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80 Tac-Hwan Kwak, *Ibid.*, p. 25.

81 Yang Xiyu, "China's Role and Its Dilemmas in the Six Party Talks", in Carla P. Freeman (ed.), No. 16, pp. 185–188.

82 Bong-Geun Jun, "Enough Failure Use Strategic Diplomacy to Denuclearize North Korea", *Global Asia*, 11 (4), Winter 2016, p. 22.

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3 Japan's security pledge in the Korean Peninsula

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Inter-Korea reconciliation versus Japan's scepticism

The situation on the Korean Peninsula has moved rapidly towards reconciliation since the North Korean chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong-un announced, during his 2019 New Year's Day address, the North's participation in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games. Consequently, the South Korean administration of Moon Jae-in, too, has held three summit meetings – in April, May, and September 2018 – with the objective of building a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. It is significant that this thrust towards reconciliation has been achieved despite North Korea not revealing a concrete path to denuclearisation and South Korea's aggressive attitude towards the North, about which the South has often been cautioned by the United States.

In contrast to the positive changes in the inter-Korean relationship, Japan's perception of North Korea as a serious threat has remained consistent. Underlying Japanese concerns about North Korea's denuclearisation talks, in particular, is the deep-rooted distrust of North Korea since the first nuclear crisis in the 1990s. Therefore, Japan has been sceptical about peace on the Korean Peninsula. According to some experts, the situation on the Korean Peninsula was in a flux even after the decision to hold the US-North Korea summit meeting had been taken. Retired vice admiral of the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) Yoji Koda claimed that the United States recognised the threat to Japan and that Japan should prepare for the worst.¹

At the US-North Korea summit meeting in Singapore on June 12, 2018, both countries agreed to denuclearise and improve bilateral relations. It is necessary to note that Complete, Verifiable and Irreversible Denuclearisation (CVID) was not included in the joint statement of the summit talks, deepening the scepticism about North Korea's denuclearisation. Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe, however, has not changed his position on seeking CVID of North Korea. Meanwhile, at a press conference on June 22, Japan's chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga spoke about temporarily stopping the missile protection training drills scheduled nationwide, considering the positive mood following the US-North Korea summit meeting.² On June 28, 2018, the Japanese government downgraded the alert level of the JMSDF's Aegis destroyers against a possible North Korean missile

launch.³ The Terminal-Phase Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC)-3 systems deployed in Hokkaido, Chugoku, and Shikoku regions were also withdrawn on July 30.

Nonetheless, the Japanese response to the inter-Korean summit held in Pyongyang on September 18 and 19 was more cautious compared to that of South Korea. Apart from *Asahi Shimbun*,⁴ Japan's major newspaper editorials after the summit were of the opinion that the future of the denuclearisation talks was uncertain.⁵ Each of them emphasised that inter-Korean cooperation would be possible only after North Korea was completely denuclearised. That tone was dominated by the opinion that neither the left nor the right prioritised the "denuclearisation of North Korea at first".⁶

Moreover, regarding the country's stand on North Korea's denuclearisation, many Japanese experts think that Japan cannot help but maintain a neutral attitude due to its non-involvement strategy in the Korean Peninsula to date. But it is likely that the US and Chinese confrontation will intensify, and a great game among major powers would commence. Therefore, the experts also agree that Japan's strategy for the future must take into consideration such likely scenarios as well.

In this context, the remarks of the president of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) Akihiko Tanaka are representative of the views held by most Japanese experts. According to him, Japan does not have the means to influence the situation on the Korean Peninsula at this time. He further states:

It is important that the international community continues to be interested in the North Korean problem, maintaining, or possibly intensifying, sanctions in case the negotiation fails. Or if denuclearisation progresses and peace comes, we need to prepare for that, too. While strengthening the Japan-US alliance, Japan should further improve the ballistic missile defence. However, rather than making conventional efforts to enhance the ability of the JSDF, including its counter-attacking ability, we must be more imaginative, especially if denuclearisation progresses, considering the promise of the Japan-North Korea Pyongyang Declaration. Unfortunately, discussions in Japan are not progressing as to what kind of blueprints we should draw.⁷

In Japan, there were concerns about the threat posed by the situation on the Korean Peninsula until the spring of 2018. These became less pronounced by the summer of 2018 once the negotiations on the denuclearisation of North Korea started. However, the security dilemma in North-East Asia has further deepened, and each country is struggling to address the military build-up. Therefore, depending on any agreement on North Korea's denuclearisation, the declaration ending the Korean War (1950–1953) and the signing of a peace treaty may lead to a big change in the security architecture of the region that is vital for Japan, including the dismantlement of the United Nations Command (UNC) and the reduction or withdrawal of the United States Forces Korea (USFK). There is a possibility of such an agreement. At the same time, it is fully conceivable that the denuclearisation talks between the United States and North Korea will not be successful, and the military tension that prevailed in 2017 may recur.

The question, therefore, arises: how would Japan respond to these two developments? At first glance, it seems that Japan's hedging strategy may allow it to prepare for contingencies, at least in the near future.

Preparing for contingencies

Improving the ballistic missile defence capability of Japan

In the security architecture of the Korean Peninsula, the spotlight is on the United States and South Korea, which are at the forefront in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), as compared to North Korea and China. Japan's position has been one of support to the United States and South Korea, and it has indirectly contributed to regional security through defensive military power. Japan has avoided taking the initiative on the security structure and active engagement. In any case, there seems a social consensus about the present role of Japan in the Korean Peninsula because of the negative heritage of its colonial past.

At the same time, Japan has enjoyed a strategic advantage because South Korea acts as a buffer on the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, Japan has enhanced its military power under the Japan-US alliance regime. This has enabled the JSDF to build up its defence capabilities with express speed under the principle of exclusive defence, achieve national security, and invest in economic development with the minimum necessary defence burden. In this context, some conservatives in Japan have emphasised the importance of South Korea as an anti-communist breakwater and suggested that Japan should engage more actively with the country. On the other hand, a sense of caution against "involvement in the Korean Peninsula contingency" is also strong and widely shared.⁸

Looking back, following the first nuclear crisis in the 1990s, Japan became a target for North Korea in the Korean Peninsula security structure when it developed the *Nodong*, a single-stage and mobile liquid propellant medium-range ballistic missile. Following the continued development of nuclear and ballistic missiles by North Korea, Japan began to deploy a variety of defensive equipment, with the ability to detect, intercept, and share information. (In a way, the main reason to improve Japan's defence capability has been to strengthen missile defence against the North Korean threat.)

Thus far, only six countries in the world (the United States, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Spain, and Norway) have the Aegis destroyers that play a central role in this missile defence system. Most of these are concentrated in countries in the Asia-Pacific. In addition, the power of the PAC-3 missile interception system was upgraded first in Japan and later in other countries. Not only is the Transportable Radar Surveillance (TPY)-2 (i.e. X-band radar) for detecting ballistic missiles for the US military located in Shariki, Aomori Prefecture, and Kyogamisaki, Kyoto Prefecture, in Japan, but the location of Japan's unique J/FPS-5 ground-based warning control radars is well distributed across the four Japan Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF) bases.⁹ Thus, Japan has high-level missile detection capabilities and a front-line ballistic missile defence against North Korea. Further, these assets have improved Japan's relationship with the US

military, which regularly utilised JASDF's capabilities in the face of the repeated military provocation by North Korea until November 29, 2017, when North Korea last launched an inter-continental ballistic missile, *Hwasong-15*. Moreover, the improved exchange of information with friendly nations (within the context of its alliance with the United States), supported by the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets established in December 2013, has helped bolster Japan's intelligence capacity, too.

Furthermore, in December 2017, the Japanese government decided to deploy the Aegis-Ashore system at two domestic sites. Moreover, once the Standard Missile (SM)-3 Block IIA anti-short- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, which are being jointly developed in Japan and the United States, are installed aboard the existing Japan-US Aegis destroyers, they will cover almost the entire land area of Japan. Cruise missiles and bombers can also be targeted by SM-6 anti-air and anti-surface interceptor missiles launched by the Aegis-Ashore system. It is clear that these are not targeting North Korea, which has no cruise missiles and bombers supported by powerful airpower, but China.¹⁰

Further, in October 2018, the 38th Air Defence Artillery Brigade Headquarters of the US Army were established within the US Army Sagami General Depot in Sagami City, Kanagawa Prefecture. In addition to the three missile defence units of the US Army in Japan, a Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missile unit in Guam is also under the command of the same headquarters.¹¹ The creation of these new military assets and the command system of the US Army is expected to not only improve the ballistic missile defence capability of Japan and the United States but also reduce the burden on maritime forces, centring on the Aegis destroyers of the JMSDF. From the point of view of the Japan-US alliance, it is hypothesised that Japan will become a more important strategic base for the US military, thus strengthening the alliance and its deterrence power.

In terms of the legal system, the passing of the Legislation for Peace and Security in 2015, which allows the JSDF to operate around the Korean Peninsula in support of the US military, marked a significant milestone. In wartime and in peacetime, in addition to providing bases for the US military for moving into the Korean Peninsula, the JSDF is also allowed to use force to protect the weapons of the United States and other allies. Indeed, in May 2017 the JMSDF's *Izumo* (DDH-183) and *Sazanami* (DD-113) were for the first time charged with defending the US Navy cargo ship *Richard E. Byrd* (T-AKE-4). It is obvious that these new actions are necessary for protecting Japan and South Korea.

Changing the consciousness of Japanese citizens

For many people in Japan, North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile development that has been going on since the 1990s was an external matter. This is because the missile impact points were off the coast of Japan, such as in the Sea of Japan, except for the *Gwangmyeongseong-1* on August 31, 1998, and the *Gwangmyeongseong-2* on April 5, 2009, which passed over mainland Japan. And so, it did not seem like a familiar threat. However, since 2016, the threat has

increased significantly, as North Korea's missiles have flown closer to the mainland of Japan. On March 17, 2017, the Japanese government organised the first resident evacuation drill, due to the threat from the ballistic missiles, in Oga City, Akita Prefecture. The government has also ensured improvement in the citizen protection system; emergency messages can now be delivered to the media outlets as well as individual mobile phones through an emergency information network system (EM-net) and the national instantaneous warning system (J-ALERT).

On September 15, 2017, a mobile intermediate-range ballistic missile, *Hwasong-12*, launched by North Korea flew over Japan. Warnings were issued in the morning, at around 7 a.m., and the TV programmes were interrupted all at once by a screen that conveyed the missile alert. The threat also temporarily halted the railroads in the East Japan area.

When ballistic missiles loaded with nuclear weapons were actually tested, the simulation that calculated the expected damage attracted considerable social interest. Several discussions relating to damage estimate, economic impact, and Business Continuity Planning (BCP) were also held.

In addition to dealing with the threat of ballistic missiles, the concern of Japanese private companies in the second half of 2017 was how to evacuate officials and their families from South Korea in case of a Korean Peninsula emergency. The Japanese government took counter-measures in the spring of 2017, dispatched government officials to South Korea, and conducted a field survey.¹² However, the South Korean opposition to the execution of Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEOs) in its territory and waters is a concern. Moreover, in the event of an NEO in its territory, South Korea wants the USFK to become the primary actor instead of the JSDF.

In 2018, the growing hope of reconciliation between North and South Korea and the US-North Korea summit in Singapore came as a welcome relief for Japan. Resident evacuation drills from ballistic missiles were cancelled. However, the problem of evacuating Japanese residents in Korea remains a concern, particularly if there is another emergency in the Korean Peninsula in the near future (at this point, it is unclear whether discussions regarding an NEO in South Korea are still taking place within the government).

The threat consciousness among Japanese citizens has been fostered not only by the tensions on the Korean Peninsula but also by the expanding Chinese military power. In particular, the threats to the south-western region of Japan are particularly acute, in view of the interplay between Japanese and Chinese coast guards on the Senkaku Islands after the 2000s and the rapid increase in the scrambles against Chinese military planes flying into Japan's Air Defence Identification Zone (JADIZ). These military threats from North Korea and China help the Abe administration towards building a national defence build-up. To this effect, the Legislation for Peace and Security enacted in 2015 almost overcame the problem of collective self-defence, which was an issue for many years. Additionally, with regard to equipment, it has become possible to introduce light aircraft carriers and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSM) and to create amphibious units, which were considered taboos as they deviated from the established exclusive defence framework.

In the latest National Defence Programme Guidelines of December 2018, it was decided that a professional maritime transport unit would be established in the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force (JGSDF) to improve the projection capacity of the land forces to the remote islands. In December 2018, the Japan Ministry of Defence announced its decision to increase its procurement of F-35s from 42 to 147 aircraft. Among these newly acquired aircraft, 42 were to be replaced with fighter aircraft with Short Take-off and Vertical-landing (STOVL) functions.¹³ As a result, it was decided to acquire the F-35B, and a new powerful military asset was created by converting the Izumo-class helicopter destroyers into aircraft carriers. The *Izumo* has been the centre of strategic communications of the JSDF since it was commissioned in March 2015: for example, its three-month-long deployment from May 1 to August 9, 2017 to the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, including goodwill visits to Singapore, Cam Ranh Bay, Subic, Chennai, and Colombo, and multilateral exercises, such as Pacific Partnership 2017 and Malabar 2017. It performs multilateral functions and is at the forefront of the India-Pacific strategy.¹⁴

The JGSDF is working hard to move the military force to the south-west and switch to manoeuvrable troops for island defence and recapture operations. To begin with, a Coast Observation Unit was created on Yonaguni-jima in the Nansei Islands in March 2016 (an area that did not have any land forces, except on the main island of Okinawa). Furthermore, security forces, ground-to-air missile units, and ground-to-ship missile units were stationed on Amami-Oshima and Miyako-jima in March 2019. The Japanese Ministry of Defence began the construction of a garrison with similar units in Ishigaki-jima. Additionally, in March 2018, the first full-scale Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB) was launched in Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture. The stationing of a landing force on the opposite shore of the Korean Peninsula across the Tsushima Strait could not have been imagined ten years ago. Although the training between the US Marine Corps (USMC) and the Republic of Korea Marine Corps (ROKMC) has been suspended because of the denuclearisation talks with North Korea, the JGSDF's ARDB unit participated in "KAMANDAG 2", the joint exercise between the USMC and Armed Forces of the Philippines, and "Blue Chromite", the first landing exercise with the USMC in October 2016 in Tanegashima, Kagoshima Prefecture. According to a report in the *Sankei Shimbun*, by the end of March 2019, Japan will train to deploy its ARDB unit in the East China Sea using transportation ships of the JMSDF.¹⁵

Emerging possibility of US disengagement

Fluctuation of the US-South Korea alliance and strengthening functions of the UNC

From 2016 to 2018, actions that heralded huge changes in the security architecture inside and outside of the Korean Peninsula became obvious. Former South Korean president Park Geun-hye faced a significant political scandal in the latter

half of 2016, resulting in the first presidential impeachment in the constitutional history of South Korea. In May 2017, with the presidency of Moon Jae-in, a progressive government took office for the first time in nine years. On the future Korean Peninsula policy, President Moon Jae-in clarified his stance that South Korea was willing to enter into a dialogue with North in order to ease tensions. In terms of its relationship with the United States, South Korea is gearing to implement the transfer of the wartime Operational Control (OPCON) from the USFK to Seoul, which had been indefinitely postponed by the Park Geun-hye administration.

Further, the future of the US-South Korea alliance has become uncertain. For the first time, a lieutenant general of the Canadian Army, rather than a US Army general, was appointed deputy commander of the UNC in May 2018. There is also a rise in the number of army officers from Canada and Australia among the UN staff. Also, it is said that 100 Australian troops and 60 New Zealand troops participated in the US-Korea joint military exercise in 2016.¹⁶

In light of this trend, Japan also increased its presence by taking advantage of its position as a backward support base of the UN military, on the basis of Article 5 of the position agreement, which was signed in June 1954. There are seven US military bases in Japan (Camp Zama, US Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Commander Fleet Activities Sasebo, Yokota Air Base, Kadena Air Base, Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, and White Beach Naval Base), which it has also been allowed to use. Some maritime patrol aircraft of the UN Forces countries deployed in the Kadena Air Base, such as the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), have patrolled the waters around the East China Sea, to monitor the secret "ship-to-ship cargo transfer" on the high seas, which would allow North Korea to escape UN Security Council sanctions.¹⁷ Japan has been strengthening regional security by incorporating UNC member states, including European countries such as the United Kingdom and France, into a security apparatus for North-East Asia, including the Korean Peninsula. It goes without saying that these will be an effective deterrent against North Korea, but its deterrent effect on China is also an expected consequence.

In addition to the framework of the UN Forces, Prime Minister Abe released the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIPS) in August 2016 for the United States, India, and Australia. It seeks diplomacy and security cooperation with these four countries (the Quad). In addition to multilateral military exercises – Japan-US-Australia and Japan-US-India – Japan has also supported capacity building for South-East Asian countries. The latest National Defence Programme Guidelines reflect the trend of strengthening cooperation with major countries in the Asia Pacific, including Australia, India, and the United States, and describe the order as "Australia, India, Southeast Asian countries".¹⁸

On the diplomatic side, Japan was also a participant at the foreign ministerial conference in Canada in January 2018, in addition to the delegations from the UNC sending states, including South Korea. China and Russia did not

participate in the meeting, and the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson at a regular press conference said:

As initiators of the meeting, the US and Canada co-hosted the meeting under the banner of the so-called UN Command sending states. That is Cold War mentality pure and simple, and will only drive a wedge among the international community and undermine the concerted efforts to seek proper settlement of the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue.¹⁹

Regarding diplomacy with North Korea, high-level talks between Japan and North Korea were held to negotiate the return of Japanese people abducted by North Korea. Reportedly, the director of Cabinet Intelligence Shigeru Kitamura (one of Prime Minister Abe's aides) had confidential contact with high-ranking North Korean officials twice: in July 2018 (in Vietnam) and October 2018 (in Mongolia).²⁰ In the opinion poll released by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* on October 4, 2018, the percentage of Japanese people who wanted "Japan-North Korea summit meeting should be held earlier" rose from 38 to 50 per cent.²¹ The Abe administration aims to respond to both pressure and dialogue from North Korea while monitoring the direction of the denuclearisation talks with North Korea and the trend of domestic public opinion.

According to reports and expert forecasts in Japanese and foreign media immediately after the US-North Korea talks in June of 2018, North Korea will be denuclearised only in the framework of the following four countries: North and South Korea, the United States, and China. Some analysts predicted that Japan would be in isolation with regard to the negotiation talks on North Korea's denuclearisation, implying that the changes in the Korean Peninsula as a whole would be decided without Japan's involvement. However, the Japanese government has never intended a closer involvement, keeping a constant distance while maintaining pressure on North Korea to denuclearise. Nonetheless, the Japan-US alliance has become more significant than ever, as the relationship between the United States and China continues to deteriorate because of trade friction. Furthermore, Japanese financial capital within the Peninsula is now even more important, with regard to providing economic support to North Korea after denuclearisation.

Japan fearing the return of the Acheson line

In the National Security Strategy (NSS), Japan's top strategic document formulated by the Abe administration in 2013, the Korean Peninsula is referred to as the "North Korea issue". It lays down the Japanese government's response to North Korea's nuclear and missile development.²² However, it does not contain strategic documents regarding either how the security architecture of the Korean Peninsula affects Japan or how Japan intends to deal with the Peninsula over the medium and long term.

Nonetheless, it provides a glimpse into a part of the Japanese government's current perception of the Korean Peninsula strategy. After the US-North Korea

summit meeting on June 12, 2018, the Japanese government was stirred into action by a series of sudden developments relating to the United States and North Korea. Ahead of the US-North Korea summit meeting, the Abe administration sent the Secretary General of National Security Secretariat Shōtarō Yachi to Singapore to gather information about the outcome of the meeting. According to the news release, the Japanese side was apparently told from the US side that the topic of the US forces in South Korea would not be touched upon, which would have reassured Japan.²³ However, at the press conference after the summit talks, US president Donald J. Trump announced the cancellation of joint US-South Korea military exercises, which surprised Japanese government officials. Many experts described this as one of the significant concessions to North Korea at this stage of the talks, that is, the suspension of deployment of strategic assets, such as long-range bombers like B-1 and B-52 and Strategic Submarine Ballistic Nuclear (SSBN). Reportedly, the plan was "to gradually reduce the scale of exercises at the final stage of denuclearisation". On June 18, the suspension of the US-South Korea joint military exercise "Ulchi-Freedom Guardian (UFG)" was officially announced. Furthermore, immediately after the second US-North Korea summit in Hanoi in February 2019, the US and South Korean governments decided to end the joint military exercises "Key Resolve (KR)" and "Foal Eagle (FE)", too. Subsequently, they decided to scrap all three major joint exercises, including UFG and, instead, hold them in a modified, downscaled form.

Japanese experts do not deny the change in the security environment in the Korean Peninsula. Specifically, there is a concern that the reduction or withdrawal of the USFK troops from South Korea will be decided either by the United States alone or by the United States and South Korea together, without Japan's involvement. Furthermore, Japan is reluctant to consider the Tsushima Strait as Japan's new defence line, which is reminiscent of the Acheson line (which is said to have triggered the Korean War), by losing South Korea as a buffer zone between the United States and China.²⁴ It is less certain whether the relationship between the United States and its allies in the Indo-Pacific region after 2019 will develop further, as the US defence secretary James Mattis, who valued strategic relationships with allies, resigned on January 1, 2019.

From a short-term perspective, it is expected that not only the US military's ability to respond quickly but also the ability of South Korean forces to play a part in the joint force will be affected following the cancellation of the US-South Korea joint military exercises. From the perspective of deterrence against China and the rapid change in Japan's security architecture in the North-East Asian region, time may be approaching for Japan to proactively speak to the United States and South Korea regarding the future US military presence in this region.

Challenges in Japan-South Korea ties

After the visit of South Korean president Lee Myung-bak to Takeshima in August 2012, the relationship between Japan and South Korea, which had been one of conflict because of historical issues, improved. Further, the statement on

the “Comfort Women” issue by foreign ministers of Japan and South Korea at the joint press conference on December 28, 2015, removed one of the major barriers to better relations between the two countries.²⁵ Security cooperation between the two countries, which had been suspended, resumed, mainly in terms of exchanges between the defence officials of the two countries. During the Kumamoto earthquake that occurred in April 2016, two South Korean Air Force C-130 transport aircraft flew to Kumamoto airport with assistance and provided disaster support to Japan.²⁶ This was a positive event that symbolised the developing security cooperation between Japan and South Korea.

After the conclusion of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in November 2016, the cooperation mechanism for military information between Japan and South Korea was completed, and the framework for a more multi-layered Japan-South Korea security cooperation was created. It goes without saying that this framework had a positive influence on security cooperation between Japan, the United States, and South Korea. The South Korean Navy’s Aegis destroyer *Sejong the Great* (DD-991) participated in the United States and Japan’s joint naval ballistic missile warning exercise, “Pacific Dragon 2016”, in June 2016, for the first time.²⁷ Since then, a total of six ballistic missile launch detection drills have been undertaken by the navies of Japan, the United States, and South Korea. Although exercises with weapons cannot be conducted, security cooperation among the three countries has been steadily strengthened.

However, every time there has been a military provocation by North Korea, Japan, the United States, and South Korea have made appeals for “strengthening tri-country cooperation”, but it is hard to say whether the three countries share a vision or plan for how far, specifically, this security cooperation can advance in the future. Notably, the three countries have not overcome their differences in recognising cooperation, and that gap has gradually become apparent.

Furthermore, the Japanese government must be wary of not only North Korea and China but also the South Korean defence build-up, even though it has not revealed an official response to the build-up. Following consultations with the United States in 2017, the warhead weight limit of South Korean ballistic missiles was relaxed altogether.²⁸ This will increase not only the North Korean threat but also the destructive power of the ballistic missiles themselves for the Japanese Islands in their range. In addition, South Korea is supposed to independently develop Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs), slated for completion in 2020.²⁹ On September 14, 2018, President Moon attended the launch ceremony held for South Korea’s first 3,000-ton class submarine, *Dosan Ahn Chang Ho* (SS-083), which will be equipped with SLBMs.³⁰ According to a report in *Hankook Ilbo* on March 16, 2018, the Moon administration is aiming to develop a variant of the French Navy’s Barracuda-class (5,300 tons) nuclear submarine to counter the threat of North Korean SLBMs. On the other hand, South Korea also has reservations regarding Japan’s defence build-up.

As a nation that shares the values of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, such as rule of law and freedom of navigation, Japan wanted South Korea to become a partner.

However, on October 31, 2017, South Korea made a “three no’s agreement” – no additional THAAD deployment, no participation in the United States’ missile defence network, and no establishment of a trilateral military alliance with the United States and Japan – with China to dispel China’s security concerns. Thus, South Korea seems keen on building diplomatic relations with Japan and the United States while distancing itself from the Indo-Pacific Strategy that Japan and the United States are focussing on. The New Southern policy, which the Moon administration regards as one of its most important diplomatic initiatives, is focussed on developing economic relations between South-East Asian countries and India, but cooperation in the security field has yet to be seen.

Further, the importance of South Korea is decreasing in Japan’s strategic framework. Japan’s latest National Defence Programme Guidelines give a country-specific description under “Active Promotion of Security Cooperation”, and South Korea is described as the fourth partner after Australia, India, and South-East Asian countries.³¹ Given what was first described in the “National Defence Programme Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond”,³² it is clear that South Korea’s importance in the Abe administration’s security cooperation policy has declined.

Conclusion

The confrontation between Japan and China in the Senkaku Islands after the 2000s and the repeated military provocations by North Korea until 2017 fostered awareness regarding the security threat to Japan. As a response to the growing regional insecurity, since 2013, Prime Minister Abe has been making special efforts on Japan’s security policy, including the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) and the National Security Secretariat and the adoption of the NSS. The Abe administration also changed to restrictively interpret Article 9 of the Constitution so that Japan can exercise the right to collective self-defence. Moreover, important laws and policies, such as restricted exercise of self-defence rights, were enacted in 2014; the peace and security legislation was formulated in 2015; and the Japan-US Defence Cooperation Guidelines were revised in 2015. Thus, the clear and present threat to Japanese citizens was acknowledged, mainly on account of the rising threat from China.

The Abe administration took advantage of the international political situation to strengthen the security set-up. The greater the military provocation by North Korea, the more Japan could increase troop operations and multilateral exercises under the new system. There is no change in shifting to the south-western defence and remote island defence for deterrence against China and the strategic communication in peacetime. However, the tensions arising from the situation on the Korean Peninsula have strengthened not only Japan’s military relations with the United States and Australia but also its formerly weak military relations with other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and France. These options have become an important strategic asset for advancing Japan’s Indo-Pacific strategy.

Japan's Korean Peninsula strategy will be a deterrent for not only North Korea but also China because of strengthened cooperation between Japan, the United States, and South Korea while letting South Korea function as a buffer between China and North Korea. Until 2017, when the military tension between the United States and North Korea was at its peak, the strategy was rather significant to all concerned.

Following the Japan-South Korea agreement in December 2015, the security cooperation between Japan, the United States, and South Korea was strengthened as Japan expected, thus increasing the pressure on North Korea. However, because of fluctuations in the domestic politics in South Korea, a new friction is developing between Japan and South Korea, but the interaction between military personnel is continuing and the GSOMIA is being automatically renewed every year. (Notably, as the relationship between Japan and South Korea has drastically deteriorated since the fall of 2018, the relationship between the militaries has also begun to be affected.) Moreover, the security cooperation between Japan and South Korea is likely to remain stagnant in the future.

Japan fears that the reduction or withdrawal of the USFK will be decided only by the United States alone or by the United States and South Korea. Japan, the United States, and South Korea are under pressure to rebuild their security strategy in preparation for the sudden structural change in the US-South Korea alliance. However, it is apparent that Japanese policy cannot keep pace with the rapidly changing situation on the Korean Peninsula, as well as of the world. In the first half of 2018, before the National Defence Programme Guidelines, issued every five years, were revised, a number of experts called for the revision of the NSS.³³ In fact, the Abe administration reportedly showed signs of wanting to revise the NSS five years ahead of schedule in December 2017.³⁴ However, since a new Defence Programme Guidelines were formulated without a revision of the NSS, the move was criticised.³⁵ The most important issue for the Abe administration's 2019 diplomatic and security policy is to formulate a new NSS, after studying North Korea's denuclearisation negotiation process.

It is also necessary to formulate a medium- to long-term strategy that looks more than a decade ahead. As Narushige Michishita, professor at GRIPS, points out, "Japan should recognize that the era of trivialising the problem of the Korean Peninsula as the problem of North Korea was over".³⁶ Thus, from the perspective of Japan's national interest, it is necessary to have a clearer strategic goal and flexibility with regard to understanding the situation on the Korean Peninsula, including not only North Korea but South Korea, and how to secure it.

Notes

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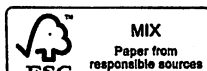
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