

# A New Era of Cooperation: The Trilateral Leaders' Summit at Camp David

Hugh S Tuckfield

POLICY  
BRIEF

IPSC

I N D O  
P A C I F I C  
S T U D I E S  
C E N T E R

International Relations  
Policy Brief  
August 2023

# A New Era of Cooperation: The Trilateral Leaders' Summit at Camp David

Policy Brief

AUTHOR

Hugh S Tuckfield

A Policy Brief of the IPSC International Relations Research Program

August 2023



ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NO PART OF THIS PUBLICATION MAY BE REPRODUCED OR TRANSMITTED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY MEANS, ELECTRONIC OR MECHANICAL INCLUDING PHOTOCOPYING, RECORDING OR ANY INFORMATION STORAGE OR RETRIEVAL SYSTEM, WITHOUT THE PRIOR WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT HOLDER. PLEASE DIRECT ALL ENQUIRIES TO THE PUBLISHERS. THE INDO-PACIFIC STUDIES CENTER DOES NOT EXPRESS OPINIONS OF ITS OWN. THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS PUBLICATION ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AUTHOR(S).

©2023 BY THE INDO-PACIFIC STUDIES CENTER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

ISBN

## Contents

The first ever summit between United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea.....	3
Five key areas of agreement .....	3
Security interests in the Indo-Pacific .....	4
High-Level Trilateral Consultations .....	5

## The first ever summit between United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea

On 18 August President Biden hosted the historic trilateral summit at Camp David with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida and the President of the Republic of Korea President Yoon.

It was the first ever summit held between the leaders of the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. In the [Whitehouse Statement](#) the Summit was declared to be the inauguration of a new trilateral partnership affirming that 'the cooperation between the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea advances the security and prosperity of our people, the Indo-Pacific region, and the world'.

The Summit is highly significant given the deep political schisms that have existed between neighboring Japan and South Korea. The Summit was held at a moment in history of increasing tensions in the Indo-Pacific, due to China's assertiveness in its claims to territory and resources in the South China Sea.

### Five key areas of agreement

The Summit resulted in five key areas of significant agreement aimed at strengthening cooperation and reaffirming shared strategic interests. Those five areas included a commitment to engaging in high-level trilateral consultations to respond to regional challenges, including peace and security interests. Second included a commitment to strengthen security cooperation mainly through multi-year defense exercise and cooperation on ballistic missile defense. Third, to focus on areas of deeper economic and technology cooperation. Fourth. To broaden cooperation in the Indo-Pacific that includes financing infrastructure, a maritime security cooperation framework, humanitarian development, and assistance in the region. Fifth, to expand global health cooperation.

These initiatives are aimed at reinforcing peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region by enhancing security cooperation, promoting a coordinated approach to development and humanitarian assistance, strengthening the regional and global supply chains, and accelerating technological innovation.

All these interests are interconnected. Collectively, these interests contribute to the overarching goal of peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. The

strengthening of security cooperation ensures a stable environment that fosters economic growth and technological innovation. Simultaneously, the alignment in economic and technological interests enhances resilience and sustainability, which will support broader regional development and humanitarian efforts. The emphasis on people-to-people connections and global health reinforces these initiatives by building trust, promoting shared values and international norms.

## Security interests in the Indo-Pacific

While it is not explicitly stated that an attack on Japan or the Republic of Korea would be seen as an attack on the alliance, like the NATO pact, reality suggests this is the case without expressly stating it. Such understandings are not uncommon. China has forged agreements with these conditions with its close neighbors for centuries.

The regular coordination between the trilateral partners, and the agreement to enhance trilateral security cooperation, including through improved cooperation on ballistic missile defense, demonstrates how committed the US, Japan, and Korea are to deterring threats from North Korea and other states in the region. It can also be considered as an attempt by the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea to increase their power in the Indo-Pacific in direct response to the rise of China's assertiveness.

The new era of cooperation will most likely be interpreted by those not named in the statement, specifically China, and North Korea, as a clear signal that an attack on Japan or the Republic of Korea would be seen as an attack on the trilateral alliance and an appropriate, swift response would be delivered promptly if they believe they are being threatened.

Importantly, the initiatives of the Summit extend beyond the merely strategic material and security interests and can be interpreted as emphasizing liberal democratic norms and values including human rights, the rule of law, transparency, and a rules-based order. These democratic ideals can be considered the foundational elements of an international system that shaped the initiatives of the Summit and reinforcing the sense of shared identity and common purpose between the trilateral partners and the greater Indo-Pacific region. It can be viewed as simply as the construction of an institutional alliance that promotes cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

But no matter how the alliance is interpreted, a considered evaluation of all the understandings that were affirmed or reaffirmed during the Summit, and the planned for further cooperation between the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea leads to a strengthened commitment to regional security in the Indo-Pacific, greater economic cooperation and technological innovation and unequivocal alignment of interests to address the complex challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. It represents a new era of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

## High-Level Trilateral Consultations

The summit focused on establishing joint agreement to hold high-level talks to expeditiously address matters that affect their collective interests and security.

The heads of government formally declared a mutual commitment to engage in prompt consultations to develop coordinated responses to security threats and challenges. This collaboration aims to align their responses to regional issues, challenges, and threats that impact shared interests and the collective security of their nations.

In the context of the Trilateral Leaders Summit, regional challenges, provocations, and threats that affect their collective interests and security covers a broad spectrum of events and geopolitical hot spots. These include:

- North Korean aggression involving missile tests, nuclear weapons development, cyberattacks, or even hostile rhetoric from Pyongyang.
- Chinese influence includes political, military, or economic pressures or actions from China that might affect the strategic interests and security of the three nations.
- Territorial disputes, which might include conflicts over islands and maritime boundaries within the East China Sea and South China Sea, potentially leading to military tensions.
- Economic issues including trade, tariffs, and other barriers that could undermine economic cooperation and stability in the region.
- The impact of natural disasters: requires a collaborative response to earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural disasters, which may require coordinated humanitarian and relief efforts.

- The threat from piracy and other illicit maritime activities in key trade routes that require coordinated naval and law enforcement activities.
- Coordinated attacks on critical infrastructure, government networks, or major industries by state or non-state actors.
- Epidemics or pandemics that might require a coordinated regional response to prevent spread and mitigate impacts.
- Issues such as pollution, climate change, and resource depletion that could affect the stability and welfare of the region and may require joint efforts to address.
- The threat or actual occurrence of terrorist activities within the region that might necessitate coordinated intelligence, military, and law enforcement response.
- Disinformation and Foreign Influence Campaigns: Coordinated efforts by state or non-state actors to manipulate public opinion or interfere in domestic politics.
- Dependence on critical materials, technologies, or manufacturing capabilities that may be susceptible to disruption to regional and global supply chains.

The emphasis on swift coordination underscores the urgency and priority accorded to maintaining regional stability by the heads of state to the Indo-Pacific region.

## Conclusions

In summary, the historic trilateral summit between the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea represents a monumental step forward in the regional cooperation and alignment of strategic interests within the Indo-Pacific region.

Amidst a geopolitical landscape marked by increasing tensions, assertiveness, and a myriad of complex challenges ranging from territorial disputes to technological dependencies, the Trilateral Summit at Camp David has ushered in a new era of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region not seen before. It symbolizes the reconciliation of past schisms but sends a resounding message of unity and mutual commitment against common threats.

The new alliance, though not explicitly defined as a traditional military pact, communicates a shared resolve to deter aggression and promote security and prosperity, thereby potentially re-shaping the balance of power in the region.

## A New Era of Cooperation: The Trilateral Leaders' Summit at Camp David

The Summit's emphasis on rapid coordination, high-level consultations, and an inclusive approach to various regional challenges highlights a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy. The author's theoretical perspective offers various explanations for this alliance, but it is evident that the commitment to a coordinated response is robust and strategically pragmatic. The decisions made and the understandings reached during this summit will have far-reaching implications, not only for the three nations involved but for the broader Indo-Pacific region and the evolving dynamics of international relations.

ISPC

Indo-Pacific Studies Center

[www.indo-pacificstudiescenter.org](http://www.indo-pacificstudiescenter.org)

[hugh.tuckfield@indo-pacificstudiescenter.org](mailto:hugh.tuckfield@indo-pacificstudiescenter.org)