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BUSINESS AS PLANNED AMID DOMESTIC CHALLENGES

Ji-YOUNG LEE, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
ANDY LIM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Following major turning points and breakthroughs of 2023, the start of 2024 has been steady, coordinated, and ordinary. In contrast to the highs and lows of the past five years, the rhythm of the relationship between Korea and Japan has settled to a welcome tone of “business as usual,” and business as planned. Both Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and President Yoon Suk Yeol faced serious challenges to their leadership with record low approval ratings and the conservative People Power Party’s defeat in Korea’s parliamentary elections. But for now, Japan-Korea relations are thriving as they follow through on commitments made at the Camp David summit. Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo continued to tick off their laundry list of promised deliverables from that summit. While they might no longer be meeting at the breathtaking pace of a trilateral meeting every 3.5 days, the three partners continued to meet almost bi-weekly at all levels, including the Cabinet level.

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Economic Security and Institutionalized Trilateralism

Trilateral cooperation [started](#) strong with the inaugural meeting of the Trilateral Indo-Pacific Dialogue on Jan. 5 in Washington, DC. According to the press release, this new assistant-secretary level dialogue initiated “a new chapter in our countries’ partnership” and represented an “important step” to strengthen and closely align their policies globally, especially in coordinating their Indo-Pacific policies. Furthermore, the three sides reiterated their commitment to continue the dialogue and agreed to hold it annually. This solidified the new trilateral—[highlighted](#) prominently in the Camp David statement—as an important entry in an expanding calendar of regular trilaterals.



Figure 1 South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul meets with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa on the margins of the G20 ministers meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Feb. 22, 2024 in this pool photo released by the Associated Press. Photo: Yonhap

On Feb. 22, the first trilateral foreign minister meeting—under new South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul—[took](#) place on the sidelines of the G20 foreign ministers meeting in Brazil. The three top diplomats highlighted the importance of trilateral cooperation for dealing with Russia and North Korea, as well as Taiwan and Gaza. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken shared that they have “upheld commitments to consult with each other” and have done so “expeditiously” while coordinating responses whenever there is a “shared security challenge.” Foreign Minister Cho pointed out the “symbolic milestone” of the meeting, which took place on the 30th anniversary of the first trilateral in 1994. Not only was this their first trilateral in South America, he said the meeting was also “emblematic” of their global outreach and their

commitment to meet whenever and wherever. Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko reiterated the importance of “strategic coordination” on challenges to the free and open international order.

In late February, the first trilateral Commerce and Industry Export Control Dialogue [took](#) place in Tokyo. This director-level dialogue is [aimed](#) at aligning export controls for critical and emerging technologies, coordinating Russia controls, and cooperating on outreach to Southeast Asian countries. Thea Rozman Kendler, US assistant secretary of Commerce for Export Administration, said the trilateral relationship creates a “trusted ecosystem” that allows for emerging technologies to develop safely. This new dialogue promises to be an important trilateral channel to coordinate dual-use export controls and prevent “key and new technologies” from falling into the wrong hands.

In mid-March, the three continued discussions on economic security when they [held](#) the third trilateral economic security dialogue in Busan, South Korea. This dialogue precedes the Camp David summit—the first meeting was in February 2023—and has long been a shared interest for the three partners, especially in diversifying away from China. The Busan meeting focused on improving cooperation in critical mineral supply chains, emerging technologies, and artificial intelligence governance. While a tangible outcome is still in the works, they mentioned continuing cooperation through the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. South Korea and Japan are both members of the US-led MSP, which [held](#) a principals’ meeting in Toronto on March 3 and discussed establishing a MSP Forum and boosting support for 23 MSP projects in the works to diversify critical mineral supply chains.

On March 29, the 2nd Trilateral Diplomatic Working Group Meeting on North Korean Cyber Threats was [held](#) in Washington to continue discussion on trilateral coordination to disrupt North Korean cyber activities and IT workers that generates revenue to support its WMD and ballistic missile programs. They also shared concerns of a new growing trend of North Korean IT workers using fraudulent IDs to win contracts from global IT companies.

Two days earlier, the US and South Korea [coordinated](#) sanctions against these IT workers

by sanctioning two companies related to Chinyong Information Technology Cooperation Company (tied to North Korea's Ministry of Peoples' Armed Forces), which are involved in dispatching and operations of these IT workers abroad. They sanctioned one individual (Jon Yon Gun) who was a team-lead for one of the new sanctioned companies, the UAE-based Pioneer Bencont Star Real Estate company. A day before, on March 26, three Japanese government agencies jointly [released](#) a public statement warning domestic companies about contracting North Korean IT workers who are posing as Japanese nationals. A senior Japanese official confirmed there have been cases in Japan and the "threat is increasing."

A week later, the three partners once again partnered to discuss the North Korean threat, but this time on the international stage. They [co-hosted](#) an informal UN Security Council meeting (also known as an Arria formula meeting) on April 4, marking the first such meeting to discuss this issue. At the meeting, their three top representatives to the UN highlighted the challenges and danger of North Korea's cyber activities, including a warning from South Korean Ambassador Hwang Joon-kook that over 50 countries have already been directly affected. It is important to remember that South Korea is currently [serving](#) as a nonpermanent member of the UNSC for the 2024–2025 term, along with the US (permanent) and Japan (nonpermanent, ending 2024). With Russian and Chinese blockage of new UNSC resolutions and the Russian [veto](#) of the UN Panel of Experts' mandate in late March, this year represents a unique opportunity for the three partners to mobilize action at the UN, possibly at the UN General Assembly.

In mid-April, the three partners ticked off another promised deliverable from the Camp David summit when the first Trilateral Korea-US-Japan Finance Ministers Meeting was [held](#) in Washington. During the meeting they issued a rare warning when they acknowledged "serious concerns" over the "sharp depreciation" of the Korean won and Japanese yen. They also agreed to work together to mobilize financing for resilient supply chains, including through the new [Partnership for Resilient and Inclusive Supply-chain Enhancement](#) (RISE), a \$50 million Japan-World Bank initiative, with support by Korea and others, to "help emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs)" to play a bigger role in the midstream and

downstream in supply chain of clean energy products. This will help diversify the global mineral supply chains. Lastly, while not naming China, they pointed to "non-market economic practices of other countries, including economic coercion" as an important point of cooperation.

Bilateral Friendship and New Faces

The bilateral Korea-Japan relationship continues to grow and mature in the second year after reconciliation. Year-end tourism data that came out in January showed that the neighbors have become each other's largest source of tourism, with South Koreans [making](#) up 28% (6.95 million) of Japan's 25.06 million tourists in 2023, and Japanese [totaling](#) 21% (2.32 million) of 11 million tourists in Korea. People-to-people ties are often the first victim of bilateral downturns, but the positive data shows that this important element of bilateral ties is back on track.



Figure 2 Tourists arrive at Kansai International Airport in Osaka. Photo by Arisa Moriyama

As noted in the previous issue, a shuffle among top diplomatic posts in Korea and Japan in the latter half of 2023 brought new characters into the mix for the next stage of the relationship—consolidation, institutionalization, and implementation. South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul finally [met](#) his counterpart, Kamikawa Yoko, on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Brazil on Feb. 21. This meeting took place a day before the trilateral foreign minister summit described above.

Aside from expected talking points on fostering a future-oriented bilateral relationship, Cho also suggested communicating closely on Japan-North Korea relations. This alludes to [recent comments](#) by Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio to restart dialogue with North Korea "without any preconditions" and to resolve the abduction issue, aiming for the first Japan-North Korea summit in 20 years. The outreach was

initially received positively by Pyongyang, with Kim Yo Jong, the influential sister of Kim Jong Un [commenting](#) that it was a positive thing, before being flatly [ruled](#) out by the North a month later. Kishida's comments might have caused consternation in Seoul and Washington over a potential breach in trilateral policy coordination.

Washington reportedly [told](#) its Japanese counterparts that while it welcomed any engagement between Japan and North Korea—something it has tried to no avail under the Biden administration—it clarified that this should be done under the condition that Tokyo smoothed over issues with Seoul first. Cho's comments in his bilateral meeting in Brazil reflect similar concerns from the Yoon government, though [comments](#) a month later from a senior South Korean government official seemed to indicate that this has been ironed out. Regardless of future developments on Japan-North Korea reconciliation, this would continue to test trilateral policy coordination as both Japan and South Korea have interests that are not identical in diplomacy with the North.

When it comes to coordination and the nitty-gritty of diplomacy, individuals matter, and aside from the leader and the top diplomat, the next most important person is arguably the ambassador. The ambassador is often the first person to be summoned when the host country publicly expresses disapproval and is also the key person managing important communications with the host country while keeping pulse of the situation on the ground. Therefore, it has been imperative that the ambassador in both Tokyo and Seoul have the wherewithal to handle this complex and sensitive relationship. This post—Japanese ambassador to South Korea and South Korean ambassador to Japan—arguably ranks in the top three in terms of diplomatic importance for both countries, behind the US and China.

In early April, news emerged that there will be a new Japanese ambassador in Seoul. *Kyodo News* [reported](#) that Mizushima Koichi, Japan's ambassador to Israel since 2021, has been appointed to replace Aiboshi Koichi as the new top envoy to Seoul. Both were coincidentally ambassadors to Israel prior to their Seoul assignment, and both come to the job with experience at the embassy in Seoul. Furthermore, Mizushima will come into his new position with useful experience under his belt, having served in Seoul between 2017 and 2019, some of the most difficult years in the bilateral relationship in

recent memory. By tapping a seasoned veteran for this post, Tokyo has the right personnel to smooth over any potential bilateral issues.

In South Korea, the results of the 22nd general election on April 10 [led](#) to the creation of a new class of foreign policy experts and diplomats in the new National Assembly, including Wi Sung-rak, former South Korean ambassador to Russia, Kim Gunn, former special representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs, and Kim Joon-hyung, former chancellor of the Korea National Diplomatic Academy. Their expertise, which is dispersed across both sides of the aisle, would likely make them voices in South Korean foreign policymaking as the last remaining years of Yoon's single term are locked in with an emboldened opposition majority.

Domestic Politics and Steady Signals from the Top

Having regular meetings on a variety of issues is a good sign and healthy indicator of a cooperative relationship. Equally important is for the top leadership to publicly reaffirm the continuity of its policy. This is important for internal and external audiences, especially at times of domestic unpopularity, to signal that policy is here to stay, as well as for optics—showing that a big foreign policy event like summit meetings is not just a photo-op or empty statement.

In his second March First Independence Movement Day speech—a symbolic day for Korean independence from Japan—President Yoon Suk Yeol again [used](#) this platform and opportunity to signal that the two countries are no longer enemies. He sought to convey the message that Korea and Japan have become partners with “common interests” of global peace and prosperity that are now working toward a “new world” built upon “mutual understanding and empathy.” He also emphasized how the two are making strides in building a “closer partnership in industry, finance and cutting-edge technologies,” and called out the 60th anniversary of normalization next year as an opportunity to take the relationship to an even higher level.

South Korean presidents have typically approached their March First Independence Movement Day speech as an occasion to highlight and commemorate the history of Korean resistance to Japan's colonial rule as a way of strengthening group cohesion among

Koreans. Two things are notable about this year's [speech](#). First, President Yoon did not mention the forced labor issue—which was at the center of bilateral disputes over history until recently—for the second consecutive year. Second, he spoke about Korean unification as an effort toward expanding universal values such as freedom and human rights for North Koreans who live under the totalitarian regime. Japanese media outlets such as [Yomiuri Shimbun](#) welcomed Yoon's speech. In South Korea, some, mostly from the opposition, [criticized](#) the speech for lacking reflections on history and urged him to “discontinue humiliating diplomacy with Japan.” Others [countered](#) that the spirit of the March First Independence Movement does not necessarily mean South Korea should take an “anti-Japan” position today.



Figure 3 President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea casting his early vote for the parliamentary election, in Busan. Photo: Yonhap

To his credit, President Yoon has been steadfast since the beginning of his presidency in his desire—in some people's eyes, obstinacy—to build a better relationship with Japan, even when it was a low-reward, unpopular decision. In the first months of 2024, it was the political will and efforts of the governments in Seoul and Tokyo that disagreements over history issues would not be turned into bigger diplomatic conflicts. Unsurprisingly, they expressed disapproval of the other's position on the history issues even as they tried to manage bilateral relations. Regarding the forced labor issue, in January, a South Korean Supreme Court [upheld](#) an appellate court's ruling that ordered Nippon Steel Corp. to provide compensation for the family of a South Korean wartime labor victim. In response, the Japanese Foreign Ministry [said](#) it was “extremely regrettable and totally unacceptable.” Later that month, the South Korean Supreme Court [upheld](#) lower court decisions that ordered Nachi-

Fujikoshi Corp. to provide compensation for wartime labor victims. The Japanese government [called](#) the ruling “extremely regrettable and totally unacceptable.” During a TV interview, President Yoon [stated](#) that “such similar rulings would continue to come out (in ongoing cases) and [he] wishes to see cooperation between businesspeople of the two countries who wish to improve relations between Korea and Japan.”

In late January, in [response](#) to Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa's annual Parliament speech on the government's foreign policy objectives, South Korea [said](#) it “strongly protests against the Japanese government's repeated unfair territorial claims over Dokdo.” On Feb. 22, as Japan's Shimane Prefecture [held](#) the annual “Takeshima Day” with participation by a Cabinet Office parliamentary vice minister, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned Mibae Taisuke, the deputy chief of mission at the Japanese embassy in Seoul to lodge a protest. In March, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs [summoned](#) Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Aiboshi to [protest](#) historical and territorial-related revisions in middle school textbooks. In April the South Korean government [protested](#) Japan's “unjust claims over Dokdo” in its Diplomatic Bluebook.

With the results of the 22nd general election in South Korea on April 10 being unfavorable for the ruling People Power Party, the reconciliation President Yoon spoke about in his March First Independence Movement Day speech possible will likely require a lot more political capital. In South Korea, the People Power Party's defeat in parliamentary elections was a big blow to Yoon, which led to the resignation of key officials of his government including Prime Minister Han Duck-soo. In the nation's highest turnout since 1992—67 %—South Korean voters expressed dissatisfaction with Yoon's performance, especially on the economy and matters of their livelihood. The opposition Democratic Party, which won a majority of 175 seats in the National Assembly, has been critical of Yoon's foreign policy, including his Japan policy. But we do not expect an abrupt change in South Korea's foreign policy in the remaining years of Yoon's presidency.



Figure 4 Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida walks past Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno at the end of a news conference at the prime minister's office in Tokyo, Japan, 13 Dec 2023. Photo: Reuters

Prime Minister Kishida's low approval rating has created uncertainty over his political future as he faced challenges of political reform amid a slush funds scandal that negatively impacted public trust in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). According to a Kyodo News [poll](#) on April 15, Kishida's approval rating was as low as 23.8%, remaining in the 20% range for months now. In April, the LDP lost three seats in House of Representatives by-elections, which many [view](#) as a "harsh indictment" of the party. Amid the opposition's demand for dissolving the Lower House, Kishida [said](#) that he had no intention to do so, even while acknowledging the political funds scandal led to the defeat. Kishida has apologized for the scandal, promising to discontinue such fundraising parties. The LDP took disciplinary action toward 39 members involved in the scandal, which [was](#) most extensive since 2005. However, according to [Yomiuri Shimbun](#)'s polling in late April, 69% of respondents were not convinced by such measures.

North Korea and Beyond Security

North Korea wasted no time in launching its first provocation of the year when it launched a solid-fuel intermediate-range ballistic missile carrying a hypersonic warhead into the sea between Korea and Japan on Jan. 14. As part of a new norm, the US, Korea, and Japan [responded](#) the day after with a three-day trilateral naval exercise involving a US aircraft carrier to show a combined posture against North Korea. The three partners will continue to host joint exercises together for the next few months, part of the new multi-year joint exercise plan created by the Camp David summit. This includes a naval

exercise in [mid-April](#) involving another US aircraft carrier conducting anti-submarine warfare drills and maritime interdiction exercises.

In a speech in late January, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [called](#) the security dimension the "source of propulsion" for pulling the three partners together. The security aspect of the trilateral relationship, especially in dealing with the common North Korean threat—something we have emphasized repeatedly in previous issues—has been the guide for trilateral cooperation in the past three years. Even as the partnership expands to other nonsecurity domains, security will likely continue to gird the relationship as long as the threat from Kim Jong Un remains.

In that same speech, Sullivan rightly pointed out that the relationship has expanded beyond security and beyond the Korean Peninsula, to issues like economic coercion and technology and to places like Ukraine. He called out the "huge amount of complementary capacity" across economics, technology, and national security in the three countries, as well as shared values and global reach. Furthermore, he reminded the audience that trilateral cooperation remains a "work in progress" and listed some homework, including aligning ODA budgets for greater impact in the developing world. His most memorable line of the speech came when he boldly called the trilateral US-Korea-Japan trilateral partnership a "vision for the world."

Looking Ahead

If 2022 and 2023 were characterized by North Korean provocations that brought about unprecedented trilateral military cooperation, 2024 seems likely [headed](#) the same way because of North Korean tendencies to ramp up provocations during a US presidential election year.

Trilateral cooperation will continue to go strong as they expand the range of issues they try to coordinate and discuss on a global scale. In March, press reports [emerged](#) of preparations for a trilateral leaders' meeting on the sidelines of the NATO summit in July. According to a diplomatic source, the three leaders are expected to discuss Russia, defense cooperation, Chinese economic coercion, and the North Korean threat, including cybersecurity. An expanded agenda has

become normalized—initial consultations three years ago focused primarily on North Korea. Their trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the 2022 Madrid Summit was fittingly their first trilateral, and if the July NATO meeting in Washington takes place, it would be their fifth trilateral in three years.

Following his State Visit to Washington, Prime Minister Kishida [held](#) a telephone call with President Yoon to brief him on the outcomes of his recent meetings. This is a good sign that the two leaders are committed to close coordination at the highest level.

Looking ahead to 2025, which would be the 60th anniversary of the normalization of Korea-Japan relations, some South Korean officials have [signaled](#) expectations that the two leaders would issue some sort of joint statement to cement “future-oriented commitments” for the relationship. We expect that Seoul and Tokyo’s political commitment to further improving bilateral relations will continue. But the key factor to watch will be these neighbors’ domestic political dynamics.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

JANUARY – APRIL 2024

Jan. 4, 2024: Kurt Campbell, NSC Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs, [holds](#) a video conference with Japanese and South Korean counterparts to discuss North Korea's possible arms transfer to Russia and the need for trilateral cooperation.

Jan. 5, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korea [hold](#) the inaugural Trilateral Indo-Pacific Dialogue in Washington, DC, an outcome of the 2023 Camp David Summit, and release a [Joint Statement](#).

Jan. 5, 2024: South Korean Minister of Foreign Ministers Park Jin [holds](#) call with Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko to discuss the bilateral relationship and to [express](#) condolences for Japan's recent earthquake.

Jan. 11, 2024: South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [announces](#) the country will deliver humanitarian assistance worth \$3 million to Japan to support recovery from the earthquake in Ishikawa.

Jan. 11, 2024: South Korean Supreme Court [upholds](#) appellate court's ruling that orders Nippon Steel Corp. to provide compensation for the family of a South Korean wartime labor victim. The Japanese Foreign Ministry [says](#) this is "extremely regrettable and totally unacceptable."

Jan. 11, 2024: 30th annual meeting between Japan's Keidanren and South Korea's Federation of Korean Industries (FKI) [takes](#) place in Tokyo.

Jan. 15, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korea [launch](#) a three-day joint naval exercise to strengthen "deterrence and response capabilities" in response to North Korea and to respond to "maritime security threats."

Jan. 17, 2024: Japan's National Tourism Organization [reports](#) 25.06 million foreign visitors in 2023, with South Korean tourists accounting for the largest percentage at 28% (or 6.95 million).

Jan. 17, 2024: South Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Kim Gunn and Japanese Director-General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Namazu Hiroyuki [meet](#) to discuss North Korea.

Jan. 18, 2024: US Senior Official for the DPRK Jung Pak [meets](#) with Japanese and South Korean counterparts in Seoul for the Trilateral Special Representative [consultations](#) on North Korea.

Jan. 18, 2024: US, Japanese, and South Korean National Security Advisors [release](#) a statement congratulating the University of Chicago, University of Tokyo, and Seoul National University's [signing](#) of an MOU to [cooperate](#) on quantum science and technologies.

Jan. 21, 2024: Korea Trade Commission [announces](#) that anti-dumping duties placed on Japanese, Spanish, and Indian stainless steel bars will be [lifted](#) from January 22, 2024.

Jan. 22, 2024: South Korean President Yoon [agrees](#) to extend the 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' [until](#) May 2025 to investigate human rights abuses connected to previous military governments including cases during Japan's occupation of South Korea.

Jan. 23, 2024: Newly appointed South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul [holds](#) a phone call with Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa to [discuss](#) the bilateral relationship, US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation, and North Korea.

Jan. 25, 2024: South Korean Supreme Court [upholds](#) lower court decisions that order Nachi-Fujikoshi Corp. to provide compensation for wartime labor victims. The Japanese government [called](#) the ruling "extremely regrettable and totally unacceptable."

Jan. 28, 2024: Data from the Korea Customs Service [shows](#) South Korea's imports of Japanese fish and shellfish in 2023 decreased by 12.8% on-year, the biggest decline since 2012.

Jan. 29, 2024: Following North Korea's submarine-launched cruise missile (SLCM) [test](#), a US Department of Defense spokesperson [says](#) the US will continue to cooperate with South Korea and Japan on North Korea's threats.

Jan. 30, 2024: In [response](#) to Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa's annual Parliament speech on the government's foreign policy, South Korea [says](#) it "strongly protests against the Japanese

government's repeated unfair territorial claims over Dokdo.”

Jan. 30, 2024: Korea Tourism Organization [reports](#) over 11 million foreign visitors in 2023, with Japanese tourists accounting for the largest number (2.32 million).

Jan. 31, 2024: US National Security Advisor Sullivan [speaks](#) at an [event](#) on “The Future of US-China Relations,” calling the US-Japan-ROK partnership a “vision for the world.”

Feb. 1, 2024: Japanese local government [completes](#) removal of a memorial stone, located in Gunma Prefecture, for South Korean wartime labor victims. The Korean government previously [stated](#) they hope the issue is “resolved in a way that does not undermine” bilateral relations.

Feb. 1, 2024: Seoul High Court [issues](#) a retrial order to the Seoul Central District Court, which had dismissed a damages suit in June 2021 against 16 Japanese companies by 85 South Korean forced labor victims and their families because the court had ruled they did not have litigation rights because of the 1965 normalization agreement.

Feb. 1, 2024: US, South Korean, and Japanese officials meet on the sidelines of the ASEAN-ROK Digital Ministers’ Meeting in Singapore to [discuss](#) digital cooperation.

Feb. 8, 2024: Following Korean Supreme Court rulings upholding lower court decisions that order Japanese firms to compensate wartime labor victims, President Yoon [states](#) he “wish[es] to see cooperation between business people of the two countries” on the issue to improve bilateral ties.

Feb. 9, 2024: South Korean Unification Minister Kim Yung-ho [says](#) when the government questions North Korean defectors that have been abducted about their nationality, they will add Japan to the list of potential responses and share information with the Japanese government.

Feb. 14, 2024: South Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs [says](#) Japan cannot unilaterally develop the continental shelf in the East China Sea without Korea’s consent, even if the bilateral Korea-Japan Continental Shelf Agreement expires in June 2028.

Feb. 15, 2024: Gwangju District Court [rules](#) in favor of 15 families of South Korean wartime

labor victims and orders Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. to provide compensation.

Feb. 16, 2024: 17th Japan-ROK Consultation on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues is [held](#) in Tokyo.

Feb. 18, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korea release a [Joint Statement](#) ‘Commemorating the Ten Year Anniversary of the UN Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.’

Feb. 20, 2024: Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism and South Korea’s Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport [hold](#) their 12th high-level meeting on transportation, marking the first such meeting in eight years.

Feb. 20, 2024: South Korea’s Ministry of National Defense [expands](#) the scope of its examination into the December 2023 recalled troop education material that listed Dokdo as disputed territory.

Feb. 20, 2024: Family of a South Korean wartime labor victim [withdraws](#) compensation of 60 million won (about \$44,000) from Hitachi Zosen Corp., marking the first time that a wartime labor victim accepts a Japanese company’s compensation. In response, the Japanese government summoned Korean Ambassador to Japan Yun Duk-min to [protest](#).

Feb. 21, 2024: South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Cho Tae-yul meets with Japanese counterpart in Brazil on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, [marking](#) their first in-person meeting since Cho’s appointment.

Feb. 22, 2024: US Secretary of State Blinken, Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa, and South Korean Foreign Minister Cho [hold](#) a trilateral [meeting](#) on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting.

Feb. 22, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korea [hold](#) their first director-level Commerce and Industry Export Control Dialogue in Tokyo.

Feb. 22, 2024: Japan’s Shimane Prefecture [holds](#) annual “Takeshima Day” with participation by a Cabinet Office parliamentary vice minister. The South Korean ministry of foreign affairs summoned Mibae Taisuke, deputy chief of mission at the Japanese embassy in Seoul, to lodge a protest.

Feb. 27, 2024: US Secretary of State Gina Raimondo meets South Korean Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Ahn Dukgeun during which both sides [discuss](#) planning for the inaugural Trilateral Commerce/Industry Ministerial Meeting.

March 1, 2024: South Korean President Yoon [delivers](#) a [speech](#) to mark the March First Independence Movement Day, noting South Korea and Japan can “usher in a new and brighter future” for the bilateral relationship by cooperating and working to resolve historical challenges.

March 8, 2024: South Korean Deputy Finance Minister Choi Ji-young and Japanese Vice Finance Minister Masato Kanda [meet](#) in Tokyo for the second Finance Deputies’ Dialogue and [agree](#) to hold the next meeting in South Korea.

March 13, 2024: A South Korean government official reportedly [anticipates](#) South Korean and Japanese leaders to issue a joint statement “with future-oriented commitments” next year in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the bilateral relationship.

March 13, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korean national security officials convene in Busan to [hold](#) their third economic dialogue and discuss cooperation in areas such as emerging technologies and supply chains.

March 14, 2024: South Korean Ministry of Unification [announce](#) new plans to cooperate with the US and Japan to address the issue of detainees, abductees and prisoners of war (POWs) in North Korea.

March 22, 2024: South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs [summons](#) Japanese Ambassador Aiboshi to [protest](#) historical and territorial related revisions in their middle school textbooks.

March 26, 2024: Japan and South Korea [sign](#) a memorandum of cooperation to collaborate in developing satellite navigation systems.

March 27, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korean chiefs of defense [meet](#) virtually ahead of their in-person meeting this summer to discuss security issues including North Korea.

March 29, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korea [hold](#) their [second](#) ‘Trilateral Diplomacy Working Group for Foreign Ministry Cooperation on North Korea’s Cyber Threats.’

March 30, 2024: Seoul Central District Court [holds](#) a hearing on compensation lawsuits filed against Japanese companies, Nippon Steel Corp. and JX Metals Corp., by families of wartime labor victims, thereby resuming court proceedings for the first time in over two years.

March 31, 2024: Japanese press reports the US is considering a US-Japan-ROK trilateral leaders’ summit in July on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Washington, DC.

April 4, 2024: US, Japan and South Korea [co-host](#) an informal UN Security Council meeting to highlight the North Korean cyber threat.

April 9, 2024: Japanese Government [appoints](#) Koichi Mizushima as Ambassador to South Korea.

April 12, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korea [conclude](#) two-day naval exercise to strengthen response capabilities against the North.

April 16, 2024: South Korean government [protests](#) Japan’s “unjust claims over Dokdo” in its Diplomatic Bluebook.

April 17, 2024: South Korean President Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida [hold](#) a phone call to [discuss](#) bilateral and US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation as well as Kishida’s visit to Washington, DC.

April 17, 2024: US, Japan, and South Korean financial ministers [hold](#) their inaugural ministerial [meeting](#) as a follow up to the 2023 Camp David Summit.