



US-Japan Task Force on Command Relationships for New Challenges *Dialogue Summary #2, prepared by Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA*

On Thursday, December 1, 2022, Sasakawa USA's US-Japan NEXT Alliance Initiative convened a second US-only dialogue focusing on different examples of US military command relationships with allies and their attributes. The group considered these in the context of possible future adjustments to help improve the effectiveness of US-Japan 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 17 experts from US government offices, the US military, think tanks, universities, and former government officials and military officers. Mr. Jim Schoff, Senior 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. These meetings are being coordinated informally with Mr. Chris Johnstone, Japan Chair at CSIS, which has its own project underway on this topic. Each project is distinct, but this coordination aims to maximize the value and efficiency for government participants. The projects have no pre-conceived notions of what the outcome should be. They aim only to facilitate dialogue and provide a useful foundation for future Track 1 discussion.

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, characterized generally as "cross domain operations." 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 is 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.

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 US-only group to test the project premise and chart a course for the remainder of research and dialogue. We will shift to a bilateral format next.



Opening Remarks:

An American faculty member of the US National War College and Colonel in the US Army with experience in coalition operations opened the meeting by presenting his NEXT-commissioned research on US C2 models with international partners. He began by highlighting important C2 headquarter considerations:

- 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 help determine the proper size and shape of the combined or coalition C2 model. In addition, the scholar gave his view of the overall purpose behind C2 in general, which is to meet the needs of the commander so that he or she can lead effectively. Technology is just one component of this system that includes a variety of different variables: communications, facilities and equipment, personnel, and procedures. He highlighted six characteristics:

- Reliability
- Survivability
- Flexibility
- Responsiveness
- Interoperability
- User-orientation

The scholar then examined several current and historical models of US international C2 arrangements and highlighted their relevant attributes. He reviewed the following models:

- US-UK Combined Command 1942
 - TORCH (1942)
 - OVERLORD (1944)



- Combined Forces Command (CFC) (US-South Korea)
- US-Japan (*Operation Tomodachi, 2011*)
- US-Australia CJTF Exercises (*Talisman Sabre*)
 - Biannual Exercise
- A Doctrinal US Approach to Joint Task Forces
- Joint Interagency Task Force-South (*works with partner nations leveraging all-domain capabilities to target, detect, and monitor illicit drug trafficking in the Joint Operating Area around South and Central America and the Caribbean; heavy on intel sharing and complex coordination among armed forces, intelligence community, Coast Guards, law enforcement, and diplomats*)

The scholar also provided a comparison slide at the end to summarize the different attributes of each model:

Command	Operational Problem	Permanent	Multiple Functions	Agility	Builds Readiness	Urgency to FOC
CFC	Defense of South Korea	YES	YES	YES	Seldom	Evolution/High
WWII-Europe	Enter and Conquer	NO	NO	YES	NO	High
Tomodachi	HA/DR	NO	NO	NO	NO	High
Talisman Sabre	Joint Exercise	NO	YES and NO	NO	YES	Routine
JIATF-South	C-Drug	YES	YES	YES	NO	Evolution/Routine

Discussion Theme 1: Scale and Scope Considerations for C2 in a US-Japan Context

The discussion started by highlighting some of the existing coordinating structures that the US and Japan already have in place, upon which some building can take place (e.g., bilateral air defense coordination and the Bilateral Joint Operations Coordination Center (BJOCC) at Yokota Air Base, along with the Alliance Coordination Mechanism that also includes a Bilateral Operations Coordination Center and Component Coordination Centers, when needed). Another example would be the role of the USS Blue Ridge based in Japan that supports a multilateral



North Korea sanctions “Enforcement Coordination Cell.” One participant thought that in many ways the models discussed in the opening brief were perhaps too operations oriented. Instead, “we need a joint command (not the exercise command) to fill this in, and a great organization would be one with almost no forces assigned to it.”

He described a combination of staff to facilitate planning, communications and reporting, secure classified information sharing, so the “blocking and tackling” by two staffs can operate as one when needed. There will still be two national staff, but we need to figure out how to make them work together more seamlessly and effectively. He thought that the kind of overarching structure similar to OVERLORD (US-UK model) already exists (in the pol-mil space), and we already have good experience coordinating (and integrating) operations at sea and in the air especially. So, if we get that joint command structure right, then we can assign them forces when needed for certain exercises to prepare for necessary missions in the future. He pointed out that Talisman Sabre with the Australians started out far more modest about a dozen years ago when it was initiated, and so the capability and complexity can evolve with time and practice.

Returning to the question of what a new C2 arrangement should be focused on trying to address, another participant suggested that the overall purpose could be deterrence and preserving stability, so it is likely to be less mission-focused (e.g., protecting EEZs or sea lanes) and will be broader. It is about building the capacity to address a wider range of coordinated missions in the future. The approach needs to be acceptable to the Japanese (politically and legally) from the start, but it should also be able to support (over time) the ability to coordinate cross-domain operations. Another participant wondered if one single alliance C2 structure will be able to accomplish all of this, and that to some extent a collection of support structures might be necessary, addressing different functions and in different geographies.

This participant also highlighted that Japan (like South Korea in many ways) is going through its own evolution in terms of defense force structure and building the capacity to sustain operations throughout the relatively broad expanse of Japanese territory and its EEZ. Japan’s Central Readiness Force back in the early 2000s was an early example of this adaptation by Japan, to address disaster relief or other types of crisis situations around different parts of Japan and abroad, but it did not have forces assigned to it. It was a command structure that could pull forces from the regional armies to accomplish a particular mission, when so ordered.

Another participant suggested that we should think of the next stage of C2 with Japan as developing a process to effectively manage mission, functions, and tasks. “That’s the work of task force, task groups, and task units,” he said, “and the Japanese understand that.” He added, if you are talking about man, train, and equip (i.e., the readiness piece), that’s a competency piece that the US and Japanese sides might not understand in the same way. He thought that this might be an area where there is a separation between us, and it would probably be disconcerting to the



Japanese if the US side wanted to begin talking about the assignment of forces in this context. Instead, the US should focus on the necessity of command and control.

He continued, “there is no need to surge forces without first establishing their C2 requirements,” and if the US and Japan are both surging forces to a particular geographic space based on each of their respective national interests, then they will need a C2 structure to accommodate that scenario. In the Talisman Sabre example, these are two separate joint national forces (Australia and the US) that are tied together about as much as possible from a cultural and intellectual/language perspective as such forces can possibly be, so they integrate naturally. But even then, it required an adequate C2 structure and regular exercises to operationalize effectively. In the US-Japan case, it might be better to do this in the form of command post exercises with few specific forces assigned, and with a substantial pol-mil (e.g., DoD/Defense Ministry and State/Foreign Ministry component) to make sure the civilian control aspect is well covered.

Another participant noted that alliance managers will be dealing with two different groups when it comes to moving forward with discussions about command relationship adjustments. One group includes the professionals and experts involved in the process, which the other group is the broader Japanese public. Keeping the scope of new alliance activities in this area relatively modest can help the process by starting off low key and allowing the public to acclimate to the new arrangements. Then, if we face strong North Korean or Chinese provocations in the future, we can raise the level of our coordination in a more conducive public atmosphere. Regardless, an important issue is for the US not to change its mind or direction for once we start the process. We should coordinate closely and be deliberate each step of the way.

Discussion Theme 2: Options and Considerations Going Forward

At different times during the discussion, participants in the group cautioned against getting too ambitious with any C2 reform with Japan and urging a “go slow” approach in close consultation with the Japanese. Former officials and military officers with experience in Japan recalled multiple times when Japanese authorities erred on the side of caution with respect to how to interpret certain legal parameters, possible acceptance of roles connected to military combat, and subsequent rules of engagement. They emphasized the importance for the US side to understand the political dynamics in Japan and the mindset of the populace going forward. Although this sparked some group debate about the extent to which the atmosphere has changed in Japan in the last few years (due to actions taken by North Korea, China, and especially Russia in Ukraine), the overall view was to remain cautious and incremental, even as we thought the timing was as good as it has ever been for a substantive bilateral dialogue in this area.



Being sensitive to cultural differences will be important, as is recognizing some of the differences in terms of what authorities different leaders have and when they can be exercised. One retired US military officer noted that Japan's J3 and J5 construct, for example, is different than the way the US divides those responsibilities, so coordination with both of them was often necessary for a J3 counterpart in the US military, for example. Moreover, sensitivity to certain terminology can also be a factor, as one participant recalled a debate with the Japanese about whether or not a certain collaborative activity should be called an "expeditionary" activity or "amphibious." The Japan side, he said, thought that "expeditionary" had implications that Japanese citizens would not like, so they described it as amphibious.

This led one participant to suggest that the next meeting in this series, which is planned as the first bilateral, should perhaps start out as a Track 2 meeting without acting government officials or military officers joining. This might help the next meeting establish a more informal atmosphere that provides space to explore different topics that could be of value (indirectly) to a Track 1 or Track 1.5 dialogue in the future. The track 2 approach can be useful in deciding in a bilateral way which direction the project should go, so that it is a recommendation generated bilaterally and not just proposed by one side to the other. The group can then reconvene in the future in a Track 1.5 format, bilaterally.

Some of these key topics are likely to include basics of enhancing information sharing or coordinating more effectively on roles, missions, and capabilities, and policy makers might be able to tap into alliance after-action-reviews (AARs) of existing missions or exercises that will help them recommend useful adjustments. One participant confirmed that some of these AARs focus specifically on the performance of Bilateral Cooperation and Component Coordination Centers. This collaborative process might also help take advantage of the existing C2 infrastructure within the alliance, as we shift from Track 2 to Track 1.5, and eventually a Track 1 process emerges.

On the information sharing piece in particular, a participant called it "one of the elephants in the room" when trying to build a more sophisticated and capable C2 structure that aspires to build an alliance common operating picture. This relates not only to what troops in the field see on their targeting screens (for example, making sure that Japanese Ground Self-Defense Forces with anti-ship missile capability in the Southwest Islands can easily discern between a US or potential enemy vessel), but also how information is shared more broadly. He noted that pretty much all of the info traffic in support of operations in the Indo-Pacom area of responsibility is on JWICS (Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System), "it's all elevated." So that keeps the US and Japan more in a "coordination mode" that is hard to rise above, and we end up mostly deconflicting in time and space.

Many in the room felt that this kind of baseline would probably not be sufficient for future scenarios that involve a flow of forces from both countries to a particular area. We will want to be able to grow beyond coordination into a more meaningful combined C2 structure, and this



means that the information sharing problem will need to be addressed. One participant thought that this could be an incentive for Japan to continue improving its information security culture and procedures.

Another challenging topic for the future will be harmonizing rules of engagement (ROE) for US and Japanese forces. One participant suggested that the bilateral dialogue on C2 issues can lead to an informed discussion on ROE, national caveats, and interpretation of international law. This does not mean that one side or the other will have to adopt rules or interpretations of the partner, but greater operational integration will necessitate deeper bilateral dialogue and mutual understanding about these issues. A participant emphasized that it is not just about tactical execution but about developing a shared operational framework with which both sides are comfortable.

Next Steps

The project will expand this dialogue to include Japanese specialists at its next meeting, so that some of the ideas and observations generated so far can be shared, and so the US participants can learn more about how Japan perceives the strengths and weaknesses of current arrangements. The Japanese government will have also just finalized its revised strategic documents at this time, and together we can consider what these all mean for each other going forward. We plan to carry on this bilateral conversation leading up to a 2-day bilateral Track 1.5 workshop in Japan in March 2023, and then a follow-on bilateral conference in Annapolis, MD in the Fall of 2023.

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.*
