

Press Releases: Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

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The text of the following statement was released by the Governments of the United States of America and Japan.

Begin Text:

I. Overview

The U.S.-Japan Alliance (“the Alliance”) is the cornerstone of the Asia-Pacific region’s peace, prosperity, and freedom. This dynamic partnership is also increasingly important in promoting values shared by both nations, including freedom, democracy, peace, human rights, free and fair markets, and the rule of law. The Ministers renewed their resolve to uphold the rules-based international order amid the challenging security environment.

Today the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (“SCC”) charted a path forward for the Alliance in addressing the ongoing and emerging threats that pose a challenge to regional peace and security, based on the Joint Statement by the leaders of both countries on February 10, 2017. The SCC reaffirmed its commitment to implement the 2015 Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation and to pursue further ways to strengthen the Alliance. The Ministers also reaffirmed the Alliance’s commitment to the security of Japan through the full range of capabilities, including U.S. nuclear forces.

II. The Regional Strategic Environment

The Ministers condemned in the strongest terms North Korea’s recurring provocations and development of nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, which have entered a new phase, and pose an increasing threat to regional and international peace and stability. The Ministers committed to bolster the capabilities of the Alliance to deter and respond to these threats. They also concurred on continuing to pressure North Korea, in cooperation with other countries, to compel it to take concrete actions to end its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and to achieve the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The Ministers called on the international community to comprehensively and thoroughly implement

the United Nations Security Council resolutions including the newly adopted Resolution 2371. The Ministers strongly encourage China to take decisive measures to urge North Korea to change its course of action. The Ministers called on North Korea to end its systematic human rights violations and to immediately release all foreign nationals held in North Korea, including Japanese abductees and U.S. citizens.

The Ministers expressed continuing concerns about the security environment in the East China Sea. They also recalled the situation in early August 2016. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of working together to safeguard the peace and stability of the East China Sea and reconfirmed that Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands and that the United States and Japan oppose any unilateral action that seeks to undermine Japan's administration of these islands.

The Ministers expressed serious concern about the situation in the South China Sea and reaffirmed their opposition to unilateral coercive actions by claimants, including the reclamation and militarization of disputed features, that alter the status quo and increase tensions. They reiterated the importance of the peaceful settlement of maritime disputes through full respect for legal and diplomatic processes, including arbitration. They also emphasized the importance of compliance with the international law of the sea, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, including respect for freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea. In this regard, the Ministers recalled the award rendered by the Arbitral Tribunal on July 12, 2016. The Ministers acknowledged the adoption of the framework of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) and look forward to the conclusion of a meaningful, effective and legally binding COC. The Ministers underlined the significance of continued engagement in the South China Sea, including through respective activities to support freedom of navigation, bilateral and multilateral training and exercises, and coordinated capacity building assistance.

III. Strengthening Security and Defense Cooperation

(1) Alliance Responses

The Ministers confirmed their shared intent to develop specific measures and actions to further strengthen the U.S.-Japan Alliance, including through reviewing roles, missions, and capabilities, to ensure seamless Alliance responses across a full spectrum of situations amid an increasingly challenging regional security environment. To that end, Japan intends to expand its role in the Alliance and augment its defense capabilities, with an eye on the next planning period for its Mid-Term Defense Program. The United States remains committed to deploying its most advanced capabilities to Japan. To expedite work already underway in this regard, the Ministers gave the following guidance to their staffs:

- Accelerate implementation of the 2015 Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation and pursue additional types of cooperation under Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security; and,
- Explore new and expanded activities in various areas, such as

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), training and exercises, research and development, capacity building, and the joint/shared use of facilities.

(2) Implementation of the 2015 Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation

The Ministers reaffirmed the two Governments' unwavering commitment to continue implementation of the 2015 Guidelines. The Ministers welcomed important steps within the Alliance to operationalize mutual asset protection and to bring into force the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) as milestones in enhancing bilateral defense cooperation. The Ministers noted the successful use of the Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM) to respond to regional events. The Ministers reaffirmed the critical role that U.S. extended deterrence plays in ensuring the security of Japan as well as the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region, and they expressed their intention to deepen engagement on this subject through the Extended Deterrence Dialogue. They also confirmed their shared commitment to enhance and accelerate cooperation in such areas as bilateral planning, air and missile defense, non-combatant evacuation operations, defense equipment and technology cooperation, intelligence cooperation and information security. The Ministers affirmed their desire to expand bilateral cooperation in space, particularly in resiliency, Space Situational Awareness, hosted payloads and satellite communications. They called for deepening consultations in a timely manner on Alliance responses to serious cyber incidents, underscoring the critical importance of further enhancing Allied deterrence and defense.

IV. Trilateral and Multilateral Cooperation

The Ministers highlighted ongoing Alliance efforts to advance trilateral and multilateral security and defense cooperation with other partners in the region, notably the Republic of Korea, Australia, India and Southeast Asian countries. The Ministers underscored the importance of cooperating to promote a rules-based international order, taking note of the United States' continued commitment to maintain a strong presence in the region and Japan's initiatives demonstrated by its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy."

Regarding cooperation with the Republic of Korea, the Ministers emphasized the need to enhance information-sharing and expand trilateral exercises, including missile warning, anti-submarine warfare, and maritime interdiction operations exercises.

Regarding cooperation with Southeast Asian nations, the Ministers affirmed their intention to further enhance capacity building programs and defense equipment and technology transfers in areas including maritime security, defense institution building, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR). Recognizing the importance of upholding the maritime order in the region, the Ministers confirmed their shared commitment to launch a whole-of-government dialogue on maritime security capacity building, which would incorporate existing efforts in this regard.

V. The U.S. Force Presence in Japan

(1) Realignment of U.S. Forces in Japan

The Ministers, in view of maintaining a robust U.S. force presence in Japan, reaffirmed the two Governments' commitment to implement the existing arrangements for the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, which aim to maintain operational and deterrent capability in an increasingly severe security environment, while also mitigating the impact on local communities and enhancing support from local communities for the presence and operations of U.S. forces in Japan.

As an essential element of this effort, the Ministers welcomed the resumption of Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) construction and reconfirmed that the plan to construct the FRF at the Camp Schwab-Henokosaki area and adjacent waters is the only solution that addresses operational, political, financial, and strategic concerns and avoids the continued use of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma. The Ministers reaffirmed the two Governments' unwavering commitment to the plan and underscored their strong determination to achieve its completion as soon as possible and the long-desired return of MCAS Futenma to Japan. In this context, the Ministers called for the steady implementation of the construction plan, noting the adverse impact of further delays on the ability of the Alliance to provide for peace and security.

The Ministers welcomed the return of a major portion of the Northern Training Area in 2016, the single largest land return in Okinawa since 1972. They noted progress on the land returns that were announced in December 2015 and called for further implementation of those returns. The Ministers also reaffirmed the importance of steady implementation of the Consolidation Plan for Facilities and Areas in Okinawa and their commitment to update the plan as soon as possible.

The Ministers also welcomed progress in the relocation of a total of approximately 9,000 U.S. Marine Corps personnel, along with their associated dependents, from Okinawa to locations outside of Japan, including Guam. They confirmed the steady implementation of the Guam International Agreement.

The Ministers welcomed Japan's commitment to make utmost efforts to secure a permanent field carrier landing practice facility as soon as possible.

The Ministers confirmed their intent to continue to promote aviation training relocation, including tilt-rotor/rotary wing training relocation, which has helped to mitigate the impact of training activity on Okinawa.

(2) Host Nation Support (HNS)

The Ministers welcomed the entry into force of the current Special Measures Agreement (SMA) in April 2016, which serves as a pillar of the Alliance and a symbol of Japan's enduring support for the U.S. military presence in Japan. The Ministers confirmed that the overall level of HNS is to be maintained roughly at the Japan Fiscal Year 2015 level. The Ministers reaffirmed that the Facilities Improvement Program (FIP) funding in the current SMA period is to be no less than a budget of 20.6 billion yen per year.

(3) Other Issues

The Ministers reaffirmed the two Governments would promote joint/shared use to enhance interoperability and deterrence, build stronger relationships with local communities, and strengthen the Self-Defense Forces' force posture, including in Japan's southwestern islands.

The Ministers reiterated their determination to address issues related to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) through mutual consultations. The Ministers welcomed the entry into force of supplementary agreements regarding environmental stewardship and the civilian component, and they stressed the importance of steadily implementing these agreements. The Ministers acknowledged the United States' enhanced training and orientation processes for personnel with SOFA status.

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