

The Camp David Partnership and Its Potential Challenges

Tsun-Yen Wang

*Associate Research Fellow,
Institute for National Defense and Security Research*

Abstract

The Camp David Summit represents a firm resolution by the United States, Japan and South Korea to work together to tackle regional and global challenges. The joint statement of the Summit upholds shared values and addresses geopolitical tensions, including those created by China and North Korea. While the Summit heralds the prospect of democratic solidarity against authoritarian regimes, this paper argues that existing mutual suspicions and different views on security could pose challenges to the trilateral partnership. This includes Japan's skepticism of South Korea's commitment to improving bilateral relations, South Korea's skepticism of Japan's diplomatic thaw with North Korea, South Korea's skepticism of United States security guarantees, and different threat perceptions between Japan and South Korea.

Keywords: Camp David, Japan, South Korea, Skepticism, Threat Perception

I. Introduction

The leaders of the United States, Japan and South Korea (Republic of Korea, R.O.K.) convened at David Camp on August 18, 2023. The Summit represents a striving for unity among democracies in a tumultuous world. It is especially important as Northeast Asia witnesses a deterioration in its overall security situation. For the region, 2023 was a time when authoritarian countries began to work more closely together – and when regional democratic countries united in their efforts to push back.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is highly oppressive domestically, while externally it has flexed its military muscles against its Southeast Asian neighbors and

Taiwan. Beijing has also supported Russia in its invasion of Ukraine. North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK), meanwhile, has turned a blind eye to high levels of domestic poverty, has stubbornly continued on its militaristic path, and has exerted military pressure on South Korea while posing a security threat to the region. Externally, Pyongyang also supports Russia's aggression in words and deeds.

Facing the deteriorating security situation in Northeast Asia, Japan and South Korea have finally put aside their longstanding disputes and improved their relations in a sign of democratic solidarity. Japan and South Korea quickly put aside their lingering historical grievances and sovereignty disputes, and the two heads of state resumed their "shuttle diplomacy". As for the United States, its alliances with Japan and South Korea have buttressed its instrumental role as the promoter of cooperation between the two Asian neighbors. The Summit therefore represents the determination of democracies to counter authoritarianism, and points to future strategic cooperation.

The partnership stands as the basis for U.S.-Japan and the U.S.-R.O.K. security alliances, but as indicated in the Summit's Commitment to Consult, it does not supersede them. Coordination among the three countries, and that between Japan and South Korea in particular, is important for the triad's unity. This is so because Japan-South Korea relations have been fraught with longstanding historical grievances and sovereignty disputes. They do not necessarily concur on their threat perceptions either. The two alliances may be ironclad (as declared in the Summit documents), but the unity and mutual trust between Japan and South Korea remains to be tested.

This paper analyzes the potential concerns which could pose challenges to the partnership. It looks at the international context in which the triad was formed and the strategic implications of the Summit. It also explains the rationale for the Summit with a focus on its joint statement. It then moves on to explore several potential challenges to Camp David solidarity, including the suspicions and different threat perceptions among the three countries. Lastly, it suggests increasing coordinated action in the future to increase mutual trust.

II. The Road to Camp David: Common Threats

The deteriorating security environment is the backdrop that has prompted Japan and South Korea to stand together. Both countries have long been threatened by China and North Korea.

1. Japan

Although China claims to be a respectable and trustworthy country, its behavior has put the lie to such narratives, especially in its relations with Japan. For over a decade, China has been Japan's top security concern. Chinese Coast Guard vessels have intruded into waters surrounding the disputed Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu/Diaoyutai) and have attempted to chase off Japanese fishing boats operating there. This has created tensions and occasionally triggered confrontations between the two countries' maritime law enforcement agencies.



Figure 1. A Japanese Coast Guard Vessel Faces off Against Chinese Patrol Ships

Source: Saitō Katsuhisa, "The Senkaku Confrontation: Japan's Coast Guard Faces Chinese 'Patrol Ships'," *nippon.com*, April 26, 2021, <<https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00698/>>.

Additionally, China's growing pressure on Taiwan has created worries for Japan. Recent years have seen an increasing number of Chinese military aircraft and warships crossing the median line in the Taiwan Strait. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has conducted military exercises near Taiwan's maritime zones and airspace. The large-scale exercises around Taiwan in August 2022, during which five ballistic missiles landed into Japan's Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) underscored the fact that a Taiwan contingency is also a Japan contingency.

For Japan, North Korea is also a security challenge. Some North Korean missiles have been launched in Japan's direction or overflew its territory. With a deepening sense of crisis, the Japanese government defines North Korea as an unprecedentedly



Figure 2. North Korea Launches a Rocket Carrying the Malligyong-1 Spy Satellite on November 21, 2023

Source: Soo-Hyang Choi & Chang-Ran Kim, "North Korea claims it launched first spy satellite, promises more," *Reuters*, November 22, 2023, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-flags-plan-launch-satellite-rocket-between-nov-22-dec-1-japan-says-2023-11-20/>>.

serious and imminent threat in its new National Security Strategy (2022).¹

2. South Korea

North Korea is without doubt the greatest military threat to South Korea. North Korea has never relented in its military intimidation and continues to provoke South Korea with words and deeds.



Figure 3. Democratic Party Leader Lee Jae-myung, Left, and Chinese Ambassador to Seoul, Xing Haiming, Meet in Seoul

Source: Kyung-woon Jeon & Minu Kim, “Chinese ambassador voices discontent over Seoul’s pro-U.S. diplomacy,” *Pulse*, June 9, 2023, <<https://pulsenews.co.kr/view.php?sc=30800028&year=2023&no=437803>>.

1. Japanese Ministry of Defense, “National Security Strategy of Japan,” December 16, 2022, *Cabinet Secretariat*, <<https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>>.

As for South Korea's relations with China, despite being less tense than those between Japan and China, the growing frequency of PLA aircraft approaching South Korean airspace and even entering South Korea's Air Defense Identification Zone (KADIZ) has made Seoul nervous. For example, on January 26, 2023, two Chinese military aircraft flew into the KADIZ. On the afternoon of the same day, one of the military aircraft once again flew into the KADIZ and lingered there for around 30 minutes, compelling the South Korean military to dispatch interceptors twice to monitor the situation.²

South Korea also encounters friction with China at the domestic level. On June 8, 2023, Chinese Ambassador to South Korea Xing Haiming met with Lee Jae-myung, leader of South Korea's largest opposition party, and said bluntly "the current China-South Korea relations are encountering considerable difficulties ... [and] the responsibility does not lie with China ... I hope South Korea can get rid of the interference of external factors when handling relations with China ... Those who bet on loss on China's side will definitely regret it in the future."³

3. The Russia Factor Behind China and North Korea

Sino-Russian and North Korean-Russian relations are worsening the current security situation, as they suggest that a China-Russia-North Korea triad is taking shape. Before the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war, China had already openly praised its infinite friendship with Russia; today, China continues to support Russia's brutal aggression. North Korea has also proved itself to be a true friend of Russia in a

2. Wonju Yi, "Chinese aircraft intruded into S. Korea's air defense zone more than 70 times last year: military," *Yonhap News Agency*, October 13, 2023, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20221003002400325>>; Sun-ah Shim, "Two Chinese warplanes entered KADIZ earlier this week: S. Korean military," *Yonhap News Agency*, January 27, 2023, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230127010251325>>; Sang-ho Song, "S. Korea expresses 'stern' protest to China, Russia over air defense zone incursion," *Yonhap News Agency*, June 7, 2023, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230607004800325>>.

3. Boram Kim, "Chinese ambassador warns against betting against China," *Yonhap News Agency*, June 8, 2023, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230608009400320>>.

concrete manner by manufacturing weapons for the Russian military.⁴

Both Japan and South Korea worry that the Ukraine war could trigger instability within their own security environments. For instance, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has said that “Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow,” while South Korean President Yoon has stated that “the current situation facing Ukraine reminds us of the past situation of the Republic of Korea.”⁵ Both Japan and South Korea worry that a Russian victory in Ukraine could have strategic implications for China and North Korea, igniting the territorial ambitions of authoritarian regimes and emboldening them to follow suit and invade other countries. With these regional tensions and the ongoing Ukrainian war as a backdrop, Japan and South Korea have improved their cooperation significantly.

III. The Camp David Summit

The Spirit of Camp David is the product of the Summit, a joint statement by the U.S., Japan, and South Korea. In addition to *The Spirit*, the Summit also released the *Camp David Principles* and the *Commitment to Consult Among Japan, Republic of Korea, and the United States*, with the former containing the central points of the Spirit, while the latter emphasizes the three countries’ common obligation to consult trilaterally with each other while maintaining that the commitment “does not supersede or otherwise infringe on the commitments arising from the *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States* and the *Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea*.”

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4. Yoonjung Seo & Helen Regan, “North Korean factories making arms for Russia are ‘operating at full capacity,’ South Korea says,” *CNN*, February 28, 2024, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/28/asia/north-korea-munitions-factories-shipments-russia-ukraine-intl-hnk/index.html>>.
 5. “Japan PM: East Asia Could Be Next Ukraine,” *Voice of America*, January 14, 2023, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/kishida-says-g7-should-show-strong-will-on-russia-s-ukraine-invasion/6918474.html>>; Hyung-jin Kim, “South Korean President Yoon makes surprise visit to Ukraine, pledges to expand support,” *PBS*, July 15, 2023, <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/south-korean-president-yoon-makes-surprise-visit-to-ukraine-pledges-to-expand-support>>.



Figure 4. The Camp David Summit

Source: President Biden, “Welcome to Camp David, President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida,” August 19, 2023, X, <<https://twitter.com/POTUS/status/1692610852661174407>>.

The Spirit stresses that the three countries, guided by shared values, shall uphold peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region and the world, and cooperate on a variety of issues. In Southeast Asia and the Pacific, the triad will cooperate in building the regional countries’ capabilities, and the importance and centrality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will be respected. *The Spirit* indirectly criticizes China’s aggressive and coercive actions in the South China Sea.

With regard to Northeast Asian security issues, *The Spirit* emphasizes the geopolitical challenges posed by China and North Korea. The three countries reiterate their stance on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and state that they will establish a system to share intelligence on missile warnings. The triad will also cooperate in the fields of economic security and technology.

Noteworthy especially for Taiwan is that the three countries “reaffirm the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity in the international community” and “call for a peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.”

IV. Potential Challenges Ahead

Alliances require common goals, and the Summit succeeds in addressing shared concerns. The trilateral partnership already has the hallmarks of a quasi-alliance. In this regard, it should be noted that this quasi-alliance is based on two existing bilateral alliances: the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-South Korea security alliances. Both alliances have claimed ironclad mutual trust between member states within the two alliances. However, if any one of the two is destabilized, then the triad can be undermined as well. Consequently, this emerging quasi-alliance is not without challenges.

1. South Korea’s ‘Japan Skepticism’

Recent polls have shown that Japan’s and South Korea’s perceptions of each other at the civilian level have improved. According to surveys by the non-profit organization Genron NPO, 71.6% of South Korean respondents had unfavorable views of Japan in 2020,⁶ but a Japan Press Research Institute poll in February 2024 noted an improvement, with 44% of South Korean respondents holding a positive impression of Japan, a record high for the second year in a row.⁷

Nevertheless, historical wounds continue to undermine the relationship. Although South Korean President Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida reached a consensus on settling the wartime forced laborer issue, the dispute over history is

6. Yasushi Kudo, “South Korean attitudes toward Japan have worsened dramatically, annual survey finds,” October 19, 2020, *The Genron NPO*, <https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5562.html>.

7. “Record 44% of South Koreans have good impression of Japan, survey says,” *The Japan Times*, February 18, 2024, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/02/18/japan/south-korean-people-japan-impression-improves/>>.

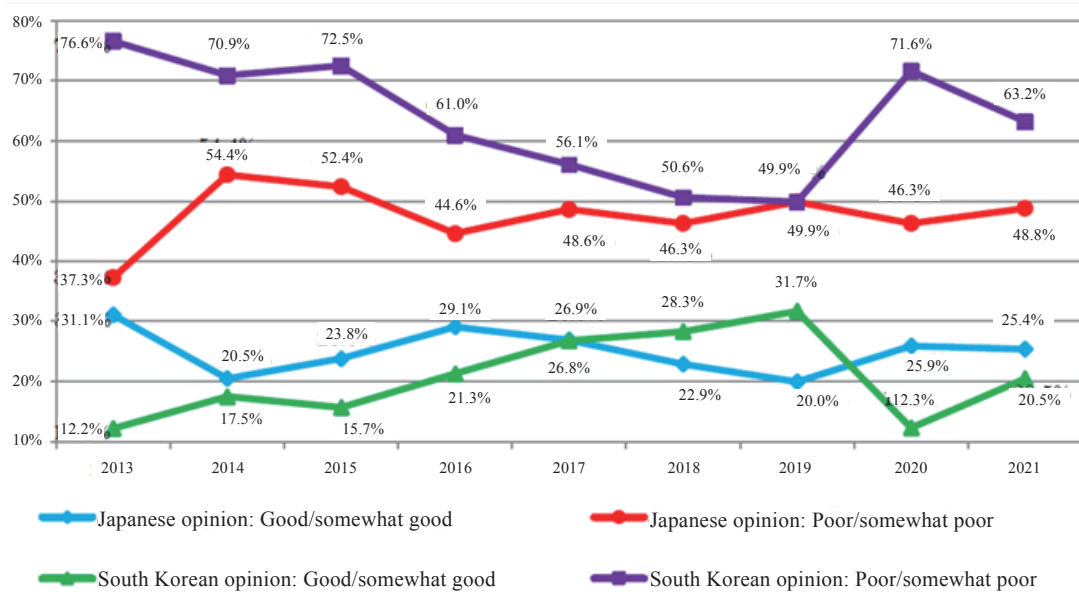


Figure 5. Japanese and South Korean Impressions of Each Other

Source: Yasushi Kudo, “What signs are there that the relationship between Japan and South Korea will improve? Public sentiment less acrimonious, but still chilly,” November 30, 2021, *The Genron NPO*, <https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5589.html>.

far from being resolved. In November 2023, a Korean appellate court overturned a previous ruling and ordered Japan to compensate 16 women who were forced to work in wartime brothels as “comfort women.”⁸

Moreover, sovereignty dispute resurface sporadically. The end of 2023 was marked by a recall of education materials for the South Korean military on political grounds. The language describing the status of the Dokdo/Takashima Island in the material, calling the island “disputed territory,” was considered problematic by the South Korean government.⁹

8. Hyonhee Shin, “South Korea court orders Japan to compensate ‘comfort women’, reverses earlier ruling,” *Reuters*, November 23, 2023, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-korea-court-orders-japan-compensate-comfort-women-reverses-earlier-ruling-2023-11-23/>>.

9. Wonju Yi, “(LEAD) Defense ministry recalls new troop education material describing Dokdo as disputed territory,” *Yonhap News Agency*, December 28, 2023, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20231228003851315>>.

The bilateral relationship has also suffered new wounds. The discharge of treated radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear plant sparked worries among South Koreans. Despite the fact that President Yoon has expressed on multiple public occasions his personal determination to improve his country's relations with Japan, and South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo argued in August 2023 at a parliamentary questioning session that the discharged water is not contaminated,¹⁰ a Gallup Korea poll in September 2023 still showed that about 70% of South Koreans are concerned about the water's impact on seafood.¹¹



Figure 6. South Korea Prime Minister Han Duck-soo

Source: Han-joo Kim, “Gov’t to consider changing term ‘contaminated water’ for describing Fukushima water release: PM.”

10. Han-joo Kim, “Gov’t to consider changing term ‘contaminated water’ for describing Fukushima water release: PM,” *Yonhap News Agency*, August 30, 2023, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230830004500315>>.

11. Hyunsu Yim, “South Koreans worry about Fukushima water, more disapprove of Yoon, poll shows,” *Reuters*, September 1, 2023, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-koreans-worry-about-fukushima-water-more-disapprove-yoon-poll-2023-09-01/>>.

Although President Biden has praised President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida for their leadership in “transforming” Japan-South Korean relations, both countries did little more than shelve their disputes to make way for the Summit. The longstanding issues surrounding history and contested territory have not ended but have faded for the time being, thus creating uncertainty for the future of the Japan-South Korea partnership.

2. Japan’s ‘South Korea Skepticism’

The recent improved perceptions of each country are a positive development, and Japanese perceptions of South Korea have generally been more positive than Koreans’ perceptions of Japan. However, apprehensions that the improvement in bilateral relations could end or even turn back seem to linger in Japan.



Figure 7. Shinzo Abe and Park Geun-hye Pledge to Resolve Disputes over Wartime History

Source: Justin McCurry, “Japan and South Korea summit signals thaw in relations,” *The Guardian*, November 2, 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/02/japan-south-korea-summit-thaw-in-relations>>.

Behind this worry is the denial and overturning of an agreement reached between the Japanese and South Korean governments under Abe Shinzo and Park Geun-hye governments by the former Moon Jae-in administration. The incident sparked criticism by Japan and exacerbated Japan's mistrust of South Korea.

Japanese interlocutors interviewed for this paper shared their worries that agreements or consensus reached by the Yoon government could be overturned by successor governments. Park Cheol-hee, Chancellor of the Korea National Diplomatic Academy (KNDA), notes in a *Nikkei Asia* interview that the Japanese fear that shifts in South Korean politics could have a negative impact on agreements between the two countries.¹²

3. South Korea's 'U.S. Skepticism'

Suspicious do not only characterize relations between Japan and South Korea; their shared ally, the United States, has also become the object of suspicions in the security realm, especially over the issue of nuclear deterrence.

The arrival of U.S. nuclear ballistic missile submarines in South Korea occurred against the background of South Korea's growing concerns over North Korea's rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal. The visits were meant to represent the United States' steadfast commitment to peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula and to reassure South Koreans over North Korea's nuclear weapons. However, according to a poll released by Gallup Korea in February 2024, 72.8% of South Koreans believe that their country should develop its own nuclear weapons.¹³

12. Tetsuya Fujita, "South Korea and Japan need new joint declaration, Yoon adviser says," *Nikkei Asia*, February 27, 2024, <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-South-Korea-ties/South-Korea-and-Japan-need-new-joint-declaration-Yoon-adviser-says>>.

13. Thomas Maresca, "Survey: Almost 73% of South Koreans want country to develop nukes," *United Press International*, February 6, 2024, <https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2024/02/06/Gallup-Chey-survey-North-Korea-nuclear-weapons-denuclearization/8841707211962/>.



Figure 8. The USS Michigan Submarine Docks at a Naval Base in Busan, South Korea

Source: Jesse Johnson, “U.S. nuclear sub arrives in South Korea after North sends missiles into Japan EEZ,” *The Japan Times*, July 16, 2023, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/06/16/asia-pacific/us-nuclear-submarine-south-korea-missiles/>>.

South Koreans’ concerns are legitimate. A poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs conducted in September of 2023 indicates that only 50% of U.S. Republican Party supporters agree the U.S. should defend South Korea militarily if North Korea invades South Korea. This represented a drop from 2021, when 63% expressed support when asked the same question. Those who support the United States deploying troops in South Korea also decreased from 77% in 2022 to 63% in 2023.¹⁴ It is worth mentioning that the above-mentioned poll on developing a domestic nuclear arsenal was held after the United States had dispatched a nuclear submarine to

14. “Half of Republican supporters oppose US intervention to defend Korea,” *The Dong-A Ilbo*, October 6, 2023, <<https://www.donga.com/en/article/all/20231006/4467799/1>>.

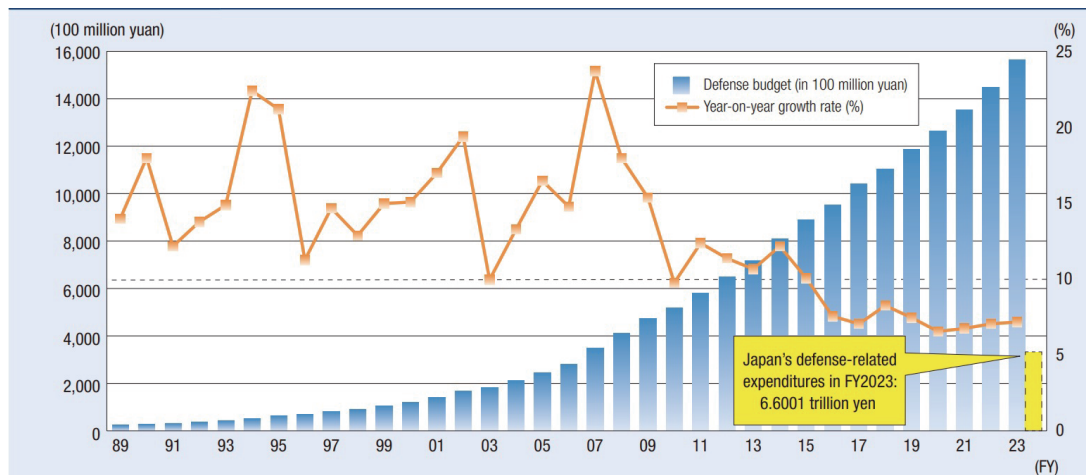
Busan, South Korea, in July 2023.¹⁵

4. Differences in Threat Perceptions

Even more significant than the skepticisms are the different threat perceptions held by the members of the quasi-alliance, which poses a more fundamental challenge to Japan-South Korea security relations. The perceptual differences are most salient in how each country ranks its threats, especially in their official defense documents. In this regard, Japan views China as the biggest security concern, while South Korea sees North Korea as playing that role.

Japan’s Defense White Paper has repeatedly ranked China as the biggest security concern since 2019, a view that is also confirmed by the latest version of the National Security Strategy (2022).¹⁶ Although Japan calls North Korea a “threat” in its defense documents, the fact that the chapter on North Korea always comes after that on China reveals Japan’s real estimate of the threat to its national security.

Table 1. Changes in China’s Announced Defense Budget



Source: Japanese Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2023*, July 2023, p. 59, *Japanese Ministry of Defense*, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2023/DOJ2023_EN_Full.pdf>.

15. Matt Murphy, “First US nuclear sub docks in South Korea since 1981,” *BBC*, July 18, 2023, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66233802>>.

16. Japanese Ministry of Defense, “National Security Strategy of Japan,” p. 9.

For South Korea, North Korea poses the biggest threat to the survival of South Korea since the political division of the Peninsula in the previous century. Despite the fact that they fought against each other during the Korean War, China is hardly viewed as a threat to South Korea. To the contrary, South Korea expects China to exert pressure on North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions. The Yoon government labels China in South Korea's first-ever Indo-Pacific Strategy report (2022) as "a key partner for achieving prosperity and peace in the Indo-Pacific region."¹⁷ On February 7, 2024, President Yoon even said in a KBS interview that he does not think South Korea and China are different in their "basic respective principles for the running of state of affairs or external relations."¹⁸ Those remarks may have caused jitters in Tokyo, coming as they did from the president of democratic South Korea concerning authoritarian China, Japan's biggest security concern.

Complicating the different threat perceptions of the two countries is a series of positive developments between Japan and South Korea's arch-enemy North Korea, which likely made Seoul apprehensive. North Korea's repeated advance notices to the Japanese Coast Guard over the expected or planned impact points of missile launches may have been low-key gestures to Japan. On Japan's side, Prime Minister Kishida has publicly expressed his willingness to visit North Korea to conduct dialogue with Kim Jong Un. In January 2024, a telegraph of condolence from Kim following a devastating earthquake in Japan's Ishikawa Prefecture was a clear and friendly signal. In the telegraph, Kim even made the unprecedented step of calling Prime Minister Kishida "Your Majesty."¹⁹ Kishida and Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa

17. The Government of the Republic of Korea, "Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region," November 11, 2022, *The Government of the Republic of Korea*, <https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_26382/contents.do>.

18. Haye-ah Lee, "(ROUNDUP) Yoon says first lady's acceptance of luxury handbag was caused by lack of cold-heartedness," *Yonhap News Agency*, February 8, 2024, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240208000600315?section=national/politics>>.

19. "North Korea's Kim sends rare message of sympathy over Japan quake," *Kyodo News*, January 6, 2024, <<https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2024/01/6d0e59b150be-n-koreas-kim-sends-message-of-sympathy-to-kishida-over-japan-quake.html>>; Jesse Johnson, "North Korea's Kim sends rare sympathy message to Japan over Ishikawa quake," *The Japan Times*, January 6, 2024, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/01/06/japan/politics/kim-kishida-message-earthquake/>>.

reciprocated with messages of gratitude to Pyongyang.²⁰ On February 15, the vice department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of North Korea Kim Yo Jong, Kim Jong Un's powerful sister, issued a rare press statement expressing positive views on Japan-North Korea relations, saying there is no reason why Japan and North Korea cannot get closer. The day when Prime Minister Kishida visits Pyongyang might come.²¹

In response to a report by Japan's *Fuji News Network* (FNN) suggesting that Kishida would visit South Korea in March, the South Korean Presidential Office replied that there was no such plan.²² While the reason for Kishida's visit still awaits an explanation, South Korea's denial smacks of displeasure.

One possible reason why Kishida wants to visit South Korea is that he may intend to explain to President Yoon personally the rationale behind his plan to visit North Korea. Nonetheless, the thaw in Tokyo-Pyongyang relations that a Kishida visit would signal would hardly be welcome in Seoul. South Korea finds itself in an awkward situation, as it can play no part in Kishida's travel to its enemy's capital, which Pyongyang could grant and Washington support.²³ In the context of diplomatic maneuvering among Northeast Asian countries, South Korea is therefore stuck in strategic passivity, which hardly reflects the spirit of Camp David unity and solidarity.

20. "Japan PM grateful to N. Korean leader for quake sympathy message," *Kyodo News*, February 2, 2024, <<https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2024/02/831f5978323f-japan-pm-grateful-to-n-korean-leader-for-quake-sympathy-message.html>>.

21. "Press Statement of Vice Department Director of C.C., WPK Kim Yo Jong," *Korean Central News Agency*, February 15, 2023, <<http://www.kcna.kp/en/article/q/134a0eb1839cb01381c703e991441821705ce86f4fd6fe373a296234846f0f3b.kcmsf>>; "Kim Jong Un's Sister Talks of 'New Future' Between North Korea and Japan," *Voice of America*, February 15, 2024, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/kim-jong-un-s-sister-talks-of-new-future-between-north-korea-and-japan-/7488998.html>>.

22. Hyo-jin Lee, "Seoul denies news report on possible Yoon-Kishida summit," *The Korea Times*, February 14, 2024, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/03/113_368796.html>.

23. "US Expresses Cautious Support of Japan-N. Korea Engagement," *KBS World*, February 16, 2024, <https://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=e&Seq_Code=183728>.

V. Conclusion

An alliance is supposed to be based on common threats. A security alliance may not be the objective of the Camp David Summit in the first place. However, without shared security threat perceptions and sufficient mutual trust, moving forward will be difficult.

The fact that the Camp David Summit addresses geopolitical issues, such as regional security challenges posed by China and North Korea, is an encouraging development. But it also stresses the supremacy of the existing security alliances in relation to the Summit's spirit. The three countries must identify their common and respective challenges based on their own national interests. This is not easy to achieve when perceptions of the same challenge differ.

Mutual trust is the foundation for an alliance, and it does not happen naturally in an anarchical international system. To grow trust and prevent mistrust, the United States, Japan, and South Korea may need more communication concerning their respective relations with China and North Korea. Since *The Spirit* already indicates the triad's concerns over peace and stability in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, these two geographical areas may be used as testing grounds for strengthened communication and coordination with a view to enhancing trust and solidarity.

The geopolitical significance of the South China Sea is reflected in Japan's erstwhile definition of Southeast Asia as the Empire's "interest line" in the Meiji era, and then in Tokyo's modern effort to boost Southeast Asian countries' capacity for maritime security. It is also reflected in South Korea's inclusion of Southeast Asia as the central area which its "New Southern Policy" targets. Moreover, the fall of Taiwan to China would give Beijing a strategic chokepoint on Japan's and South Korea's shortest path to Southeast Asia. Neither Japan nor South Korea can afford the turning of the South China Sea into "Lake Beijing" or Taiwan becoming a province of China.

Amid increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait and between China and the Philippines, Japan and South Korea must clearly evaluate what is in their national interest and back the Spirit with joint deeds. Participating in U.S.-led freedom of

navigation operations (FONOPs) near Taiwan and in the South China Sea would be a timely move to improve mutual trust and solidarity.

