Headlines:

- South Korea’s bold move to boost ties with Japan opens trilateral doors
- NEXT Alliance convenes Tokyo meeting on US-Japan command relations
- State Department gives green light for early warning aircraft to Japan
- US-Japan hold 13th bilateral dialogue on the Internet economy
- Okinawa Governor Tamaki visits Washington

Details:

- South Korean President Yoon on March 6 announced a plan to compensate Korean victims of Japanese forced labor practices during WWII through a domestic foundation, potentially removing a persistent obstacle to closer Korea-Japan relations and trilateral cooperation with the US. The politically brave and strategically important announcement was welcomed in Tokyo and Washington, where US President Biden said the move “marks a groundbreaking new chapter of cooperation and partnership between two of the US’ closest allies.” Yoon later met Prime Minister Kishida in Tokyo on March 16, when they agreed to normalize intelligence sharing and economic security cooperation. The three countries are also considering a trilateral consultative body on nuclear deterrence.

- Sasakawa USA’s “NEXT Alliance Initiative” convened a 4-day bilateral workshop with briefings in Tokyo from March 10 to consider the future of “US-Japan Command Relationships for New Challenges.” This was the fourth and largest gathering of this special “Task Force” project discussing potentially useful adjustments to Japan Self-Defense Force connections with US Forces Japan and Indo-Pacific Command so that bilateral arrangements can align more effectively with national reforms, evolving external threats, and new defense technologies. Nearly forty specialists including scholars, retired and active military officers, and former and current government officials debated practical ways to modernize decision making and alliance security cooperation for the future. NEXT will publish a summary in April.

- The State Department notified Congress of the potential sale of early warning and control aircraft to Japan on March 7. The $1.38 billion sale of five E-2D Hawkeye aircraft comes with the 360-degree APY-9 AESA radar, that enables tracking of advanced stealth aircraft, drones and cruise missiles including maritime and land targets. Congress has approved similar sales of the Northrop Grumman aircraft to Japan in the past, with the first coming in 2019.

- US and Japanese government officials convened their 13th “US-Japan Policy Cooperation Dialogue on the Internet Economy” on March 6-7, focused on the promotion of open, interoperable, and secure fifth generation (5G) wireless technologies; public-private partnerships to support the development of the digital economy in third countries; and international coordination in areas such as artificial intelligence, data protection, free flow of data, and cybersecurity capacity building. The meeting included discussions with private sector representatives from both countries.

- Okinawan Governor Denny Tamaki visited Washington on March 8 to lobby congressional representatives and US officials for a reduced US military presence in Japan’s southwestern prefecture. Tamaki won a second term as governor last September. He also pushed for more transparency from military bases regarding potentially toxic chemicals in the water, and he objected to placing surface-to-air missiles on the prefecture’s Nansei islands. Tamaki met with US Senators Todd Young (R-Ind) and Ed Markey (D-Mass), as well as House minority leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), Jill Tokuda (D-Hawaii), and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY). He also met with met with State Department Japan Director Joel Ehrendreich and Japanese Ambassador to the US Koji Tomita.