

The U.S.-Japan Summit on 23 May 2022: Assessment and Outlook

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President Joseph R. Biden met with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio on May 23, 2022, to advance bilateral cooperation on a range of regional and global issues and reaffirm their intent to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance. The essence of the Biden administration's Asia strategy is establishing flexible and innovative partnerships with U.S. allies and partners in Asia to counter China's clout in the region amid the U.S.-China strategic competition. And Biden's trip to Asia was aimed at boosting strategic ties with and between U.S. allies and partners in the region as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy. It is assessed that President Biden's stops in Seoul, Tokyo assured steady policy implementation by reaffirming unwavering U.S. commitment to the last year's agreements with its allies, and fleshed out the contents of the QUAD and IPEF as the Indo-Pacific's multilateral consultative bodies.

President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida shared the view that the greatest immediate challenge to the international order is Russia's brutal, unprovoked, and unjustified aggression against Ukraine. The President and the Prime Minister condemned Russia's actions, and called for the Kremlin to be held accountable for its atrocities. The two leaders reaffirmed their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The two heads of state's first encounter is meaningful in that the two sides reaffirmed their

shared intention to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance to effectively mitigate the growing geopolitical tension in the Indo-Pacific based on the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. The joint statement says that Washington's determination to provide U.S. extended deterrence by employing nuclear and conventional forces remains the same, and that Article V of the Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands. But what deserves attention in the statement is that President Biden's reaffirmed determination will likely serve as powerful deterrent forces against China's growing assertiveness in the region. President Biden also clearly stated that the U.S. will intervene militarily if China invades Taiwan, which seems to be a warning to Beijing that the U.S. will not sit back and watch China's aggression against Taiwan.

At the meeting, Prime Minister Kishida stated his determination to fundamentally reinforce Japan's defense capabilities and secure substantial increase of its defense budget needed to effect it. With the Japanese people's growing concern over various security challenges - North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile development activities, China's rapidly increasing defense budget and maritime advance, and the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is leading discussions to hammer out plans to strengthen Japan's defense capabilities. In line with efforts to boost the integration and globalization of the U.S.-Japan alliance, it is forecast that Japan will play a greater role in the U.S. government's Indo-Pacific strategy,

particularly in checking China's advance in the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, by departing from its exclusively defense-oriented posture with the deepening of cross-sectoral bilateral cooperation in the domains of land, air, sea, cyber, space, missile defense, and the electromagnetic spectrum.

At their last summit held in April 2021, the U.S. and Japan agreed to implement various policies aimed at checking China in the domain of economic security. The two sides reaffirmed their resolve and fleshed out the contents of such policies this year. President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida underscored that Washington and Tokyo need to work together to protect and promote critical technologies, support their respective competitive advantages, and ensure supply chain resilience, expressing the intention to hold the Japan-U.S. Economic Policy Consultative Committee (the Economic "2+2") at the Ministerial level in July 2022. Since March, the U.S. has been pushing for the formation of a "Chip 4" alliance with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan to revamp the global semiconductor supply chain. In the joint statement released after this year's summit, the U.S. and Japan concurred on establishing a joint task force to explore the development of next generation semiconductors.

Meanwhile, on May 23, the U.S. held a hybrid meeting with representatives of top and ministerial levels from 13 countries, and announced the joint statement on the launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity. At the meeting, President Biden said that the U.S. will lead efforts to "write the new rules for the 21st century economy that are going to help all of our countries' economies grow faster and fairer." He also pledged to address regional challenges toward an economic vision where economic growth is sustainable and inclusive through the IPEF.

The U.S. intends to leverage IPEF instead of TPP or RCEP to rewrite the trade rules in the Indo-Pacific region. If IPEF takes shape, the U.S. is expected to pursue high-standard rules in areas like labor, environment, and digital trade, with standards that are high as the ones the TPP countries have agreed to. IPEF is also likely to help the U.S. build a stronger and more resilient supply chain in key materials like semiconductors and cutting-edge technologies, and therefore allow

itself to "de-couple" from China.

A more intense strategic competition between the U.S. and China in the Indo-Pacific could bring the confrontation between the U.S.-led bloc including Europe and Japan, and China aligned with Russia further to the fore. The Biden administration is expected to leverage the U.S.-Japan alliance, the ROK-U.S. alliance, U.S.-Japan cooperation, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), and AUKUS to strengthen solidarity with U.S. allies and partners in military and non-military domains in the Indo-Pacific region. China, for its part, is rallying anti-U.S. forces to counter what it sees as a U.S.-led encirclement of China. Beijing is increasing its military activity around Taiwan and expanding its presence in the South Pacific. With both sides ratcheting up their actions, the ongoing power struggle between the U.S. and China will likely persist in the coming years.


Korea needs to improve relations with Japan, which is a key partner for the Biden administration in the implementation of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. The new Yoon Suk Yeol administration should engage in strategic cooperation with Japan, by focusing on substantive areas of cooperation. For instance, Seoul and Tokyo could expand strategic cooperation at regional and multilateral levels, deepen economic and trade ties, cooperate on non-traditional security threats, and increase cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Relations between the two countries have deteriorated over the past few years, as Japanese society has become increasingly conservative and a series of events that took place during Moon Jae-in's presidency soured bilateral relations, with a sense of bitterness still lingering on both sides. With regards to historical issues, the new Yoon government should try to negotiate with Japan through diplomatic channels after closely monitoring the political landscape in Japan in the wake of the upcoming upper house election. Also, the Yoon government should forge a consensus among the public before consulting with Japan.

To improve Korea-Japan relations, it is necessary to take a comprehensive approach guided by a broader perspective. The two sides should seek to restore trust and improve ties by resuming channels of dialogue between the heads of state as

well as high-level officials. Also, the two governments should explore solutions to each issue facing the two countries, and work together to arrive at a comprehensive agreement that will commit the two countries to a shared vision.

Broadening the scope of the Korea-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation is a complex matter. Using the trilateral cooperation to deal with a wide array of security issues beyond North Korean nuclear and missile issues is often a matter closed linked to other issues like historical grievances between Korea and Japan, North Korea policy, and Korea-China relations. For this reason, the new Korean government should come up with a long-term plan to decide on the scope and level of security cooperation with the U.S. and Japan while actively communicating with the Korean public to forge a national consensus on this issue. The Yoon administration could work together with the U.S. and Japan to ensure that U.S. extended deterrence remains credible and resilient. Moreover, it should make efforts to normalize the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), increase people-to-people as well as information exchanges with Japan on the security front, and contemplate signing the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) with Japan as part of its mid to long term plan to improve bilateral relations.

Countries led by the U.S. and Japan are likely to participate in IPEF, QUAD working group, and ministerial-level meetings on supply chain in the coming years to set global standards for cutting-edge technologies and reorganize strategic material supply chains. The new Korean government should harness these multilateral arrangements to reshape its economic relationship with Japan and open up new avenues for deeper economic cooperation. IPEF has the potential to be a new platform to boost economic security, covering a broad range of issues that will emerge in the post-pandemic world. Participation in IPEF will allow Korea to expand its diplomatic horizon, insulate itself from a series of shocks that could harm Seoul's economic security, and transition to a digital economy and clean energy. IPEF membership could help Korea emerge as a new "rule-maker" in Indo-Pacific – a country with the potential to shape a new regional economic order.

Going forward, the Korean government will have to sketch out its Indo-Pacific strategy or lay out an official position on what it envisions in the Indo-Pacific region. When formulating a new Indo-Pacific strategy, the strategic area of interest identified by the new Korean government should not deviate too much from concepts like Northeast Asia, Asia-Pacific, East Asia, and New Southern, which have been used to define and categorize a series of South Korean foreign policies and related strategies. The Yoon government should also keep in mind that its Indo-Pacific strategy, whatever form it takes, should define Korea's position between the U.S. and China amid the growing rivalry between the two great powers. 

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