



Bilateral US-Japan Task Force on Command Relationships for New Challenges

Dialogue Summary #3, prepared by Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA

On Wednesday, December 21, 2022, Sasakawa USA's "US-Japan NEXT Alliance Initiative" convened a bilateral Track 2 dialogue focused on Japan's new National Defense Strategy, implications for future alliance security cooperation, and options for more integrated planning and operational activities. One goal was to begin to develop a Task Force work plan for the remainder of this fiscal year that can usefully support Track 1 dialogue on these issues in 2023. The group considered these issues in the context of possible future adjustments to help improve the effectiveness of US-Japan C2 arrangements amid evolving security threats, advancing Japanese military capabilities, and continued technological change. This not-for-attribution hybrid event (in person and via video conference) involved 23 experts from think tanks, universities, and former government officials and military officers. Jim Schoff, Sr. Director of Sasakawa USA's "US-Japan NEXT Alliance Initiative" moderated the dialogue, which is part of a longer-term series of mostly bilateral discussions planned by NEXT for 2022-23.

Background and Introduction

This Task Force project was launched in 2022 by NEXT on the premise that two trends are working to complicate current US-Japan command and control (C2) arrangements in ways that could undermine their effectiveness, while a third is creating opportunities for closer bilateral security cooperation. The first trend involves a shifting regional military balance that makes integration of allied forces more vital to sustaining deterrence or repelling any attack. The second trend includes a combination of technological advances and operational needs that are driving toward more integrated and combined force concepts. These go beyond "multi-domain" models of operating in parallel and lead to a deeply interconnected operating system influenced by digital transformation. Additionally, Japan's own consideration of new capabilities, including long-range precision strike, will call into question the longstanding alliance division of labor in roles and missions—the so-called shield and spear construct—and support a reconsideration of alliance C2. At the same time, Japan is focused on improving military "jointness" and moving to create a permanent joint headquarters for the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in the next few years.

All this suggests that a reexamination of US-Japan command relationships is needed, to consider practical and useful adjustments to SDF connections with US Forces Japan (USFJ) and US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) so that bilateral arrangements can align effectively with national reforms. It can also help with timely decision making on defense policy and deployment issues, as Japanese territory (and US bases therein) are more connected with regional military operations.

Task Force participation is flexible and involves a wide range of specialists with different expertise. The purpose of the Task Force is to engage the US and Japanese defense communities in discussions about the dual challenge to the existing command structures (described above), and to consider elements in potential design of a more integrated alliance C2 system that offers the operational benefits of a more unified command while respecting Japan's legal and political limits. We began with a small Track 1.5 US-only group to test the project premise and chart a course for the remainder of research and dialogue. This was the first bilateral meeting.



Opening Remarks/Recap of Previous Roundtables:

The moderator summarized for the group highlights of project research and dialogue to date. Overall, participants believe that the alliance has a good foundation from which to build an adapted C2 configuration. This includes:

- Strong trust, good personal and institutional relationships, lots of exercise opportunities, and a high level of potential interoperability;
- Existing mechanisms for policy and operational coordination including the “2+2 Process,” Extended Deterrence Dialogue (EDD), Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM), and the related Bilateral Operations Coordination Center (BOCC) and Component Coordination Centers (CCCs) when needed, plus specific mechanisms & facilities for missile defense including the Bilateral Joint Operations Coordination Center (BJOCC) at Yokota Air Base, as well as the multilateral Enforcement Coordination Cell (ECC) sharing intelligence and coordinating activity related to North Korea sanctions enforcement utilizing the USS *Blue Ridge* stationed in Japan; and
- Common approaches to national security and national defense strategies.

In addition, previous roundtable dialogues have revealed a broadly held perception by US specialists that the alliance needs to grow beyond simple military coordination and deconflicting in time & space so that it can more effectively share information, plan, and manage mission, functions, and tasks. When considering alliance C2 requirements for surging forces to the same geographic space, many thought that the alliance should move toward more of a combined or integrated staff arrangement (of some kind).

An early favorite of previous dialogue participants is a combined staff arrangement that would not have forces assigned to it (until needed), but can facilitate planning, communications, reporting, info sharing, and other staff activities.

Participants in the first two roundtables have also underscored the need to be sufficiently sensitive to political and legal considerations in Japan, when it comes to adapting current C2 arrangements. The allies will also have to account for differing authorities vested in defense leadership “counterparts” that might not be completely equivalent. Moreover, these defense authorities often relate to calibrations of operational (or defense condition) phasing that are different for each partner, and the two military cultures differ as well. Participants have also emphasized that it is important to avoid consuming the readiness of forces when considering some kind of joint or combined staff set up.

Roundtable participants have also highlighted important C2 arrangement considerations in the previous dialogues:



- Purpose - What is the operational problem to organize around? This will be a critical question for US and Japanese officials as they consider priorities for future security cooperation. Will it be focused on a particular mission or domain, or will it involve multiple domains and an integrated set of missions? Will it be focused on a limited area of operations? Etc.
- Location(s) - Where will it be located? How many supporting locations?
- Functions - What will it do day-to-day? What contingencies is it built for?
- Agility - Can it expand and adapt?
- Readiness - Does it enhance or consume readiness of alliance forces?
- Timeline - What are the aspirational timelines for implementation?

Answers to these questions can help determine the proper size and shape of a combined or coalition C2 model, and they provide a reference point for the agenda of future roundtables.

Japan Perspective Update Following Release of New National Defense Strategy:

The group then heard from three different retired Japanese government and military officials with extensive alliance experience regarding Japan's new National Defense Strategy (NDS) and how it might relate to the Task Force's future agenda. An **opening presenter** emphasized several key points on strategy implementation:

- Japan's defense buildup commitment to address growing security risks is laudable, but the goals for this buildup (as currently articulated) are relatively vague and should be clarified. Otherwise, the measurement for achievement over time will be ambiguous as well.
- The concept of "security" should not be diluted. The National Security Strategy (NSS) has to some extent become a "catchall document" to cover a wide range of policy issues with a label of security. While it is true that various issues can affect national security (i.e., not just military warfighting, but economic and other components as well), it is important to remember that the main driver for updating the NSS and NDS is the intensifying geopolitical rivalry amid a deteriorating balance of military power, and this gap must be defined and the balance restored. The speaker cautioned against complacency in the military buildup, which could happen if policy makers convince themselves that they have made sufficient progress under a broad and shallow definition of "security."
- Serious efforts to muster the combined capabilities of the SDF, Police and Japan Coast Guard (JCG) should be promoted. This will likely require legal and operational adjustments, and the JCG should be encouraged to coordinate more closely with other services and with US entities. The NSS addresses this, but it must be implemented thoroughly.



- Establishment of the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) should be established as soon as possible and be accompanied by human resource development. To some extent, insufficient human resources were long cited as a reason to forgo establishment of a PJHQ, and this underscores the need to address this point as Japan moves forward with a PJHQ.
- A new definition of roles and missions and division of labor between Japan and the US should be carried out immediately. If integrated deterrence is a key word to align the defense strategies of the two countries, then a whole-of-government approach should be adopted, and other countries could also be included in this effort.

Another presenter offered his views about establishment of a PJHQ in Japan and the challenges faced in the past. Although some policy makers and SDF officers had been promoting the idea of a PJHQ since after the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsumani disaster, the idea languished until Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (according to this retired officer), as policy makers felt more acutely the risks of weakened deterrence stemming from not being sufficiently prepared for military conflict. Now, the Kishida government has decided to establish a PJHQ as soon as possible, but the details are still under discussion in the Defense Ministry.

The presenter expects that the scope of US-Japan military cooperation will expand in the future, to include cross-domain operations, counterattack operations, flexible deterrent options (FDO), and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations, among others. The NSS clearly states to strengthen Japan's Joint operational structure in a comprehensive manner. The scope of Joint Operations includes not only "cross-domain operational capabilities," but also the newly introduced "standoff defense capabilities" and "operations of unmanned assets" and others. He provided a list of cooperation areas and priorities for the alliance, as outlined in the NSS and NDS:

- Examine constantly the US-Japan roles, missions, and capabilities;
- Further development of coordination functions such as the Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM);
- Coordination of operations, including cross-domain operations, counterattack operations, missile defense, etc.;
- Improve interoperability;
- Deepen cooperation in the cyber and space domain;
- Cooperation in equipment and technology to incorporate advanced technology;
- More advanced and practical joint training;



- US-Japan joint FDO;
- Joint intelligence, ISR activities, and coordination on information warfare;
- Joint use of US and Japanese base facilities; and
- Enhanced infrastructure for information security and cyber security.

According to Japan's new Defense Program, the employment of standoff missiles, counterattack capability will be conducted under centralized command and control based on the premise of joint operations. And in order to strengthen joint operation effectively, it was decided to establish a PJHQ in order to build a posture capable of seamlessly conducting cross-domain operations at all stages from peacetime to contingency. The Japanese government intends to centralize the SDF's operations under the PJHQ, and the commander of the PJHQ will also be in charge of Japan-US joint operations.

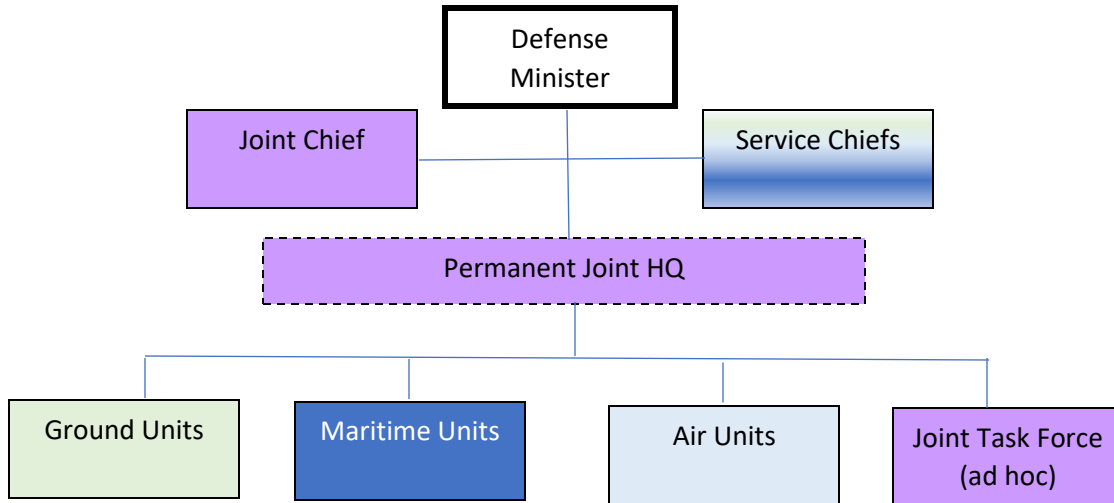
He highlighted two issues regarding the PJHQ that need to be considered: 1) the scope of operations conducted by the PJHQ, and 2) the geographic location of the PJHQ. On the latter, he thought that a critical factor would be the geographical/physical distance between the PJHQ and the Prime Minister, and that the headquarters should be located in a position suitable for Japan's unique political-military relationship. By this he meant that the closer PJHQ's location is to politics, the better, and that a location near the Prime Minister's office would be most suitable.

He explained that the Self-Defense Force law switches the authority of the SDF in peacetime and in contingency. In a gray zone where there is neither pure peace nor war, the switch from peacetime to an armed attack contingency is quite critical, and it could escalate a situation, so the government's decision making must be more sensitive and controlled than in other countries. The Japanese Governments will be particularly cautious about decisions regarding the use of counterattack capabilities and active cyberattacks, and legal requirements for a "minimum necessary level" of response could mean that operations are closely calibrated and possibly even starting and then stopping. Also, in selecting targets for counterattacks, the government would inevitably give priority to political rationality due to the exclusively defense-oriented national security policy.

A **third Japanese commentator** echoed some comments made by the first, emphasizing the importance of rigorous implementation of the new NDS, as well as the need to enhance operational integration among the SDF, JCG, and police forces for certain contingencies. He noted that although the NDS will likely drive significant change within the SDF (including the acquisition of new capabilities), there is no mention of expected change among the existing roles and missions for the alliance. This will need to be discussed carefully, as some

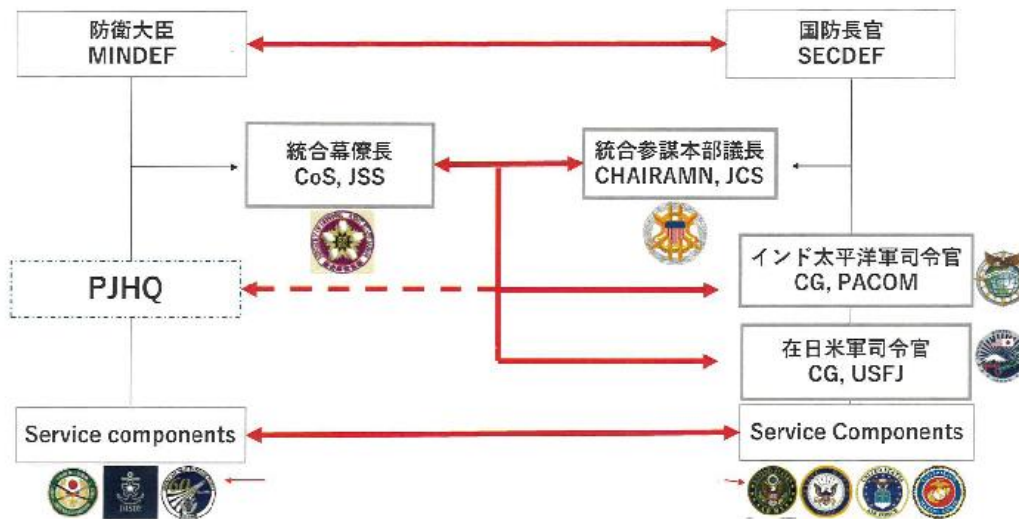
adjustments to roles and missions would seem inevitable. Some of this might be discussed in the context of trying to improve extended deterrence. Also, he thought that it might be necessary for Japan’s Ministry of Defense and SDF to develop their own National Military Strategy and Joint Defense Strategy.

The presenter noted that the PJHQ will assume an important role for the execution of orders, and he used this schematic for how the PJHQ will fit into the SDF command structure:ⁱ



His schematic for how the bilateral C2 relationship might look was as follows:

Bilateral C2 Relationship





The presenter also noted that the bulk of the US C2 structure for the region is located in Hawaii at US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), and bridging this gap effectively and efficiently will be another topic for the allies to discuss. Noting the example of INDOPACOM, he differed in opinion from the previous commentator regarding geographic location of Japan's PJHQ. He thought that the political component/liasion related to military decision making could be handled by the Chief of Staff (Joint Staff) of the SDF (in Tokyo), but because the Joint Commander (PJHQ) is responsible only for the execution of orders given, the PJHQ location should be considered from the perspective of how that role can be best fulfilled, regardless of the proximity to Tokyo.

Discussion Theme 1: How Do the Bilateral Defense Guidelines Fit into the C2 Discussion?

The discussion started with a question about how urgent it was for the allies to reconsider their current bilateral Defense Guidelines, and how that task might (or might not) relate to the longer-term adaptations to alliance C2 mechanisms. Views among the group were somewhat mixed, although most believed that a formal and time-consuming Guideline revision process should be avoided at this time, given other priorities for the alliance to sort out.

For example, one Japanese participant expressed a sense of urgency for C2 adaptations (or to improvise something) that can help the alliance deal more effectively with a regional or defense-of-Japan crisis that could emerge in the very near term (e.g., within weeks or months). In parallel, discussions could continue in Japan regarding establishment of the PJHQ and be carried out bilaterally regarding the Guidelines and a longer-term alliance C2 solution. He said that it would be dangerous to launch a Defense Guidelines revision process in such a way that it delayed quick considerations of these other pressing issues. He thought the Guidelines should be revised eventually, but that we should not spend too much time on them in the near term.

Another Japanese participant agreed in a way, expressing his view that the current Guidelines (even the current 2+2 structure) was too narrow to deal with the threats facing the alliance, so that some broader framework should be considered. In this sense, revising the Guidelines might be less important than devising a new and broader framework for alliance management with regard to national security (that incorporates the broader interagency). Another Japanese participant concurred with this view.

An American participant said he expected that the Biden administration also will not be eager to launch a formal Guideline revision process because of how much bureaucratic time it can consume, but he emphasized that down the line various important alliance conversations need to take place on operationalizing Japan's counterstrike mission, for example, and other combined activities. So, something like a Guidelines review will eventually be necessary, but it



is not the immediate task at hand. Another Japanese participant agreed, saying that we should prioritize the “homework” that is in front of us now, meaning both at a domestic level carrying out our individual defense strategies and bilaterally to improve alliance readiness in the short term.

Still, another Japanese participant emphasized the significance of change represented by Japan’s new NDS, along with the increasingly complex realm of cross-domain operations including cyber and space, so it is inescapable for the allies to address Guideline revision at some point in the not-too-distant future. Overall, participants recognized the need to reconsider the Guidelines through an iterative process that addresses pressing alliance coordination needs and at the same time looks at longer-term issues surrounding roles and missions, enhancing information sharing, and improving joint operations.

Participants also highlighted the need to keep the public informed about alliance moves and help them understand and support these new developments. The process needs legitimacy, and it is possible that the efforts to revise the Defense Guidelines will produce the momentum to enhance alliance security cooperation in a legitimate way. The shift of capabilities of the Japan side will likely affect the division of labor between the two countries, and therefore the document to define the roles and missions should be renewed.

Overall, there appeared to be a consensus that the US and Japan could try to improve alliance C2 within the context of current guidelines but be mindful of potential work by others to consider adjusting those guidelines. This would create political and bureaucratic space for the allies to move ahead with the C2 discussion independent of (but still informed by) a Guideline review process (and vice versa).

Discussion Theme 2: Agenda Building for the Alliance C2 Discussion

Another theme of the dialogue was a brainstorming process of sorts that identified various issues that the Task Force will need to consider as we develop an agenda for a March Track 1.5 workshop. This can be summarized by a series of questions or comments made by participants:

- Need to move beyond just coordination of activity and get to a point where we can integrate our activities. We are facing a peer competitor that is completely integrated.
- The National Defense Authorization Act for FY23 contains language that requires the Secretary of Defense to establish a Joint Force Headquarters in the INDOPACOM area of operations by October 2024 (as an initial target), with planning to begin in the first half of this year. Guam is already slated to host a future C2 center funded by the Missile Defense Agency. So, if we eventually have a permanent joint force HQ in Japan (the PJHQ) and a standing joint force HQ (of some kind) under INDOPACOM, then this can possibly provide



structure to the bilateral dialogue on future C2 arrangements (i.e., what should these HQs look like and how can we integrate them seamlessly to be prepared to respond to a crisis).

- Related to this, one participant asked whether a new alliance C2 structure might be needed to enable the kinds of joint and combine operations that we envision for the future, or can the existing structure simply be adapted or tweaked slightly to handle this. This is an open question.
- Information sharing (both in terms of hardware interoperability and software or information security practices) is a critical enabler of joint planning and operations, and this will need to be addressed.
- On the Japan side, a participant encouraged members to think beyond just a PJHQ but also consider joint regional mechanisms or functional mechanisms that can facilitate combined alliance operations at a narrower tactical level. Alliance C2 might need to be improved up and down the chain of command, and he noted, for example, that Japan's NDS is aiming to raise the Extended Deterrence Dialogue up to a minister level in some cases.
- One American participant noted Australia's experience establishing a Joint Force HQ and highlighted the alliance benefit of working together to develop effective bilateral routines for sharing information, reporting, and planning at a military tactical level, but just with staffs. This includes the political-military component. Then the allies benefit from exercising these plans and adjusting. This experience could be useful for the allies to review. Another American participant agreed that exercises were important, but too often our exercises are not sufficiently realistic ("too pedestrian") and we need to push the limits of what we think we can handle.
- Another American participant recalled US-Japan actions in the 1990s when they first looked at North Korea contingencies in detail and fleshed out coordination for Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan (SIASJ). This is an alliance experience that can be leveraged.
- We will have to consider the geographic scope for combined or joint operations (i.e., whether or not this is only for defense-of-Japan situations or could also respond to a regional crisis). Some aspects will be difficult to separate if Japan-based US forces respond to a regional crisis, but the alliance has options for how closely integrated Japan's SDF will be in those situations, and this will affect C2 arrangements. Another participant thought that there would be little appetite among the Japanese public for a truly "regional alliance," but certain scenarios might be acceptable. The C2 structure will need to be able to manage this ambiguity. An American added that the geographic question needs to be handled deliberately and carefully, with a balance of commitment to defend Japan and the flexibility to provide regional security.



- An American participant was concerned that any effort to get too specific in terms of regional applicability (e.g., East China Sea, South China Sea, etc.) could cause more political tension or public disagreement than necessary. In this sense, framing the new C2 applicability in the context of SIASJ might be the most legitimate and comfortable way to approach this, because of the precedent that exists.

Next Steps

The project will expand this dialogue to include government and military participants at its next meeting, so that some of the ideas and observations generated so far can be shared in a Track 1.5 format. One more virtual bilateral roundtable will be organized (this time probably by Chris Johnstone at CSIS) in February, and then we can continue the bilateral Track 1.5 conversation in a deeper way at a 2-day bilateral Track 1.5 workshop in Japan in March 2023. This will be followed by additional Task Force meetings in 2023, culminating in a bilateral Track 1.5 conference in Annapolis, MD in the Fall of 2023 (including a public event).

Please note that this summary is not a consensus document of the Task Force. It is a summary prepared by Jim Schoff based on notes from the dialogue and from subsequent follow-up discussions with participants. If you have any comments or questions regarding this summary, please contact Jim Schoff at jschoff@spfusa.org

*The **US-Japan NEXT Alliance Initiative** is a forum for bilateral dialogue, networking, and the development of joint recommendations involving a wide range of policy and technical specialists (in and out of government) to stimulate new alliance connections across foreign, security, and technology policy areas. Established by Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA with support from the Nippon Foundation, the goal is to help improve the alliance and how it serves shared interests, preparing it for emerging challenges within an increasingly complex and dynamic geostrategic environment. Launched in 2021, the Initiative includes two overlapping lines of effort: 1) Foreign & Security Policy, and 2) Technology & Innovation Connections. The Initiative is led by Sr. Director Jim Schoff.*

ⁱ The source for this graphic is pg. 220, Koichi Isobe, *Tomodachi-sakusen no Saizensen: Fukushima-Gempatsujiko ni miru Nichibei-domei Renkei no Kyokun* ("Operation Tomodachi: Process and Recommendations – The U.S.-Japan Alliance after Fukushima Nuclear Accident-," *Sairyu-sha*, August 2019, which was awarded the INOKI Masamichi Special Prize in November 2019.