



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 27, 2023

South Korea Hosts Japan and China to Reassure Beijing Over Closer Ties With Washington

SINGAPORE — In a rare trilateral summit on September 26, South Korea played host to top-level diplomats from Japan and China. The summit was viewed as an attempt to reassure Beijing amid the two U.S. allies' increasing collaboration between themselves and Washington.

The meeting was partially intended to lay the groundwork for the reinstatement of trilateral meetings among the countries' leaders, which were last organized in 2019.

Following legal, diplomatic, and trade disputes between Seoul and Tokyo over issues traceable to Japan's 1910 to 1945 occupation of Korea, those talks were halted.

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida have since taken efforts to enhance relations, attending a historic trilateral summit with U.S. President Joe Biden, where the three pledged to bolster collaboration, encompassing fields such as economic security and defense.

Besides, May 2023 saw Kishida conclude a landmark visit to Seoul with promises to boost cooperation on high-tech goods as well as commitments on a renewed bilateral alliance, both of which are vital to U.S. security policies.

Also, a senior South Korean government official revealed that China has been motivated to pursue trilateral cooperation and conduct meetings since relations worsened between Seoul and Beijing in 2017 over the mobilization of a U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system in South Korea.

"I'm sure there should be some discomfort on [China's] side regarding our increasingly close trilateral security partnerships with the United States and Japan," the official disclosed, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation.

"There seems to be a view [in China] that they need to properly manage bilateral ties with us, as they saw how their Thaad responses backfired and fuelled anti-China sentiment to serious levels."

Beijing will most likely explore trilateral trade cooperation to counterbalance the U.S. clout in the region, encourage people-to-people exchanges, and boost communication and dialogue with Seoul and Tokyo on security and defense issues, opined senior fellow Tong Zhao of the U.S.-based think-tank Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Japan and South Korea have a stake in avoiding conflicts, ensuring a stable security relationship with China, and obtaining Beijing's cooperation in slowing down, if not stopping, North Korea's nuclear project, Zhao continued.



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“These shared interests open up new avenues for strategic communication, confidence building, and measures to prevent crises,” Zhao said.

Although China’s prime minister has traditionally participated in such trilateral summits, South Korea is also campaigning for a separate visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Chung Byung-won, Japanese Senior Deputy Foreign Minister Takehiro Funakoshi, and Chinese Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Nong Rong were involved in the latest series of trilateral meetings.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin declared during a briefing on September 25 that China, Japan, and South Korea were close neighbors and key cooperative partners, and boosting trilateral cooperation would mutually benefit them.

Before the September 26 trilateral talks, Xi told South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo that China was open to cooperate with South Korea to encourage a strategic partnership, in wake of escalating hostilities regarding Russia, the United States, and North Korea.

Xi met with Han in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou before the opening ceremony of the Asian Games, as per China Central Television (CCTV) reports.

The Chinese leader told Han that he was in favor of the summit and he would contemplate the matter of visiting South Korea, Yonhap reported on September 23. A Chinese statement did not include Xi’s remark on the summit or a visit to Seoul.

China attaches huge significance to South Korea’s positive willingness to collaborate, Xi reportedly said, asking South Korea to meet it halfway to keep the momentum of friendly cooperation. The two countries can deepen mutually beneficial relationships, Xi added.

Tensions between Beijing and Seoul increased following North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un’s week-long visit to Russia earlier this month, which riled the United States, Japan and South Korea.

South Korea enforced sanctions on 10 individuals and two entities linked to North Korea’s nuclear program and weapons trade with three countries, including Russia, the foreign ministry announced.

From the Chinese point of view, maintaining harmonious relations with South Korea and Japan remains a crucial political priority, especially amid worries that the United States would try to further entrench the two East Asian countries in its orbit.

On September 25, General Viktor Sobolev, a member of Russia’s Communist Party, hinted that NATO could begin a new wave of expansion by the end of the decade, including new members in Asia to gain an advantage in a conflict with several regional powers that disagree with Washington’s foreign policies.

Sobolev predicted that NATO could include Japan and South Korea in the near future. “It is obvious that the Westerners have set a course for the militarization of Asia,” he said, elaborating that the United States would resort to anything to “drag” the two countries into the alliance to mount pressure on Russia, China, and North Korea.

“Obviously, this can’t happen immediately in the next two to three years, but such an outcome is plausible within five years. Our political and military leadership must take this very seriously, this is a real, very tangible threat”, he warned, as quoted by the Russian Telegram channel Taynaya Kantselyaria.



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Sobolev's statements come after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov earlier declared that NATO was hoping to station its troops and military infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific in an effort to deter regional adversaries.

In August, Russian President Vladimir Putin even suggested that NATO could ultimately join forces with AUKUS, a regional security pact first launched by Australia, the U.K., and the United States in 2021 amid strained relations between the West and China. Under the AUKUS project, Australia would obtain its first nuclear-powered submarines, which are poised to enter service in the early 2030s.

Regarding the possible integration of the two blocs, Putin commented at the time that the United States hopes to "reformat the system of inter-state interaction that has developed in the Asia-Pacific region."



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