enhancement by inviting on board officers, etc. of ASEAN countries and the ASEAN Secretariat, holding seminars on humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HA/DR) and maritime international law, and demonstrating various drills and exercises).<sup>42)</sup> After that, *Izumo* and *Sazanami* sailed to the Indian Ocean, where they took part in the Malabar joint naval exercise with the United States and India (described below) and conducted goodwill training with Sri Lanka. Apart from these operations, the JMSDF has continued to strengthen defense relationships with other Southeast Asian countries, such as the search and rescue exercises conducted by the JMSDF together with the Philippine Navy in waters around the Philippines in September.

In these ways, Japan and the United States, while enhancing their presence in the Indo-Pacific region, have been steadily stepping up joint operations in the region between the SDF and US Armed Forces. For example, while cruising in the South China Sea, JS *Izumo* and JS *Sazanami* conducted joint cruise exercises four times with a US Navy guided missile destroyer and a littoral combat ship in the South China Sea and in waters around Singapore from May to mid-June. The aircraft carrier USS *Ronald Reagan* also took part in the joint cruise exercises conducted in the South China Sea in June. During the above-mentioned Pacific Partnership mission, ships of the JMSDF and the US Navy made the first-ever joint port visit to Cam Ranh Bay, where they held joint HA/DR exercises with Australian armed forces and others.

In May, the SDF took part in the *Balikatan 2017* US-Philippine joint military exercises, in which US and Philippine armed forces, together with Australian armed forces conducted multilateral HA/DR command post exercises and capacity building support exercises related to humanitarian civilian

support operations (medical program and construction program). This was the SDF's second participation in the *Balikatan* exercises after the first in 2012, and the first time it had taken part in the field of capacity building support.<sup>43)</sup> In the *KAMANDAG 2017* joint military exercises started in 2017 between the United States and Philippines, a JGSDF Central Readiness Regiment from Japan took part and conducted HA/DR command post exercises and humanitarian civilian support operations together with US Marines and the Philippine Marine Corps.

In recent years, the United States and Japan have strengthened their cooperation in the areas of capacity building support and defense equipment and technology cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. In the Joint Statement of the above-mentioned "2+2" Japan-US Security Consultative Committee of August 2017, the Ministers of the two countries affirmed their "intention to further enhance capacity building programs and defense equipment and technology transfers in areas including maritime security, defense institution building, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR)" for Southeast Asian countries and confirmed their shared commitment to launch a "whole-of-government dialogue on maritime security capacity building."<sup>44)</sup> One pillar of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" the United States and Japan agreed to promote at their summit meeting in November was "commitment for peace and stability (capacity building on maritime law enforcement, etc.)."<sup>45)</sup> From this perspective, the United States and Japan are exchanging information on capacity building support and making adjustments in order to avoid the duplication of support categories.

Japan has also continued to step up its operations in the field of defense equipment and technology cooperation. For instance, based on the Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology concluded between Japan and the Philippines in April 2016 and the Defense Ministers' Agreement in May of the same year, two JMSDF TC-90 training aircraft were leased to the Philippines in March 2017.<sup>46)</sup> Following the passage of the revised Self-Defense Forces Law in May 2017, which made possible the provision to other countries of used defense equipment, etc. free of charge or at low cost, Japan decided to switch from leasing a total of five TC-90 training aircraft to the Philippines to providing them free of charge, and the remaining three aircraft are scheduled to be handed over the Philippine Navy in March 2018.<sup>47)</sup> In further promoting defense equipment and technology cooperation with other Southeast Asian countries, active policy coordination between the United States and Japan

will be an important task.

## **(2) Enhancement and Extension of Alliance Networks**

In strengthening their approach to the region, both the United States and Japan have actively promoted trilateral or small-scale multilateral security cooperation, known as “minilateral” cooperation, with the addition of other concerned democratic countries in regions such as Australia and India. As outlined in section 2, while North Korea has been the main subject of cooperation among the United States, Japan and the ROK in recent years, a distinctive objective of cooperation with Australia and India has been the maintenance and development of a more comprehensive “rule of law” or “rules-based order.”

For instance, in the Joint Statement of the Defense Ministers’ Meeting held during the IISS Asian Security Summit (Shangri-La Dialogue), the United States, Japan, and Australia, as well as reiterating their “condemnation in the strongest terms” of North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile development, made it clear that they would step up their efforts to maintain the rule of law and rules-based order, stressing their commitment to “upholding freedom of navigation and other lawful uses of the sea” in the South China Sea and East China Sea and expressing “strong opposition to the use of coercion to unilaterally alter the status quo.” From this viewpoint, Canada joined Japan, the United States, and Australia for the first four-country joint cruise exercises in the South China Sea in June 2017. In August, Japan, the United States and Australia held tripartite ministerial-level talks and the three countries affirmed that they would continue to deepen their cooperation under the Trump administration.

From September to November, Australia implemented *Indo-Pacific Endeavor 2017*, a program in which a fleet of six Australian navy ships conducted exercises in Indo-Pacific sea areas including Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. As the biggest joint task group deployment since 1980, this program is part of a strategy to promote maintenance of the rule of law in the region and is part of ongoing efforts to promote positive relations with regional militaries through dialogue and practical activities.<sup>48)</sup> These kinds of operations are viewed as being promoted in step with the strengthening of the presence of the SDF and US Armed Forces examined in section (1) above. They also reflect the fact that cooperation among Japan, the United States and Australia is being strengthened in the field of defense engagement in the region. It can therefore be expected that opportunities will increase for joint

port calls in Southeast Asian countries in the region by ships of the three allies as well as trilateral exercises or exercises including other countries in the region.

Progress is also being made in cooperation among Japan, the United States, and India. The JMSDF ships JS *Izumo* and JS *Sazanami* which, as mentioned above, sailed to the Indian Ocean after their Southeast Asia visit, took part in the *Malabar 2017* joint exercise with the United States and India for the first time as ships of a host nation in waters east of India from July 10 to 17, conducting antisubmarine, surface warfare and anti-aircraft drills with the US and Indian navies. This was the largest-scale *Malabar* exercise ever conducted. In addition to the participation of the US aircraft carrier USS *Nimitz* and the Indian carrier INS *Vikramaditya*, at least fourteen combat vessels and submarines took part, and both the United States and India dispatched P-8A and P-8I surveillance aircraft.<sup>49)</sup> Together with US-Japan and US-India bilateral cooperation, steady progress is being made in security cooperation among the three countries.

In these ways, as coordination among the United States, Japan, and Australia and among the United States, Japan, and India, has been strengthened, possibilities for strategic dialogue among the four countries have arisen. Although a similar concept was advocated by the United States in the mid-2000s and by Japan under the first Abe government, it did not win the support of Australia and India and ultimately fell through. At the time of the second Abe government, Prime Minister Abe again proposed quadrilateral cooperation as a “democratic security diamond,” but this did not necessarily lead to the formulation of a concrete policy. In recent years, however, India has become more wary of China’s sea incursions and activities near its border and this concept has again come under attention as India has strengthened its bilateral defense cooperation not only with the United States but also with Japan and Australia.<sup>50)</sup> In October 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono expressed Japan’s intention to hold a summit-level dialogue with the foreign ministers of the United States, India, and Australia.<sup>51)</sup> In the Philippine capital of Manila in November, the foreign affairs authorities of the four countries held quadrilateral discussions regarding efforts to uphold an open and free order based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific region.

Thus, coordination with other democratic countries based on the alliance relationship between United States and Japan has been strengthened and this cooperation is being expanded into a trilateral or “minilateral” framework. This kind of cooperation will become increasingly important not only from the



viewpoint of protecting the rule of law and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region, but also from the perspective of promoting the involvement of the United States in the region. While certain concerns have been expressed about the Trump administration among countries in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia, there is still a strong desire for continuing US engagement.<sup>52)</sup> In this context, by promoting the expansion of the alliance network based on its close relationship with the United States, it is possible that Japan may play the role of a bridge linking the United States with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. This is one of the important roles that Japan should play in the present US-Japan alliance.

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