

***“New age in Japan-ROK relations: Analyzing the potential for a Japan-ROK security partnership”***

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***1. Introduction***

With the boom of Korean culture in Japan in recent years and the lifting of the ban of Japanese pop-culture in the Republic of Korea (ROK) indicated the dawn of a new age for the two historical rivals. However, it is still premature, and a “new age” can only arrive when the two countries can finally recognize each other as partners, cooperating to solve regional security issues. The Japanese and Koreans often refer to each other as “The country that is close, yet far”. While close geographically and some ways culturally, it is a distant country due to differences in mentality and the strong sense of rivalry. Antagonisms over historical views and sovereignty between Japan and the ROK have been endemic in their 40 years diplomatic history. Over-reactive nationalism, xenophobia and distrust for its neighbours that have been hurled at each other in recent years have raised the question of whether they can ever reconcile at all, overshadowing calls for cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo. However, the balance of power nature in East Asia, efforts for a state to boost its power, as well as threats from non-state actors indicates that the region could face an ugly situation in the near future. This suggests that the time for cooperation between powers will be essential to ensure that security is sustained within the Asia-Pacific region, and a Japan-ROK alignment could just be the formula.

The paper will first briefly look into what the definition of an alignment, to understand the its basic structure. The paper will then look at some of the challenges that Seoul and Tokyo face to building an alignment. The final section would then look at the main shared security concerns between Japan and the ROK. These include; dealing with the problems surrounding the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), terrorism, transnational crime, non-traditional security threats, and the rise of China.

***2. Definition of a bonding alignment and justifications for Japan-ROK security pact***

*“Partners who have years of shared operational experience will increase in importance and value to each other, especially if they have areas of relative*

*advantage and possess capabilities, local knowledge and regional entree that other partners are not capable of easily duplicating.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Alan J. Hinge*

*“[Security] is primarily about the fate of human collectivities...about the pursuit of freedom from threat. [The] bottom line is about survival, but it also includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence...Security...is affected by factors in five main sectors: military, political, economic, societal and environmental.”<sup>2</sup>*

*Barry Buzan*

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of “security alliance” is given by Walt, where he terms it as the “formal or informal commitment for security cooperation by two or more states...primary purpose...to combine the members’ capabilities in a way that furthers their respective interests.”<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, the idea of forming an alignment sounds like an ideal alternative that can “get the job done” quite efficiently. However, forming an alignment is easier said than done - as establishing alliances depend heavily on domestic politics and level of confidence between states.

The primary objective of the Japan-ROK alignment is to increase efficiency to tackle shared regional security interests through cooperation. Given the unpredictable state of security in the East Asian region, there is a lot that a Japan-ROK axis can achieve to solve the situation. Should Seoul and Tokyo agree to a security alignment, it will not be a complete independent pact per se. Rather, it will function within the US alliance arrangement, hence establishing the third leg of the “trilateral security pact” in the true sense of the word. Nor will the axis be an East Asian version of North Atlantic Treaty Organization(NATO). During the early years, the main focus of the alignment should work on non-traditional security issues, and joint intelligence activities. Until when this can be consistently successful, can the two countries start thinking about forming a security agreement that functions as a conflict resolution force, taking advantage of their military strengths. Furthermore, should the alignment prove to be successful, the Seoul-Tokyo axis could expand its role as a “liberalist bloc” of East Asia, and perhaps could even initiate moves towards a true multilateral institution in the region.<sup>4</sup> While Auslin’s

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J. Hinge, “Security in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”, *Australian Defence Preparedness: Preparedness: Principles, Problems and Prospects*, UNSW, 2000. pg.115.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Buzan cited in Multhiah Alagappa, ‘Rethinking security: A critical review and appraisal of the debate’, in Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Practise*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998, pg.27.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “Why alliances endure or collapse”, *Survival*, 39:1, Spring 1997, pg157.

<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Auslin, “Japan and South Korea: The new East Asian core”, *Orbis*, 49:3, Summer 2005,

argument is creditable, such campaign would need to be treated carefully as it may only drag the region into ideological division similar to that of the Cold War and cornering Beijing. Furthermore, it needs play a more “consultant” role, and not be too patronizing to other states. Instead, considering that the East Asia region spends perhaps the most on the globe on defense, it should look at constructing a government-level forum that addresses security issues such as preventing an arms race etc.

Determining the dynamics of a Japan-ROK security axis is a difficult task indeed. “Alliances” comes in various forms, ranging from; “Alignments”, “Alliances” and “Coalitions”. Taking into account the characteristics and interests of Japan and the ROK, the most suitable form of an alignment is a “Bonding alliance”, whereby two or more states form a “horizontal partnership” on the basis of possessing shared national interests and traits. Doing so would minimize the loss of autonomy for a state and risks of touching on old wounds such as sovereignty and historical issues.

### **3. “Don’t let the best be the enemy of the good enough”: Challenges ahead**

*“Stability of tomorrow’s coalitions will also be enhanced by an increased density of connection with prospective partners. These connections include, close diplomatic relations, educational and military exchanges and operations, commercial links and international contacts among influential elites.”<sup>5</sup>*

*Alan J. Hinge*

On paper, it may not seem like a bad option for the two long-standing rivals to finally join hands. However, accomplishing such a task is extremely difficult when nationalistic paranoia and background noises over sovereignty issues that overshadow hopes for a brighter future alternative. For the time being, distrust and resentment towards one and other will be the biggest reason for the reluctance to join hands.<sup>6</sup> In the past, glimpses for a complete triangle alignment were seen at the turn of the millennium when Seoul, Tokyo and Washington constructed a trilateral security front known as the Trilateral Coordinating and Oversight Group(TCOG). Today, TCOG is now pretty much dead under the water, however, experiences in these security cooperation groups indicate that the potentials are there.<sup>7</sup> Mo argues, “As long as regional

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pg.469.

<sup>5</sup> Alan J. Hinge, “Security in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”, *Australian Defence Preparedness: Preparedness: Principles, Problems and Prospects*, UNSW, 2000. pg.115.

<sup>6</sup> Selig S. Harrison, Chapter 23 “Korea, Japan and the United States”, *Korea Endgame*, Princeton, 2002, pg.290..

<sup>7</sup> Michael R. Auslin, “Japan and South Korea: The new East Asian core”, *Orbis*, 49:3, Summer 2005,

security is threatened, Japan and South Korea will cooperate. But once that binding ring is broken, their divergent interests may come to the fore and undermine the impulse to cooperate.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the task now is whether it can be practiced in a sustainable manner.<sup>9</sup> The key to this, therefore, would be to find the solution where the relations where “the best doesn’t become the enemy of the good enough”.<sup>10</sup> Often there are voices that argue that Japan and the ROK could follow the path of the post-war Franco-German relationship. Such idea does sound ideal, however, it may not be feasible considering the realist nature of the region. Instead, the two countries could look at the post-war Australia-Japan relations as a model, where despite the dark history between the two, they are now potential security partners.<sup>11</sup>

#### •Controlling sovereignty disputes

As already mentioned, potential for any cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo quickly deteriorate whenever sovereignty disputes arise.<sup>12</sup> For example, when the year 2005 was supposed to be the year of friendship between Japan and the ROK, it became a year hijacked by historical and territorial disputes. While there are arguments that claim that the Japan-ROK relations have improved, it yet falls short of a fruitful friendship. In fact, events in recent years have proved that in fact the relations are on the brink between confrontation and cooperation. Schelling defines conflict as “Pure conflict, in which the interests of two antagonists are completely opposed, is a special case; it would arise in a war of complete extermination, otherwise not even in war itself.”<sup>13</sup> If one thinks about the current diplomatic relations between Japan and the ROK, the two are perfect examples of his definition.

The leadership of both states needs to weigh the benefits of solving these nationalistic cat-fights against the benefits from combating actual regional security issues. Both Japan and the ROK need to understand that sovereignty issues and differences in historical views are not an immediate security issue, threats to national and regional security is. Without doubt, sovereignty issues are in fact important to both countries, however, letting it spill over into diplomatic

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pp.467.

<sup>8</sup> Jong-ryn Mo, “Korean unification and Korea-Japan security cooperation”, *Japan and Korean Unification*, Lee Yeong-sun and M Okonogi ed., Yonsei University Publishing, 1999. pg.81.

<sup>9</sup> Michael R. Auslin, “Japan and South Korea: The new East Asian core”, *Orbis*, 49:3, Summer 2005, pp.468.

<sup>10</sup> Alan J. Hinge, “Security in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”, *Australian Defence Preparedness: Preparedness: Principles, Problems and Prospects*, UNSW, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> For further reading on Australia-Japan relations, see: Purnendra Jain, “Tokyo looks down under”, *Asia Times Online*, 21<sup>st</sup> August 2006, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/HH22Dh01.html> Accessed: 29<sup>th</sup> August 2006

<sup>12</sup> For further reading, see: Aidan Foster-Carter, “Korea and Japan love to hate”, *Asia Times Online*, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2002 <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/korea/DH20Dg01.html> Accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> May 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of conflict*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960. pp.4.

disputes retards relations unnecessarily. Instead, Seoul and Tokyo needs to find a way in which sovereignty issues can be treated as one part of the relations instead and setting “codes of conduct” to prevent further recurrences. If managed well, the presence of historical and territorial disputes in relations are important as it sets the boundaries between Seoul and Tokyo, so that they acknowledge the sensitivities in the relationship.

#### **•Influence of domestic politics**

Domestic politics is one of the lifelines to establishing security pacts as it is one of the biggest challenges for all powers to legitimise the promotion for the security alignment to the public and to gain legislative approval.<sup>14</sup> While this task will be extremely complicated in nature, there are two possible solutions. The first option would be to increase projects at the grass-root level, there by boosting the influx of knowledge about the future partner. The second alternative is by establishing a strong economic foundation that gives Seoul and Tokyo a shared asset that must be protected, i.e. strong trade relations. This will also help sustain the alignment as it will satisfy self-interested groups within a member state.<sup>15</sup> In fact, this has already been achieved to a fair extent. The Japan-ROK trade is worth \$70 billion, both economies are capitalist free-market based, and is also integrated into global economic regimes like OECD or IMF.<sup>16</sup> The task that remains, is establishing a Free Trade Agreement would bolster the trade relations between Tokyo and Seoul.<sup>17</sup>

#### **•Confidence building measures**

In order to establish an alignment, substantial efforts on confidence building measures is the most important task for Seoul and Tokyo. Firstly, Japan and the ROK could work on removing the mutual suspicion they have about each other on their respective arms modernisation programmes. Movements within Japan to revise the “Peace” constitution have raised concerns amongst its neighbours. However, as one analyst put it, “It is crass and simplistic to imply that a Japan that chooses to boost its military strength will soon act like an alcoholic who comes upon a bottle of whiskey.”<sup>18</sup> Thus the task for Tokyo is to confirm with Seoul that the moves to become a “normal” state is not driven by its ambitions to revive the military regime, but a logical move to have a sufficient defense force to minimize the security implications.<sup>19</sup> On the

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<sup>14</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, “US-Japan-Korea: Creating a ‘virtual alliance’”, *Asia Times Online*, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1999, <http://www.atimes.com/japan-econ/AL08Dh01.html> Accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006

<sup>15</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “Why alliances endure or collapse”, *Survival*, 39:1, Spring 1997, pg.165.

<sup>16</sup> See: Michael R. Auslin, “Japan and South Korea: The new East Asian core”, *Orbis*, 49:3, Summer 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Keizo Takewaka, “Framework for FTA between Japan and the ROK”, *Gaiko Forum*, 173, December 2003, pp.43.

<sup>18</sup> Rajan Menon, “The end of alliances”, *World Policy Journal*, Summer 2003; 20,2;. Pg.11

<sup>19</sup> Alan Dupont, “The Schizophrenic Superpower”, *The National Interest*, Spring 2005, 79, Academic

other hand, the ROK military's "Defense Reform 2020"<sup>20</sup> which aims at improving power projection capabilities with a regional outlook has caused some unease for Japan. While they are merely nationalistic rhetoric, overtly hostile statements by ROK politicians to compete with Japan have also caused great unease.

In order to work towards cooperation, it is therefore essential for Seoul and Tokyo to ease each other's concerns and clarify that the modernization programs are not directly aimed at each other, but are the result of their moves towards a self-reliant force. Secondly, the process to build security relations cannot be achieved overnight. It is a long-term effort that takes step-by-step procedures to achieve the desired end state. It is important to start small, and then expanding. Security alignments require a state to collaborate with other powers in an equal, mutually beneficial and symmetrical manner.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is essential to start in non-traditional security areas before moving onto the more sensitive traditional security areas.<sup>22</sup> Such areas include, development projects, human security issues, energy security, environmental security and threats and even projects at the grass-roots level. If this leads to frequent military-level exchanges and talks, this would indicate that the level of trust have reached a high level.

#### **•Working within the framework of the US alliance**

A security pact between Seoul and Tokyo will also "bridge the gap" that exists within the trilateral security relationship between Japan, ROK and the United States(US). Until the Japan-ROK relations are strong enough, forming a Seoul-Tokyo security relationship is should be made through their respective relations with the US.<sup>23</sup> Sticking to the US alliance is crucial as Washington can act as the "staple" to a Japan-ROK alignment. For Japan, while it has troubled times with the US, is likely to maintain its close security ties with Washington as it has served it for the better.<sup>24</sup> For the ROK on the other hand, the ROK-US alliance is likely to remain, given that while it is far from ideal for Seoul, it has the least negative incentives.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, there are even voices for Seoul to strengthen relations with the US and Japan so that they can come to its aid in a time of emergency.<sup>26</sup>

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Research Library, pp.46.

<sup>20</sup> ROK Ministry of National Defense, *국방개혁 2020*, Ministry of National Defence, pp.11~20.

<sup>21</sup> Carolina G. Hernandez, "How Japan can contribute to a peaceful world", *Asia-Pacific Review*, 12:1, 2005, pg.99.

<sup>22</sup> Carolina G. Hernandez, "How Japan can contribute to a peaceful world", *Asia-Pacific Review*, 12:1, 2005, pg.99.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, "US-Japan-Korea: Creating a 'virtual alliance'", *Asia Times Online*, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1999, <http://www.atimes.com/japan-econ/AL08Dh01.html>

<sup>24</sup> John H. Miller, "The outlier: Japan between Asia and the West", *Occasional paper series*, Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies, March 2004, pp12.

<sup>25</sup> Peter M. Beck ICG, interview with author, Seoul, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Woo-suk Choi, "Korea faces an altered Japan", *Chung-ang Ilbo*, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2005, pp.7.

Whether Washington would welcome a strong Japan-ROK alignment remains open-ended. Indeed, given the importance of its allies and the situation surrounding the DPRK, the US is likely to mediate the tensions between Japan and the ROK before it spins out of control. However, some scholars have argued that Washington in fact plays up the hostility between Seoul and Tokyo, which was “the by-product of the cold war hub and spokes structure predicted on pax-Americana”.<sup>27</sup> What this suggests is that Japan and the ROK needs balance safe-guarding their relationship whilst remaining firmly within the framework of their alliance with Washington.

#### ***4. Know your ingredients: Identifying common security perspectives***

Nations will align or join alliances to pursue their own security interests that satisfy their grand strategies. This section of the paper will briefly look at just some of the areas in which Japan and the ROK shares interests; the DPRK, terrorism, transnational crime, non-traditional security threats, and questions over the rise of China.

##### ***•Short and long term problems regarding the DPRK***

One of the main objectives for the Japan-ROK alignment is to alleviate the situation surrounding the DPRK and to deter any threats that the regime poses. While the inter-Korean rapprochement can be credited, nevertheless it is naïve for Seoul to consider that the DPRK does not pose as a military threat to South Koreans. While the current Roh government may deny this, the nuclear threat undermines the outcomes of the inter-Korean rapprochement.<sup>28</sup> In fact, since the dawn of the inter-Korean rapprochement period, Japan and the ROK’s views towards the DPRK have diverged. However, the things that Tokyo and Seoul doesn’t want Pyongyang to do are quite similar. Neither Japan nor the ROK wants a nuclear DPRK, or for it to possess a military threat that has the potential to destabilize East Asia. Similarly, both Japan and the ROK suffered from the activities by DPRK agents through abductions and espionage, and now, both Tokyo and Seoul wants Pyongyang to return to the international community.

Strong, viable relations between Japan and the ROK will inevitably include synchronizing with Seoul’s engagement policy with the DPRK. Indeed, Seoul and Tokyo play big roles in multilateral economic front. The two state’s place in the global economy can be utilized to play a significant role in development in the DPRK. In fact, Tanaka Hitoshi, a former high-ranking

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<sup>27</sup> Tetsuya Kataoka, “Scratching an old wound: Japan’s perspective on Korea and its unification”, *One Korea?*, Thomas H. Henriksen and Lho Kyong-soo ed., Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University CA, 1994, pp.105~107.

<sup>28</sup> Scott Snyder, “South Korea’s squeeze play”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2005. 28:4, pg.93

official in Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs sees potential in the DPRK's economy and argues that should it successfully recover, it would serve as a "win-win" situation for regional states.<sup>29</sup>

While the DPRK's acts are to draw the international community's attention for aid, and to prove its deterrence capabilities, for them to utilize such options indicates that they could instigate an arms race in East Asia. Thus, an alignment between Seoul and Tokyo is also needed as a control measure to minimize over-reactions to the DPRK's nuclear problem. Should Pyongyang decide to further strengthen its military threat, strong counter measures are likely to be taken by the US, followed by Japan. Such reaction is likely to exacerbate the distrust that already exists between Japan, the ROK, China and Taiwan, setting off a regional arms race. However, strong cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo could cap over-reactions.

Cooperation between Japan and the ROK vis-à-vis DPRK should also be a long term one, keeping in mind how they can cooperate in when unification occurs on the Korean peninsula. Of course, attempting to sketch an ambiguous scenario like the Korean unification is a daunting task, however, Japan's contributions in this area tests to what extent Japan and the ROK will cooperate in regional security. What becomes a problem in this issue is that while Seoul and Tokyo is likely to agree on "how" it would cooperate, they have little or no consensus on the justifications for it. From Japan's point of view, Tokyo cannot afford to not cooperate with Seoul should unification come about. Firstly, one of the primary concerns for Japan in a unified Korea are whether it will bring about a united anti-Japanese front and how that will be reflected in the new Korea's strategic policies.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, Japan is concerned about the rippling effect from the unification. That is, implications from a possible economic crisis, political and social destabilization, and perhaps the flood of refugees. On the other hand, Mo argues that Koreans "does not want Japan to interfere with the [unification] process, but they expect or demand it to make financial contributions to ease the burden of unification...rooted in the belief that Japan has not yet fully compensated Korea for the sufferings that it endured during colonial rule."<sup>31</sup> While Seoul and Tokyo's justifications on Japan's cooperation in assisting with the unification do differ, what is clear is that cooperation is in the interests of both states.

#### •Counter-terrorism

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<sup>29</sup> Tanaka Hitoshi cited in: Hajime Izumi, Hitoshi Tanaka, Duk-min Yun, "Round Table: The vital issue for Japan: The peace and stability of the Korean peninsula", *Gaiko Forum*, 173, December 2003, pp.20.

<sup>30</sup> Yoshihide Soeya, "Japan: Normative Constraints Versus Structural Imperatives," *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* (edited by Muthiah Alagappa), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 Pg 207.

<sup>31</sup> Jong-ryn Mo, "Korean unification and Korea-Japan security cooperation", *Japan and Korean Unification*, Lee Yeong-sun and M Okonogi ed., Yonsei University Publishing, 1999. pp.74

Another main area in which Japan and the ROK's could coordinate their capabilities is counter-terrorism. September 11 set a "fundamentally new era" in world politics where counter-terrorism has become a custom in international politics.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, there is a wide-spread consensus that in the early decades of this century, states are likely to face threats from "an array of lesser, more diffuse threats as opposed to matching single overarching adversaries."<sup>33</sup> Japan and the ROK has had its share of experiencing terrorist attacks; the Sarin gas attacks in Tokyo in 1995, and the 1987 Korean Air bombing, respectively. Today, both states cooperation to the US's war on terrorism also makes them a target on terrorist groups' hit-lists.

Counter terrorism is a daunting task indeed. While interstate conflict can be evaded through skilful diplomacy, dealing with threats from non-state actors to a nation's homeland security is a daunting task. One will only have to look at some of the similarities between the Japan and the ROK to see what is at stake, should a terrorist attack occur in either or both states. Together, Japan and the ROK is densely populated with home to approximately 175million people, and has numerous cities which has a population of over a million and both capital cities accommodate around 10 million, both Narita Airport, Kansai Airport and Incheon Airport function as "hubs", and major cities in both states have an extremely sophisticated mass transit networks. Additionally, around 10,000 people cross between the Korean peninsula and Japan archipelago. Indirect threats by non-state actors to Japan and the ROK also needs attention. Both Japan and the ROK rely heavily on imports for raw materials which are often transported by sea. Thus both states could be easily suffocated should the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) be attacked by terrorist groups.

Seoul and Tokyo can cooperate in this field by sharing intelligence regarding terrorist threats, research into the root causes of terrorists, and sharing ideas for efficient counter-terrorism measures. As long as it does not go to the extent of stepping into another state's sovereignty, such integrated efforts could set an example of efficient counter-terrorism in East Asia.

#### **•Combating transnational crime**

Similar to the threat of terrorism, trans-national crime should also be high on the agenda for Japan and the ROK. Objectives for cooperation to combat trans-national crime come in two levels: criminal activities by Japanese and South Koreans in one another's state, and illegal activities by external groups. According to Japan's National Police Agency, 11.1% foreign

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Dibb, "The future of International Coalitions: How useful? How manageable?", *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2002, pg. 132.

<sup>33</sup> Alan J. Hinge, "Security in the 20<sup>th</sup> century", *Australian Defence Preparedness: Preparedness: Principles, Problems and Prospects*, UNSW, 2000. pg.114.

criminals are Korean, running second behind Chinese nationals.<sup>34</sup> Such criminal activities include; theft, prostitution, illegal immigration and employment.<sup>35</sup> While figures on criminal activities in the ROK have not been released, there have been involvement Japanese nationals in the Korean prostitution market and there are also links between Japanese and Korean organised criminal groups. Already, there are sufficient links between the national police agencies of Japan and the ROK. Nevertheless, increased coordination between Japan and the ROK is needed to further minimising the number of trans-national criminal activities, targeting; illegal immigration, drug-trafficking, illegal employment, prostitution and piracy.

In regards to maritime security, there have been high numbers of incidents where Japanese or Korean fishing boats have intruded into one another's waters. While the coast guards of Japan and the ROK boast of their strong relations, ugly cases such as the Korean fishing boat that intruded into Japanese waters in May 2005, and frictions over Japan's maritime survey within proximity of the bordering in April 2006 proved that the coast guards of Japan and the ROK still have some mismatches. Thus, set measures on how the coast guards of the two countries will deal with intrusions need to be further addressed.

#### •*Non-traditional security threats*

Since the dawn of the post-Cold War era, the meaning of "security" has broadened; expanding to areas such as "human security", "environmental security" and "energy security" has become an important agenda for government states.<sup>36</sup> In recent years there has been an increase in the number of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) operations conducted by the military in most countries of the globe, mainly involving disaster relief operations. The ROK armed forces and also the Japan Self Defence Force have for years conducted joint search and rescue operations. Thus, by continuing with these joint exercises, Japan and the ROK can come to the aid of each other should there be major natural disasters in one and another's country. Furthermore, should Seoul and Tokyo be successful with this, they could "export" their coordinated efforts to the region, by expanding their network to other East Asian states as well as India.

In terms of energy, Japan and the ROK are heavily reliant on the import of fuel. Thus, ensuring

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<sup>34</sup> Author unknown, Statistics of criminal activities by foreigners, *National Police Agency Official Website*, <http://www.npa.go.jp/sosikihanzai/kokusaisousa/kokusai2/2.pdf> Accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006

<sup>35</sup> Author unknown, Statistics of criminal activities by foreigners, *National Police Agency Official Website*, <http://www.npa.go.jp/sosikihanzai/kokusaisousa/kokusai2/2.pdf> Accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006

<sup>36</sup> For human security, see: Barry Buzan, "Human security in perspective", in Mely C Anthony & Mohamad Jawhar Hassan (eda), *The Asia-Pacific in the New Millennium: Political and Security Challenges*, Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia, 2001, pg. 589-590.

the security of the SLOCs should be the shared “theme”. Frictions between Seoul and Tokyo regarding the Exclusive Economic Zone (near Takeshima/Dokdo) are yet to be solved. However, glimpses of hope for cooperative efforts were seen on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2006, when the two agreed to conduct joint surveys in the area. In fact, such agreement is a breakthrough considering the mess that the Japan-ROK relations experienced in the past 18 months. The task that remains now, is for them to maintain this agreement to produce constructive results which can then be extended to other security issues.

### •*Containing China*

The rise of China and its rush towards military modernisation has fuelled suspicions about their vision of East Asia. As Dibb argues, China is attempting to spread its sphere of influence in the region aiming for regional hegemony and the only thing that makes it different from the USSR is their economic power.<sup>37</sup> While his claims are bald, it does illustrate the realistic picture of China’s behaviour. Indeed, China has grown to become an economic powerhouse in Asia, and there are certainly reasons for sustaining strong trade relations with Beijing. However, in strategic aspects, even as a mediatory role, for Japan or the ROK to flirt too much with Beijing would only put them on collision course against the US.<sup>38</sup> Although it is low on the priority list for the ROK, senior Korean scholars have argued that Japan and the ROK have common interests in containing China.<sup>39</sup> However, there is some reluctance for Seoul to align with Japan, due to the hostile reaction that is expected to come out from Beijing.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, should a Japan-ROK alignment go further to act as a “democratic pact”, it may be inevitable for Taiwan to take part, which will consequently have major ramifications on China.<sup>41</sup>

The Japan-ROK alignment under the framework of the US alliance network is perhaps the best way to protect the Korean peninsula from growing Chinese influence. China’s desires to drag the Korean peninsula under its sphere of influence to isolate Japan are against the interests of both Seoul and Tokyo. Thus, the Seoul-Tokyo axis would work to deter any unwanted threats from Beijing.

## 5. *Conclusion*

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Dibb, “Don’t get too close to Beijing”, *On Line opinion*, <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/print.asp?article=3743> 4<sup>th</sup> August 2005. Accessed: 12<sup>th</sup> June 2006

<sup>38</sup> Scott Snyder, “South Korea’s squeeze play”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2005, 28:4, pg.94

<sup>39</sup> Jong-ryn Mo, “Korean unification and Korea-Japan security cooperation”, *Japan and Korean Unification*, Lee Yeong-sun and M Okonogi ed., Yonsei University Publishing, 1999. pg.80.

<sup>40</sup> Michael R. Auslin, “Japan and South Korea: The new East Asian core”, *Orbis*, 49:3, Summer 2005, pp.462.

<sup>41</sup> Michael R. Auslin, “Japan and South Korea: The new East Asian core”, *Orbis*, 49:3, Summer 2005, pp.471.

This paper has outlined just some of the ways in which Japan and the ROK can form a security alignment. The paper has found that while numerous challenges do get in the way to achieve this end. However, the recognition of shared strategic interests would indicate to the respective governments that cooperation would be answer to solving their security concerns. To achieve establishing a Japan-ROK security axis, the two states first need to take relations to a “good enough” standard, where sovereignty disputes are controllable, and that domestic politics are at a state where no unfavourable influences come to the fore. This will need to be maintained so that the alignment does not dissolve.

The paper has also argued that loyal commitment to confidence building measures and preventative diplomacy is also essential to establishing an alignment. This would then lay down the foundations for the alignment.

In regards to coordinated efforts vis-à-vis DPRK, the study has found that Seoul and Tokyo shares interests in minimising the risks of armed conflict on the peninsula, and for Pyongyang to return to the international community. Joint efforts by Seoul and Tokyo are likely to work as an efficient leverage against Pyongyang, as long as it efficiently uses the carrots and sticks. On the other hand, a Seoul-Tokyo alignment would be crucial in the long-term to coordinate efforts to put Korea back on track after unification.

Joint efforts to counter threats from non-state actors such as terrorism and international criminal activities are also important to protect the respective states. Joint intelligence operations, sharing of ideas on counter terrorism and research projects in terrorists’ identity and motives could be a start. For trans-national crime, policing forces of the Japan and the ROK already have strong links, this could be further expanded to target other issues such as piracy, and the relationship between Japanese and Korean organised criminal groups. While prevention of non traditional security threats is difficult, a Japan-ROK axis could be an efficient way to enhance search and rescue operations, and disaster relief operations.

The alignment could also containment the rise of China should it be on collision course with the interests of Seoul and Tokyo. Cooperation between Japan and the ROK would prove to be a sufficient deterring force against China’s moves towards regional hegemony.

Whether Japan and the Koreas remain in an ad hoc stalemate, or become a “close” country in the true sense of the word, the decision rests in the hands of Japan and the ROK. Japan and the ROK are both democratic, free-market economy states, and have strong economic ties with each

other. With the addition of cultural similarities, it makes sense for Seoul and Tokyo to cooperate in regional security. Should they realize the shared security interests and achieve establishing a sustainable security alignment, this could perhaps turn a new page to East Asian security where it the Japan-ROK alignment could expand to become a regional multi-lateral security institution.

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