

Manufacturing partners

Japan–South Korea security cooperation and Australia’s potential role

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Executive summary

Northeast Asia is shaping up to be the most influential region for Australia’s future security: three of our top four trading partners are in the region, China’s re-emergence is challenging the dominance of the US, and the region’s home to Japan, ‘our strong ally’ and ‘best friend in Asia’, along with another emerging security partner, the Republic of Korea (ROK). In Asia, Australia has no closer strategic and ideological partners than Japan and South Korea. Our similar strategic outlooks, economic ties, alliances with the US and liberal democratic values make us highly compatible partners. But while Australia’s bilateral relations are trending upwards, the Japan–ROK relationship has been spiralling downwards.

Problems in Japan–ROK relations are nothing new, but since two bilateral military accords fell through in mid-2012 the relationship has deteriorated to its lowest point in decades. Animosity between Tokyo and Seoul is compounding



South Korean anti-Japan activist protesters burn an effigy of Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe during a rally against Japan’s government in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, South Korea, 27 December 2013 © JEON HEON-KYUN/epa/Corbis.

the existing tensions and strategic uncertainty blanketing the region and preventing more robust cooperation between constructive democracies.

In the past, the US has acted as a bridge between Tokyo and Seoul. However, US encouragement of Japan–ROK security cooperation appears to be having a reduced impact. In part, this is due to the two countries’ alliances with the US, which allow them to act out against one another with little fear of long-term consequences. In addition, should China–US rivalry deepen, the US may find that it has progressively less leverage to encourage South Korea to cooperate with Japan. Seoul sees Beijing as pivotal in any future reunification of the Koreas and doesn’t want to get caught between China–US and China–Japan rivalries.

Perhaps surprisingly, Australia could be a more effective facilitator of Japan–ROK security cooperation. We’re well placed to assist because, in addition to providing a third-party buffer, cooperation with Canberra could be less provocative than US-trilateral cooperation in the eyes of both the Japanese and South Korean publics and some foreign country observers. We’re also a comparatively neutral partner to the US, providing less room for Japanese and South Korean nationalists to claim that the cooperation is forced and not mutually desired. We could propose trilateral security cooperation to enable deeper Japan–ROK cooperation and achieve multiple strategic objectives.

Trilateral talks and, down the track, limited maritime security exercises could allow Australia, Japan and South Korea to more effectively address mutual security challenges, increase interoperability between their navies, and consolidate national objectives and defence resources. An additional reason to pursue trilateralism is to further diversify our security ties as a hedging strategy in response to China’s re-emergence and perceptions of wavering US commitment to the region.

As well as benefits to this proposal there are inherent risks, the major one being how trilateralism will be perceived in Beijing. Despite measures to mitigate Chinese concerns, there’ll inevitably be some security trade-off. While Chinese concerns deserve consideration, new approaches to regional security cooperation shouldn’t be discounted solely for fear of alarming China.

Australia should take this more proactive approach to Japan–ROK relations because, in contrast to our enormous economic and strategic stake, we currently have limited ability to directly respond to challenges in Northeast Asia. Through trilateralism, Australia could maximise its influence and proactively tackle regional security challenges rather than be victimised by them. In addition, the strategic situation in the region is changing in a way that compels Australia to engage in innovative thinking and action and diversify our security frameworks to hedge against uncertainties. An initial goal should be to improve security cooperation between and with our two closest partners in Asia—Japan and South Korea.

Introduction

In Asia, Australia has no closer strategic and ideological partners than Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Our similar strategic outlooks, deeply integrated economies, alliances with the US, liberal democratic values and support for a rules-based order make us highly compatible partners. The Australian Government has called Japan our ‘best friend in Asia’¹ and our ‘strong ally’²; it calls South Korea a ‘natural’ strategic partner³ and recently concluded a historic free trade agreement with Seoul.⁴ Australia has foreign and defence ministers’ meetings (2+2) and growing defence ties with both countries. However, while our bilateral relations have been blossoming, the Japan–ROK bilateral relationship has been decaying.

Bad blood between Tokyo and Seoul is nothing new. Japan–ROK relations have transitioned through peaks and troughs since the end of Japanese occupation in 1945, but a series of recent events have caused relations to plummet to their lowest point in decades.⁵ Much of the animosity’s been generated by historical grievances, and both sides have picked at those unhealed wounds since two bilateral military accords fell through in mid-2012. Most recently, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the controversial Yasukuni shrine⁶ and earlier cast doubt over Japan’s culpability for wartime aggression.⁷ On the South Korean side, President Park Geun-hye succeeded in having a memorial honouring the Korean independence activist who killed Japan’s first prime minister opened in China⁸ and indicated that she was open to a summit with North Korea (in the wake of its third nuclear test) but laid preconditions on Japan prior to a summit. Japan and South Korea are able to cooperate on security when



South Korean protests against the Abe administration outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul (2013). © Hayley Channer, author.

faced with an immediate threat, but historical and political difficulties continue to thwart their efforts to implement even modest security accords.⁹

Many factors prevent deeper Japan–ROK security cooperation, from historical, to political, to divergent strategic interests. However, equally numerous reasons to strengthen cooperation compel analysts to continue musing over paths to Japan–ROK détente. Although they’ve thrown up some innovative solutions, difficulties in the relationship persist. It’s becoming apparent that the two countries could benefit from outside intervention to facilitate deeper cooperation but, for myriad reasons, US efforts in this regard are having limited impact. What more can be done?

Perhaps surprisingly, Australia’s emerging as a potentially unique facilitator of Japan–ROK security cooperation, and it’s in our interests to pursue such action. We could ‘manufacture’ a closer security partnership between the two and achieve multiple strategic objectives through a trilateral arrangement. While it’s true that relations in Asia have been managed for decades through the US ‘hub and spokes’ system, the major structural changes underway in Asia demand more innovative thinking and a new approach. A trilateral initiative with Australia could improve Japan–ROK security cooperation and further Australia’s strategic interests. This paper explains how.

This paper is in three parts: first, it identifies how Australia fits into Japan–ROK cooperation; second, it proposes that Australia initiate trilateral security cooperation in the form of strategic dialogues and limited maritime exercises; third, it weighs the benefits and risks to Australia of the trilateral proposal.

Australia’s place in Japan–ROK cooperation

There are several reasons why Australia could be a useful trilateral security partner to Japan and South Korea. To begin with, having a third country act as a buffer makes cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul more palatable for their domestic

constituents. The presence of a third party generates less negative media about Japan–ROK cooperation and less public interest and is therefore more helpful politically. It also changes the dynamics of cooperation, dampening South Korean perceptions of closer ties as cooperation with a former colonial aggressor and Japanese views of such ties as cooperation with an ungrateful neighbour. Once a third party is involved, the cooperation becomes less about Japan–ROK bilateral relations and more about the rationale behind cooperation.

In the past, the US has been a bridge between Tokyo and Seoul. However, two main reasons make the US a less-than-perfect trilateral partner. First, scholars highlight that Japan’s and South Korea’s alliances with the US create a ‘moral hazard’ that allows the two to act out against one another and delays the establishment of closer ties. Associate Professor Robert E Kelly explains, ‘Both are insured by the US, explicitly by the presence of US soldiers on their territory. As such, both are somewhat guaranteed against the consequences of their actions. Both can therefore indulge the luxury of conflict with the other.’¹⁰ Kelly further asserts that ‘Without the US in Asia Japan and Korea would be immediately compelled to work together.’¹¹ Obviously, the US presence in Asia will continue to be felt and several other factors necessitate the preservation of US influence. But, for the purpose of encouraging Japan and South Korea to deepen and stabilise their security ties, US-driven cooperation is fundamentally flawed.

Second, should China–US rivalry deepen, the US will have progressively less influence over South Korea. South Korea is culturally and historically close to China and sees it as pivotal to determining the outcome of the division of the Korean Peninsula and managing North Korea in the interim. South Korea is therefore more attuned to Chinese sensitivities than the US and Japan and worries that by cooperating with them on security it will appear complicit in a containment policy against Beijing. While this doesn’t preclude Seoul from participating in US-led trilateral activities, the more the US pushes Japan and South Korea closer through trilateral arrangements, the more Seoul will feel caught between China–US and China–Japan rivalries. With the bridging ability of the US reduced, another partner is needed to encourage and facilitate Japan–ROK cooperation.

Australia could take steps to encourage a new trilateral partnership alongside the existing US–Japan–ROK trilateral. Cooperation with Australia could be less provocative than US-trilateral cooperation in the eyes of both internal actors (the Japanese and South Korean publics) and some external observers. Australian-driven rather than US-driven security cooperation could dampen claims in Japan and South Korea that one or the other is bowing to US pressure. When the two countries are engaged trilaterally with the US or together bilaterally, nationalists in Japan and South Korea claim that the US is forcing cooperation and that the activities aren’t mutually desired. Partnering with Australia, a second-tier power, will place all three on a more equal and consenting playing ground and quieten critics. As for external observers, US-trilateral activities have previously offended and in some instances provoked North Korea, which is likely to feel less threatened if Japan and South Korea are engaged with Australia rather than with its traditional foe, the US.

Australia’s attractiveness and relevance as a security partner independent of US involvement is increasingly recognised by Tokyo and Seoul. Both have been enhancing their bilateral security ties with Australia: Japan’s first agreement outside of its alliance with the US was with Australia, and South Korea’s second of only two 2+2 ministerial meetings is with Australia. Importantly, all three have been among the most active in the region in diversifying their security relationships, meaning that they’ve shown openness to exploring new security frameworks.¹²

The proposal

Australia could invite Japan and South Korea to participate in informal trilateral Track 1.5 and Track 2 security dialogues. We already have high-level bilateral strategic dialogues (including 2+2) with both countries, and low-level trilateral discussions have taken place behind closed doors from time to time. Australia’s experienced in trilateralism, as we participate in the Trilateral Security Dialogue with the US and Japan. We’ve also established connections with Japanese and Korean counterparts through informal US–Japan–ROK–Australia quadrilateral dialogues.

Talks can focus on a whole range of mutual security issues, beginning with less sensitive issues and progressing to more sensitive ones. Possibly the strongest existing link between the three countries is economic, so a discussion on economic security should feature prominently early on. Preliminary talks could focus on:

- economic security
- perspectives on the US 'rebalance'
- coordinating peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR)
- consolidating aid to the region
- nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament
- maritime security (including confidence building measures and oceans management)
- climate change and other non-traditional security challenges.

Once better established, talks could address:

- China's re-emergence and assertiveness
- North Korea's nuclear and missile programs
- contingencies on the Korean Peninsula (including Japan's role)
- North Korea's humanitarian crisis
- rising militarisation
- maritime security (including managing territorial disputes, energy security, anti-piracy and illegal trafficking)
- cybersecurity.

This list scratches the surface of possible discussion topics.

A key opportunity to kick off trilateral talks could be in November this year when Australia hosts the G20 Leaders Summit in Brisbane. Government departments, universities, non-government organisations and think tanks could hold Track 1.5 or Track 2 trilateral talks on the sidelines of this event. In 2013, the Department of Defence and ASPI held a Track 1.5 Northeast Asia Security and Defence Forum in Sydney; subsequent dialogues with Australia's two closest partners in Asia would be a natural extension of this process and underscore our commitment to improving relations with Asia and promoting regional security. ASPI could be a forerunner for this initiative, coordinating an Australia–Japan–ROK Track 2 dialogue for prominent academics in the field to highlight and narrow down areas of convergence between the three countries. If Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade see value, they may consider pursuing ministerial-level (2+2+2) talks.

The important common thread of discussions should be 'promoting the interests of second-tier powers in the region'. Some may object to Japan being labelled a 'second-tier' power, but the restrictions on its military place it below the ranks of the top-tier powers, the US and China. In creating a common focus for trilateral discussions, less emphasis should be on the three being US allies, as the purpose of the talks is not necessarily to promote US interests, and emphasising the alliance would unnecessarily antagonise China.

Once a foundation of strategic talks has been established, trilateral cooperation could be expanded to include practical exercises in the maritime domain. Maritime security is a priority area for all three. The three navies have previously worked together during US-led multilateral maritime exercises, notably the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) and the Proliferation Security Initiative. Furthermore, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) has bilateral exercises with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) (Exercise Nichi-Gou Trident) and with the ROK Navy (ROKN) (Exercise Haidoli Wallaby). Both are antisubmarine and maritime interdiction exercises.

Trilateral exercises should initially be confined to HADR and search and rescue activities in Pacific waters, both to build confidence and to reduce perceptions of the drills as being for offensive purposes. If successful, exercises could be expanded to include combined-arms exercises to improve combat abilities for any contingency (bilateral RAN–JMSDF and RAN–ROKN relations have followed a development trajectory similar to the one outlined here).¹³

To minimise costs, the exercises could be held following RIMPAC when all three naval forces are harboured in neutral ground in Hawaii. Because a strong foundation of trilateral talks is necessary before maritime cooperation, the first opportunity to conduct naval exercises could present itself in 2016 after RIMPAC.

Benefits to Australia of trilateral cooperation

At the heart of this proposal is an attempt to improve relations between Japan and South Korea—two countries with more in common than with any other country in their region and that share some of the same strategic challenges as Australia. If we’re able to facilitate cooperation between Japan and South Korea through a trilateral arrangement, security challenges that adversely affect all three countries could be more effectively countered. Australia should take on this more proactive approach because, in contrast to our enormous economic and strategic stake, we currently have limited ability to directly respond to challenges in the region. Through trilateral talks and exercises with Japan and South Korea, Australia could maximise its influence and proactively tackle regional security challenges rather than be victimised by them.

Trilateralism could facilitate progress on security where Japan–ROK bilateralism has failed. For example, historical and political animosities have recently prevented Tokyo and Seoul from executing security accords that would improve military information and equipment sharing. Areas covered by the accords include nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, ballistic missile defence, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, anti-piracy, energy security, peacekeeping and HADR. Australia’s keenly interested in addressing those matters because they affect our security, either directly or indirectly. If Tokyo and Seoul can’t work bilaterally, they may be able to work trilaterally with Canberra in some of these spaces, consulting on the constructive roles each could play and multiplying force through naval exercises.



Ships line up in preparation for an engagement of Ex-USS New Orleans (LPH-11), part of Exercise RIMPAC 2010. L-R: USS Chosin (CG-65), USS Hopper (DDG-70), USS Benfold (DDG-65), JDS Atago (DDG-177) and JDS Akebono (DD-108). ROK Navy also participated. Photo courtesy of Australian Department of Defence.

More specifically, trilateral maritime exercises stand to increase interoperability between navies and enhance responses to non-traditional security threats. The RAN, JMSDF and ROKN share some of the same operational systems (procured from the US), but some vessels have indigenously designed subsystems. Gaining a better understanding of those operational systems, as well as each other's overarching doctrines and force cultures, and coordinating methods (procedures and techniques) will be important aspects of successful multilateral action. Greater interoperability could improve preparedness to address non-traditional security threats such as climate change, natural disasters, transnational crime and illegal trafficking. These challenges have been growing in frequency and severity and are more effectively addressed through multilateral action by a coordinated force.

A further advantage of trilateralism is that Australia stands to consolidate overlapping bilateral priorities and get a more effective return on its investment in these relationships. The Australian Government has a long list of identical or similar defence priorities for Japan and South Korea. With Japan, priorities include cooperating on defence technologies, maritime security and HADR and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).¹⁴ Where South Korea is concerned, our aims are to increase cooperation in defence industry, science and technology, capacity building, and HADR and prevent the spread of WMD.¹⁵ A trilateral arrangement in which Australia works jointly with Japan and South Korea in some of those spaces could consolidate our goals and streamline government resources.

More broadly, a trilateral initiative would contribute to a hedging strategy to combat the uncertainties inherent in the shifting of global power centres. China's re-emergence and perceptions of wavering US commitment to the region are challenging US supremacy in Asia after decades of stability. All three countries—Australia, Japan and South Korea—have the US as their main strategic ally and China as their largest trading partner and source of economic growth. China's huge economic and military power is allowing it to test the regional order and assert its positions more strongly. In addition, the US rebalance is being undermined by America's domestic problems, including sequestration, and by what Washington sees as a greater need for burden-sharing by allies, giving the impression that the US may intend to scale back its presence in Asia.

Hedging against these uncertainties is particularly important for US allies. Patrick Cronin and others explain that like-minded states in Asia have already begun the process of diversifying their bilateral security relationships to hedge against uncertainties: 'This portfolio strategy reduces the risk of overinvesting in either of the great powers and creates additional avenues for regional states to advance their economic and military development.'¹⁶ Developing a trilateral partnership with Japan and South Korea would reflect a measured response to shifting global power centres.

A trilateral partnership has the added benefit to Australia of developing new regional security architecture and concurrently supporting our alliance with the US. The region lacks Europe's broad and deep security frameworks capable of dealing with multilateral security issues. While the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum are emerging as the key institutions through which to pursue security cooperation, other security webs are needed. If successful, an Australia–Japan–ROK trilateral partnership would contribute to the development of new security architecture in a region sorely lacking such frameworks. Furthermore, the US has long called for stronger connections between the 'spokes' to share burden in Asia, so trilateral dialogues and exercises would fulfil some US expectations and Australian alliance commitments. The US would welcome an Australian initiative that facilitates Japan–ROK cooperation and enables greater interoperability between its allies.

Potential risks to Australia

The biggest risk of trilateralism involving three US allies is the message it will send to China. Beijing has interpreted the US rebalance and growing security cooperation between US allies as part of a broader strategy of containment. Obviously, Australia doesn't want to jeopardise diplomatic relations with the biggest kid in the yard and largest lunch-buyer.¹⁷

It's hard to judge the level of Chinese reaction to trilateral security talks and maritime exercises. Keeping Beijing informed of the location and timing of talks as well as about exercises would demonstrate a measure of openness and transparency. It's likely that the physical cooperation of maritime drills will raise more eyebrows in Beijing than security dialogues. Chinese threat perceptions over naval cooperation could be partly allayed by holding the exercises away from Northeast Asia (where bilateral RAN–JMSDF and

RAN–ROKN exercises have previously been held) and in Pacific waters. Chinese concerns could be further reduced by inviting the PLA Navy to observe the HADR exercises.

Despite measures to mitigate Chinese concerns, there’ll inevitably be some security trade-off. While Chinese concerns deserve consideration, new approaches to regional security cooperation shouldn’t be discounted solely for fear of alarming China. China’s likely to scrutinise and indeed criticise any cooperation in the region that it’s not directly involved in, and the strategic benefits of trilateral maritime exercises may well exceed that cost.

An additional concern about trilateral engagement is the uneven levels of development in the Australia–Japan and Australia–ROK relationships—the former is much better developed than the latter. We’ve been far more focused on developing relations with Japan and China, whose huge economic assets and strategic power have been like beacons of light.¹⁸ The dimmer light from South Korea hasn’t attracted as much Australian attention until very recently. For South Korea’s part, it was preoccupied with its own peninsula for several decades and that narrower geostrategic focus put Australia on the periphery.¹⁹ But changing geopolitical realities are increasing South Korea’s importance to Australia and vice versa. Many of the same factors that have made Japan one of our closest partners (trade, shared interests, alliance with the US, similar strategic outlook) are shared by South Korea. There’s much greater potential in this relationship than has been exploited by either side.

Due to the discrepancy in our bilateral relations with Tokyo and Seoul, South Korea may perceive an Australian bias towards Japanese positions and objectives during discussions or exercises. In this regard, further iterations by the Australian Government that Japan is Australia’s ‘best friend in Asia’ are counterproductive. At the outset, we should avoid weighing in on Japan–ROK bilateral disputes (a trap the US has been less able—or willing—to dodge). More generally, we can mitigate this problem by investing more in our bilateral relationship with South Korea. Australia should build stronger ties with South Korea and, ideally, greater parity in Australia’s two bilateral relationships should precede trilateral initiatives. However, considering the presence of other conditions that increase the urgency for a trilateral arrangement now, Canberra should enhance its bilateral relationship with Seoul concurrently. The recently concluded free trade agreement with Seoul is a start; Canberra should capitalise on the momentum from this development and seek to enhance relations in all other areas.

Concerned parties may also expect that a foundation of trilateral US–Australia–ROK and quadrilateral US–Japan–ROK–Australia cooperation will be established before multilateral initiatives that exclude the US. There’s no denying that the three countries’ alliances with the US provide a platform for cooperation and, indeed, multilateralism with the US could underpin the success of a trilateral Australia–Japan–ROK initiative. However, their alliances aren’t the sole driver of cooperation; nor should they be considered the most important. The US needn’t be involved in all activities and it’s preferable that it be excluded in some instances. If the US is perceived as the principal driver of cooperation, stronger fears about a containment policy would emerge in Beijing, and South Korea might be persuaded not to participate. For this reason, an Australia–Japan–ROK trilateral should be pursued with or without a foundation of other US initiatives.

Other options

There’s another option: Australia could persist with its current policies. This would be a risky path. We should and will continue to conduct the bulk of our transactions through bilateral ties, but the strategic situation in Northeast Asia is more complicated than previously and requires more innovative thinking and action.

China–US strategic rivalry looks poised to deepen, and some US allies are uncertain about how far US defence guarantees extend (both in regard to their territorial disputes and in their longevity). Heightened nationalism in China, Japan and South Korea, as well as North Korea’s ongoing nuclear and missile tests make for a tenuous environment, and bilateral relations among all neighbours are poor. When the happiest bilateral relationship seems to be between China and North Korea, a serious breakdown in the system must be taking place. Add to this rising militarism, sharper territorial disputes and competition over resources and it’s clear that the security situation is more vexed.

Rather than hoping that the foreign policy formulas of the past will produce new results, Australia should diversify its security frameworks to hedge against uncertainties. Over a decade ago, Dennis Blair and John Hanley Jr highlighted the necessity to act and to develop more multilateral security frameworks in Asia, asserting:

Inaction also poses dangers. Major social and economic changes are under way in China ... Japan [is] formulating new approaches to regional security. The Korean Peninsula faces the prospect of major changes ... Unless patterns of security cooperation and combined military activity are established and nourished, there is a danger of unilateral and bilateral actions raising tensions and rivalries in the region, which could risk conflict and inhibit peaceful development.²⁰

So, while there are risks to trilateralism, in the current context there are also risks in continuing to rely solely on bilateralism. Because of the more complex security environment and because we're an active player with considerable interests in Asia, Australia can't continue to rely solely on bilateralism. We should not only seek to build our bilateral relations but show more dynamism and explore new frameworks of cooperation.

Australia's similarities and shared strategic challenges with Japan and South Korea, coupled with a more complicated regional environment, can't be ignored. We stand to better address security challenges outside our normal level of influence, improve interoperability with existing partners, consolidate priorities and resources, and hedge against regional uncertainties—among other benefits. There's more opportunity here than may first appear.

Australia won't be able to resolve decades-old animosity between Japan and South Korea. Tokyo and Seoul's disagreements are profound, deep and historically based. However, we could bring their relationship into the future. We'd be helping to reduce the domestic and external barriers to security cooperation and allow both to circumvent the problems associated with US-trilateralism. In developing deeper and more habitual patterns of security cooperation between the two, we'd be furthering our own strategic interests.

Australia should leverage its relationships with Japan and South Korea and explore new frameworks of cooperation to proactively shape the region towards its interests. We're a second-tier power and a leader in the region: a trilateral initiative such as this is a step towards realising our full potential.

Appendix: Major events in Japan–ROK relations, 1993 to 2013

Shading reflects positive developments in the relationship.

Year	Month	Event
1993	August	Historic 'Kono' statement, formally apologising for treatment of female sex slaves ('comfort women') during World War II
1994	April	ROK Minister of Defence makes first official visit to Japan; first Japan–ROK Ministry of Defence talks are held
1995	June	Japanese Government formally establishes the Asian Women's Fund to distribute private atonement money to 'comfort women'
1995	August	Historic 'Murayama' statement, formally apologising for wartime aggression on the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II
1996	February	Diplomatic tensions escalate over Dokdo/Takeshima islands as South Korean Government announces plan to build wharf
1998	October	Joint declaration ('A New Japan–Republic of Korea Partnership towards the Twenty-first Century') improves bilateral relations and paves the way for greater defence engagement, including maritime activities
1999	Jan–Dec	Japan and South Korea install three hotlines during the year to improve security cooperation
1999	April	The two governments announce the Statement of Intent on Defense Exchanges
1999	April	Japan, the US and South Korea establish the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group to coordinate policy towards North Korea
1999	August	Japan and ROK navies conduct first bilateral exercise, a search and rescue operation
2001	July	South Korea cancels military exchanges with Japan over Japan's refusal to revise school textbooks
2002	May	Japan and South Korea co-host the 2002 FIFA World Cup
2003	March	South Korean Ambassador to the United Nations strongly opposes Japan's participation as a permanent member of the UN Security Council
2005	March	Japan restates its claim to Dokdo/Takeshima islands
2005	July	South Korea announces new Dokdo-class amphibious assault vessel

2006	February	Shimane Prefecture in Japan enacts the first ‘Takeshima Day’ to mark ownership over the disputed islands
2006	October	Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe claims that Japanese soldiers convicted as Class A war criminals ‘are not war criminals under the laws of Japan’
2006	October	Prime Minister Abe upholds Murayama statement of 1995. The same day, a group of 80 Japanese lawmakers visits the Yasukuni Shrine
2007	March	Prime Minister Abe says there’s ‘no evidence’ that the Japanese Government recruited sex slaves to service soldiers during World War II, despite previous government admissions
2007	March	27 March: The Japanese Diet issues an official apology to ‘comfort women’
2007	March	31 March: Japan dissolves the Asian Women’s Fund
2008		Japan observes US–ROK naval exercises for the first time
2010		South Korea observes Japan–US military exercises for the first time
2010	August	On the 100th anniversary of Japan–Korea Annexation Treaty, the Japanese Prime Minister declares Japan’s intention to build a ‘future-oriented’ relationship with the ROK and hopes for the two states to become the ‘most important and closest neighbouring nations in the twenty-first century’
2011	January	Japan and South Korea agree to hold regular Defence Minister and Vice-Defence Minister meetings
2011	August	Korean Constitutional Court rules ROK Government inaction on seeking a solution to atonement money from Japan for ‘comfort women’ is unconstitutional
2011	December	South Korea raises the issue of atonement money for ‘comfort women’ with Japan during Kyoto Summit
2012	April	Japan and South Korea agree to sign the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement
2012	June	Japan, the US and South Korea conduct their first trilateral naval exercise
2012	June	29 June: South Korea postpones signing the GSOMIA
2012	July	3–5 July: Japan hosts a Proliferation Security Initiative exercise involving South Korea, Australia and Singapore
2012	July	12 July: Japan, the US and South Korea announce the establishment of a security consultative body
2012	August	7–8 August: Japan, the US and the ROK hold joint naval exercises
2012	August	10 August: Outgoing South Korean President Lee Myung-bak visits disputed islands and demands apology from Japanese Emperor
2012	August	28 August: Prime Minister Abe promises to review the Kono and Murayama statements if elected
2012	August/ September	Japan recalls its ambassador to Seoul, proposes taking the case over the disputed islands to the International Court of Justice and threatens economic countermeasures
2012	September	South Korea refuses to allow a Japanese warship to dock during Proliferation Security Initiative exercise
2013	April	17 April: Japanese Ambassador to Seoul states that Japan is ready to sign the GSOMIA with South Korea ‘at any time’
2013	April	22 April: South Korea’s Foreign Minister cancels trip to Japan in response to visits and offerings made at Yasukuni Shrine by senior Japanese Government officials
2013	April	23 April: In response to questions about the Murayama apology in the Japanese Diet, Prime Minister Abe says that there is no definitive definition of ‘aggression’ and that his cabinet might not honour the apology
2013	May	13 May: Osaka Mayor Hashimoto said, ‘To maintain discipline in the military, it [a ‘comfort women system’] must have been necessary at that time’.
2013	May	15 May: Prime Minister Abe upholds Murayama apology
2013	July	Japan–ROK–US Foreign Ministers Meeting (the first meeting between the Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers since September 2012)
2013	October	Japan, the US and the ROK hold joint naval exercises around the Korean Peninsula
2013	November	South Korean President Park Geun-hye expresses openness to talks with North Korea but says there would be ‘no point’ to a summit with Japan until it changes its stance on an apology for ‘comfort women’ and acknowledges past wrongdoings
2013	December	12 December: Japan and ROK conduct joint maritime security exercise (including helicopters) in area covered by China’s Air Defence Identification Zone
2013	December	23 December: Japan provides ammunition via the UN to South Korean troops engaged in peacekeeping in South Sudan
2013	December	26 December: Prime Minister Abe visits Yasukuni Shrine

Notes

- 1 'Tony Abbott reaches out to Australia's "best friend in Asia", Japan', *The Australian*, 10 October 2013, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/tony-abbott-reaches-out-to-australias-best-friend-in-asia-japan/story-fn59nm2j-1226736508726>.
- 2 Tony Abbott, joint press conference with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 28 November 2013, <http://www.pm.gov.au/media/2013-11-28/joint-press-conference-daw-aung-san-suu-kyi>.
- 3 Julie Bishop, speech to Sungkyunkwan University, 18 October 2013, http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2013/jb_sp_131018a.html.
- 4 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Australia concludes FTA negotiations with the Republic of Korea*, 2012, <http://www.pm.gov.au/media/2013-12-05/australia-concludes-fta-negotiations-republic-korea>.
- 5 For an overview of the past two decades of major events in the bilateral relationship, see the appendix in this report.
- 6 The Yasukuni Shrine honours convicted Class A war criminals from World War II.
- 7 Shinzo Abe cast doubt over Japan's level of culpability for the Pacific War, saying 'The definition of aggression has yet to be established in academia or in the international community'. See <http://nation.time.com/2013/05/20/sorry-but-japan-still-cant-get-the-war-right/#ixzz2tcsOfXXC>.
- 8 AE Kubo, 'China opens memorial honoring Korean independence activist', 22 January 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/china-opens-memorial-honoring-korean-independence-activist/>.
- 9 In 2012, South Korea postponed signing two military accords—the General Security of Military Information Agreement and the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement.
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Acronyms and abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
GSOMIA	General Security of Military Information Agreement
HADR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
JMSDF	Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific Exercise
ROK	Republic of Korea
ROKN	Republic of Korea Navy
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

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