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Policy Proposal

**“Forming a Collaborative East Asian
Intelligence Framework”**

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SUBJECT: Forming a Collaborative East Asian Intelligence Framework

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Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, the United States has led the international community in adopting the ideas of sovereignty, freedom, and democratic governance. Over the past century, democratic principles and values have risen in prominence by placing power in the people's hands while affording their citizens individual freedoms and liberties. Recently, China has emerged as a rising power that, as an autocratic government, has intensified its ambitions to establish its regional hegemony. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program to establish Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-future. In the long term, China seeks the displacement of the United States as a global leader.¹

¹ *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense 2018), 2.

Mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to our American national security grand strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric advantage that no competitor or rival can match. This approach has served the United States well, in peace and war, for the past 75 years. The current geopolitical threats to American national security that China and other regional actors pose to the Republic of Korea (RoK), Japan, and the United States present a need for an intelligence sharing framework. Such a framework would increase collaboration between the three countries and create an environment to strengthen intelligence gathering capabilities and assets in the region.

Background

In response to Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States must rely on its regional partners to enhance its Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. However, it is important to understand the significant cultural, political, and historical differences that are ever-present when addressing partnerships with Japan and South Korea.

America has fostered mature interoperable training in the Pacific, particularly with the Republic of Korea and Japan. The U.S. Air Force (particularly in the Pacific) is actively engaged in the RoK Hovering Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (HUAV) program, which was “built with interoperability as a key factor from the start.”² While military cohesion between Japan and especially South Korea has matured, there has been limited success in formalizing a framework to share intelligence with these countries.

More recently, the intelligence sharing framework between Japan and the RoK has become increasingly tense. For example, South Korea was on the brink of withdrawing from the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in November of 2019.³ The U.S. has also struggled to build reliable intelligence-sharing networks with these countries in recent years.

Problem Analysis

The People’s Republic of China presents a clear and present threat against the democratic government of Taiwan. China continuously sends military aircraft into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ) and has achieved rapid military modernization of its amphibious

²Holgrem, Col. Jacob, USAF. "Expanding Cooperative Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance with Allies and Partn." *Air University (AU)*, 20 Jan. 2020, www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2473957/expanding-cooperative-intelligence-surveillance-and-reconnaissance-with-allies/. Accessed 9 Feb. 2023.

³ Lee, Joyce and Takenaka, Kiyoshi. “South Korea Pulls Intelligence Deal With Japan Back From the Brink.” *Reuters*, 21 Nov. 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-japan/south-korea-pulls-intelligence-deal-with-japan-back-from-the-brink-idUSKBN1XW087>. Accessed 10 Feb. 2023.

assault forces.⁴ After then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022, China conducted simulated strikes against Taiwan as well as a simulated blockade.⁵ On top of conducting more serious military exercises while modernizing its amphibious forces, President Xi Jinping was recently elected to a third five-year term. This solidifies President Xi's leadership through 2027, a significant marker for the People's Liberation Army (PLA). By 2027, the PLA is meant to achieve full military capability to conduct a joint island invasion campaign – in other words, seize Taiwan. Such an achievement would limit Taiwan's ability to respond to an island invasion and limit U.S. and allied capability to intervene.⁶

Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China is seeking to effect a strategy that is defensive in nature but allows the country to conduct offensive operations that support the strategy. Over the next twenty years, the PLA will seek to accomplish the missions set before it to ensure China's regional security. To remain strategically defensive, it is necessary that the PLA prevent Taiwan independence, control the South China and East China Seas, mitigate unrest in the western borderlands, plan for crisis in Korea, continue to uphold nuclear deterrence, and maintain non-combat missions across the region.⁷

Rising security dilemmas for the US, South Korea, and Japan call for a show of solidarity against Chinese and neighboring threats. The lack of trust between partner countries weakens U.S. security interests in the region. For example, South Korean policymakers have expressed doubts on their ability to rely on the US for deterrence. During a recent meeting between the US and RoK's Defense Secretaries, the countries decided to reaffirm their partnership through an expanded scale of military and nuclear tabletop exercises, as well as further involvement in Indo-Pacific deterrence.⁸ To contextualize, a poll from the major Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* revealed that more than 80% of the population regards China, North Korea, and Russia as military threats.⁹ Furthermore, Indo-Pacific government leaders have expressed concern that recent events, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, could embolden regional threats to implement dangerous military activities.¹⁰ As a result, Japan and the RoK have bolstered their defense capabilities and spending.¹¹

⁴ Thomas J. Shattuck, "Assessing One Year of PLA Air Incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, [Assessing One Year of PLA Air Incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ - Foreign Policy Research Institute \(fpri.org\)](https://www.fpri.org/publications/assessing-one-year-of-pla-air-incursions-into-taiwan-s-adiz).

⁵ Yimou Lee and Sarah Wu, "Furious China Fires Missiles Near Taiwan in Drills after Pelosi Visit," *Reuters*, [Furious China fires missiles near Taiwan in drills after Pelosi visit | Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/furious-china-fires-missiles-near-taiwan-in-drills-after-pelosi-visit-2022-08-24/).

⁶ Alex Willemyns, "CIA Director: China Ready for Taiwan Invasion by 2027," *Radio Free Asia*, [CIA director: China readying for Taiwan invasion by 2027 — Radio Free Asia \(rfa.org\)](https://www.rfa.org/asia/cia-director-china-readying-for-taiwan-invasion-by-2027-02-07-20230207000000.html).

⁷ Defense Intelligence Agency, "China Military Power," [China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf \(dia.mil\)](https://www.dia.mil/Reports-and-Publications/China-Military-Power-FINAL-5MB-20190103.pdf), 7.

⁸ Hee Lee, Michelle Ye, and Min Joo Kim. "South Koreans wonder: Will the U.S. still protect us from North Korea?" *The Washington Post*, 7 Feb. 2023, www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/07/south-north-korea-nuclear-weapons-security/.

⁹ Fraser Katz, Katrin, et al. "America Needs to Reassure Japan and South Korea." *Foreign Affairs*, 9 Feb. 2023, www.foreignaffairs.com/japan/america-needs-reassure-japan-and-south-korea.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The United States is at the risk of not being able to maintain its global, military, and societal influence against China due to many factors, one of which is its lack of coordination among the international intelligence agencies of East Asia.¹² It is therefore imperative to reassert the U.S. commitment to key allies, in particular geographically strategic nations such as the RoK and Japan with the possibility of Taiwan as an associate partner.

Recommendations

The US should pursue the creation of a collaborative intelligence framework between Japan and the Republic of Korea. Such a framework would:

- **Help improve operational security apparatus between partner countries:** It is widely known that Japan and South Korea do not possess the same operational security standards as the United States. By furthering intelligence sharing networks, it is vital that partner countries work to upgrade their operational security apparatus.
- **Integrate U.S. efforts to deter China and strengthen readiness:** A more unified strategic intelligence framework promotes openness; it allows more U.S. partners to work together to limit Chinese aggression in the Asia-Pacific.
- **Continuously improve the quality of intelligence that is collected between countries involved:** Relationships in intelligence sharing are reciprocal. In the best interests of this partnership, each country should standardize and control the quality of intelligence that is shared.
- **Strengthen U.S. relationships with the Republic of Korea and Japan:** This will counter China's narrative that the US is not committed to the region and that countries should side with China instead. An intelligence sharing framework will additionally support military to military engagement between the US, RoK, and Japan.

The Way Ahead

The security threats that countries such as China and other regional adversaries continue to pose could be partially mitigated by a more effective intelligence collaboration effort such as the *Collaborative East Asian Intelligence Framework*. This framework would foster partnerships between countries opposed to China and other regional adversaries. This would improve U.S. intelligence-gathering resources in the Indo-Pacific area. Trust between these partner countries would create an atmosphere of increased effectiveness of future prospects and engagement. Developing an effective national security framework hinges on cooperative involvement between partner countries. To that end, the success of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing system could be effectively translated to the Indo-Pacific regions, particularly with Japan, the Republic of Korea, and potentially Taiwan.

¹² *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense 2018), 2.

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