

**Statement of
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Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**

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**Trilateral Cooperation Between the United States,
Japan, and the Republic of Korea**

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sherman, and Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify on the topic of trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. I would also like to thank the Committee for holding a hearing on this important topic. The ongoing threat posed by North Korea's unlawful nuclear and ballistic missile programs, as reflected in their latest nuclear test on September 9 and accelerating pace of launches this year, brings the importance of our trilateral cooperation into sharper focus.

U.S-Japan-ROK Cooperation

The Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific has been a centerpiece initiative of the Obama Administration, which has recognized that events and developments in that region over the coming decades will deeply influence our nation's security and prosperity. A fundamental objective of that strategy has been to revitalize our treaty alliances and to establish networks among them. One of the best examples of such networking is the increasingly strong trilateral relationship with two of our closest friends, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Our three countries are bound by shared values and interests, and the common threats we face. Our alliances with both countries, embodied in the U.S. - Republic of Korea Mutual Defense Treaty and the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, are longstanding and unshakeable. The ties of trade and investment among our three economies, the world's first, third, and eleventh largest, are fundamental to our interconnected world and U.S. prosperity.

We share many of the same concerns and face the same threats in the region, including the one posed by a nuclear North Korea. But most importantly, the United States, the Republic of Korea, and Japan are bound by our agreement on the core principles and values that undergird the success of our countries – democracy, human rights, open markets, and the paramount importance of the rule of law. As three advanced democracies and market economies, it is natural that we cooperate on more than regional issues, harnessing the power of our governments, scientists, business leaders, and civil societies to make progress in tackling global problems.

The Shared Threat of North Korea

The United States, the Republic of Korea, and Japan together face the region's most acute threat – North Korea. On September 9, North Korea conducted its fifth nuclear test, the second this year. This test followed an unprecedented spate of ballistic missile launches, 22 so far this year. These provocations have become far too common and threaten the security of the United States and our allies. Mr. Chairman, as the House noted in H.Res.634, North Korea's ongoing nuclear and missile tests represent direct and egregious violations of United Nations Security Council Resolutions and make clear that North Korea has no regard for international norms and standards.

As President Obama said shortly after the September 9 nuclear test, the United States condemns North Korea's nuclear and missile tests in the strongest possible terms as a grave threat to regional security and to international peace and stability. The United States does not, and will not, accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state. Shortly after North Korea's September 9 nuclear test, President Obama spoke with President Park of the Republic of Korea and Prime Minister Abe of Japan and agreed to work with UN Security Council members, our other Six-Party partners, and the broader international community to implement vigorously the existing measures imposed by previous resolutions, and to take additional significant steps, including new measures, to demonstrate to North Korea that there are consequences for its unlawful and dangerous actions. We are also considering possible trilateral measures with the ROK and Japan in response to North Korea's destabilizing actions. President Obama has restated the unshakeable U.S. commitment to defend the ROK and Japan against the North Korean threat and to provide extended deterrence, guaranteed by the full spectrum of U.S. defense capabilities.

U.S.-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Cooperation

On March 31 of this year, President Obama held a trilateral meeting in Washington, DC with President Park and Prime Minister Abe in which the three leaders emphasized the importance of trilateral cooperation. After the meeting, President Obama said “we are bound together by treaty, by trade, and by the enduring bonds between our peoples.” This trilateral cooperation has continued throughout the year. On May 30, Secretary of Defense Carter met in Singapore with his Japanese and ROK counterparts to discuss defense cooperation. Just last week, Secretary Kerry met with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts in New York. During that meeting, Secretary Kerry, Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida, and South Korean Foreign Minister Yun strongly condemned North Korea’s September 9 nuclear test and its flagrant disregard for multiple United Nations Security Council Resolutions prohibiting the DPRK’s ballistic missile and nuclear programs. Secretary Kerry and his counterparts also noted the positive role that the three countries can play to promote regional peace and stability and address global challenges. That emphasis is shared by diplomats and military leaders at all levels of our governments.

To further support and enhance trilateral ties, Secretary Kerry asked Deputy Secretary Blinken to lead an effort to institutionalize trilateral cooperation on regional security and global issues. Since April 2015, the Deputy Secretary has held five meetings with his counterparts from Japan and the Republic of Korea, the last of which occurred in July 2016 in Honolulu. We look forward to the next such meeting this fall. These meetings have guided our trilateral cooperation and have spurred lower-level engagement focused on specific functional issues.

Trilateral Cooperation on Regional Security

Our partnership with the Republic of Korea and Japan is strategic and focused on dealing with the threat that North Korea poses to the region and to the world. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Sung Kim meets regularly with his ROK and Japanese counterparts to coordinate all aspects of North Korea policy, and these trilateral consultations have deepened as the North Korean nuclear and missile threat has grown.

In June of this year, we conducted a joint missile warning exercise, called Pacific Dragon, to improve coordination in a number of areas, including the detection, tracking, and reporting of ballistic targets. Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States continue to exchange information on North Korea's capabilities. We are regularizing military-to-military engagements to strengthen ties among the three countries. Key diplomatic and defense officials from our three countries have worked together via the December 2014 Trilateral Information Sharing Arrangement to coordinate approaches on addressing the DPRK missile and nuclear threat. Immediately following North Korea's nuclear tests and missile launches this past year, State Department and Defense Department officials have also communicated with Japanese and Republic of Korea counterparts via trilateral phone and video conferences to coordinate our various responses.

We are also in lockstep with our Japanese and South Korean partners on finding ways to counter North Korea's proliferation activities. We are working together to ensure all countries understand and are able to implement fully their obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2270, adopted in March 2016 in response to North Korea's January 2016 nuclear test. We've seen progress in key areas, such as disrupting the DPRK arms trade and de-flagging DPRK ships. We're focusing our efforts on cutting off sources of revenue for the regime's unlawful nuclear and ballistic weapons programs, including revenue generated through the coal trade and overseas by North Korean workers. We're also coordinating our efforts in multilateral forums, including the United Nations, the East Asia Summit, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), to ensure that other countries join us in condemning North Korea's provocative actions and fully enforce UN sanctions against the regime.

Our three countries will continue to increase the costs on North Korea and target its revenue and reputation until it makes a strategic decision to return to serious talks on denuclearization and complies with its international obligations and commitments. We are doing our part to ensure the Kim regime knows its reckless provocations will only invite a stronger response and deepen its isolation from the international community. We have long made clear our willingness to take part in credible and authentic talks aimed at returning to the Six-Party Talks with the core goal of denuclearizing the DPRK. Unfortunately, the DPRK's litany of provocations demonstrates its rejection of the kind of dialogue and diplomacy that the Republic of Korea, Japan, and the United States seek.

Our strategic cooperation also goes beyond dealing with North Korea. For example, we all have a keen interest in upholding a rules-based order worldwide, one in which all countries, regardless of size, act according to shared norms and shared principles. All three of our countries are concerned about disputes in the South China Sea. The United States does not take a position with respect to which claimant has sovereignty over any of the naturally formed land features in the South China Sea, but we do take a strong position on the importance of all claimants resolving disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law, as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention.

We have called upon both China and the Philippines to abide by the July Arbitral Tribunal decision and uphold international law. The United States will stand with allies and partners in upholding these fundamental interests, and the ongoing Deputy-level trilateral meetings give us a forum to discuss these issues with some of our closest allies in the region. We have also used our trilateral structure to cooperate on humanitarian assistance and disaster response to test our collective readiness on a range of natural disaster scenarios.

Trilateral Cooperation on Global Issues

While dealing with these regional security issues is critical, our trilateral engagement has evolved into a partnership that is global in scope. In today's interconnected world, epidemics, climate change, cyber attacks, and terrorist activities pay borders little heed, making coordination with allies and partners all the more important in responding to such threats.

Few countries have as much to contribute to upholding, advancing, and reforming the global system as our three countries – as vibrant democracies deeply invested in the principles and norms of that system, and as economic leaders for sustainable growth and game-changing innovation.

Allow me to give you a few examples of the results of our trilateral engagement on global issues. At the Women's Empowerment Forum today in Washington, DC, approximately 60 government, business, and civil society leaders, together with elected officials, from our three countries are meeting to discuss ways to bolster gender equality. The participants are focused on promoting women's political and economic participation in each of our three countries, as well as coordinating our gender-focused development programs throughout the world, with a particular interest in adolescent girls' education. This forum exemplifies the growth of our trilateral cooperation on global issues that matter to citizens in each of our countries.

We have also moved forward on cooperating on health issues that affect us all. Both the Republic of Korea and Japan have been active participants in the Global Health Security Agenda, the President’s initiative to improve global capabilities to detect, prevent, and respond to infectious disease threats. As I mentioned above, Secretary Kerry met with counterparts from Japan and the Republic of Korea on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly earlier this month in New York. During the same week, Vice President Biden, along with the health ministers of our three countries met and made a commitment to work together on cancer research in connection with the Vice President’s Cancer Moonshot initiative. Scientific leaders from our three countries also met in New York to discuss ongoing brain research projects. These trilateral initiatives on health will protect and benefit citizens in our three countries and across the world.

Our trilateral cooperation on global issues includes many other areas. This summer, our top Arctic officials discussed ways to foster scientific cooperation and our logging experts exchanged information and best practices on domestic logging laws, international law enforcement networking, and customs and borders enforcement. We have used our trilateral partnership to discuss ways to counter violent extremism in the Middle East, expand our cooperation on civil space exploration, work together in coping with emerging cyber threats, and coordinate our approaches to economic development.

As you can see, the breadth and scope of our trilateral cooperation is virtually unparalleled.

Fostering Improved Japan/Republic of Korea Relations

I also believe our trilateral engagement process has helped with the ongoing improvement in relations between the Republic of Korea and Japan. In December 2015, Japan and the Republic of Korea – under the leadership of Prime Minister Abe and President Park – reached an historic agreement to address the sensitive historical issue of “comfort women.” We have applauded their courageous step, which, we believe, will contribute to healing and reconciliation, while creating new opportunities for greater bilateral and trilateral cooperation.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, the Department of State is committed to enhancing trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea to better confront shared regional and global challenges. We look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress to continue building this important trilateral relationship.

Thank you for inviting me to testify here today. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.