

Joint Statement of the 9th Defense Trilateral Talks

Defense officials from Japan, the United States, and the Republic of Korea met in Tokyo on April 19, 2017, for the 9th Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT), where they engaged in substantive consultations on regional security issues, including North Korea, and discussed ways to deepen and expand trilateral defense cooperation. Japan Director General for Defense Policy Satoshi Maeda, performing the duties of the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs David Helvey, and ROK Deputy Minister for Policy Wee Seung-ho led their respective interagency delegations.

The three delegations assessed recent North Korean activities, including its multiple ballistic missile launches this year, and other developments in its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Emphasizing that these programs pose a serious and direct threat to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and beyond, the officials strongly condemned North Korea's recent provocative actions and resolved to strengthen mutual and international coordination to implement and enforce relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions fully. The officials called on North Korea to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner, to cease its provocative actions that only increase tensions in the region, and to abide by its international obligations and commitments.

The officials lauded the progress in trilateral defense cooperation since the 8th DTT held in December 2016. The three delegations noted that they successfully utilized a variety of communication channels to share information and coordinate responses to North Korea's provocative actions. The representatives decided to maintain even closer cooperation in the future. The officials praised recent steps to improve trilateral response capabilities, including through four missile warning exercises held since June 2016; an inaugural anti-submarine warfare exercise; a maritime interdiction operations exercise; and combined flight training events with U.S. bomber aircraft. The three delegations resolved to continue efforts to enhance trilateral interoperability, emphasizing that close cooperation among the three defense authorities is crucial to strengthening deterrence vis-à-vis North Korea and enabling an effective response in the event of a contingency.

The three delegations affirmed that the U.S.-ROK alliance decision to station a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense battery in the ROK is only a self-defense measure in response to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats and thus poses no threat to other countries in the region. The officials shared the view that pressure on or retaliation against the ROK in response to this decision is unreasonable and inappropriate and should be stopped immediately. They further urged concerned parties to actively address the root cause that makes the deployment of THAAD necessary.

The officials also discussed other regional security issues, including the importance of maritime security. The three delegations reaffirmed that freedom of navigation and overflight must be ensured, and that disputes should be resolved in a peaceful manner.

The representatives emphasized that trilateral security cooperation contributes not only to the safety of their respective nations, but also to regional security. Following this, they committed to strengthen senior-level policy discussions and military exchange. The officials also committed to developing trilateral cooperation further using the DTT framework.

The United States reaffirmed its ironclad security commitments to the ROK and Japan, and the three delegations reiterated their commitment to continue to work closely together. The officials resolved to hold the 10th DTT in 2018 in the United States on a date to be mutually determined in the future.