Webinar: U.S.-Japan Alliance Cooperation in the Post-Pandemic World  
*Views from the Next Generation Project*  
March 7, 2022  
via Zoom

SUMMARY

Panelists

Riho Aizawa, National Institute for Defense Studies  
Ryosuke Hanada, Research Student, Macquarie University  
Naritada Miura, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA  
Ippeita Nishida, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Japan  
Pam Kennedy (moderator), Stimson

On March 7, 2022, the Stimson Center hosted a webinar for the launch of “U.S.-Japan Alliance Cooperation in the Post-Pandemic World,” the ninth volume in the *Views from the Next Generation* policy brief series. The four contributing authors joined to discuss their research findings: Riho Aizawa, Research Fellow at the National Institute for Defense Studies; Ryosuke Hanada, Research Student at Macquarie University; Naritada Miura, Program Assistant at Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA; and Ippeita Nishida, Senior Research Fellow at Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Japan. The panel was moderated by Pam Kennedy, Research Analyst in the East Asia/Japan Program at Stimson.

The director of the Japan Program, Yuki Tatsumi, opened the webinar with a welcome and introductions of the panelists. Kennedy then asked Aizawa to reflect on her research. Aizawa explained the main points of her chapter, reframing the Indo-Pacific to rethink how the U.S.-Japan alliance should prioritize its activities there, with maintaining stable and open sea-lanes as the core interest. In her conceptualization, the Indo-Pacific can be divided into subregions based on regional seas, with each area having specific issues, interests, and potential security partners for the alliance. Aizawa noted that the definition of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) centers on “free” states that can make independent policy decisions and “open” public goods that are not dominated by a single country. Regarding states that do not share the FOIP values, the alliance can still build functional cooperative relations where interests overlap, particularly by expressing the U.S. and Japan’s concerns with Chinese economic coercive measures. Through encouraging countries in the region to make policy decisions aligned with FOIP values, the U.S. and Japan can strengthen the FOIP.

Hanada then discussed his chapter, in which he defined minilateralism and examined the Quad as a minilateral. The Quad is already accepted as an example of minilateral cooperation, with working level consultations and summit meetings, and it has become a sustainable grouping in recent years. But a good minilateral has three characteristics: its functionality (compared to larger groupings), agility to address chosen issues quickly, and flexibility to work among other bilateral and multilateral relationships its members have. Without a specific goal, the right membership, and resources, minilaterals cannot be successful. In terms of the Quad, Hanada found that the Quad needs a more specific goal, since it began as a maritime security partnership but has recently expanded the number of issues its members are considering. In response to a question about expanding the Quad’s members, Hanada noted that the Quad works with partners, as in Quad Plus, but probably cannot expand its membership without diluting its effectiveness. Partnership with the Quad, however, is likely to expand as the Quad can provide resources
to countries seeking to improve their maritime security capabilities. Hanada also noted that the Quad could consider two different options in the future, maintaining an ad hoc structure or moving to institutionalize its activities.

Next, Miura discussed his research on technology cooperation, noting that economic friction has occurred between the U.S. and Japan in the past with technology development, including the FSX fighter jet and semiconductors. Miura emphasized that this economic interest took precedence over the alliance’s strategic goals, which during the Cold War were to counter the Soviet Union, and that this situation could happen again. Today, there is a sense in both countries that the domestic economic needs must be satisfied by gaining as much from bilateral trade deals or tech cooperation. This leads to the necessity of a mechanism to better coordinate between the U.S. and Japan on technology development and cooperation, to encourage exchange of ideas and coordination instead of only competition. Miura noted that market competition is a reality, but the allies can work to find compromises and share their leading technologies for the benefit of the alliance, as well as other key partners. Miura added that a prerequisite is Japan improving its economic security practices, including security clearances and technology transfer transparency.

Last, Nishida presented his research on economic security, noting two main challenges for Japan and the U.S., including the broad array of economic security issues and the differing perspectives on economic security policy, as well as the difficulty in economic cooperation. Nishida pointed out that while economic cooperation is an element of the U.S.-Japan security treaty, the practical aspects of cooperation need improvement, such as a common vision on economic security along with a mechanism for consultation. Nishida also observed that third country partnerships in economic cooperation need to be enhanced, which the Biden administration has spoken about improving. A key issue remaining, however, is the cultivation of trust on economic issues, which remains difficult since the U.S. still maintains tariffs on Japanese aluminum and progress has not been made in the U.S.-Japan trade negotiations. Nishida urged both sides to reduce the friction by increasing consultations at every level of the alliance.

Kennedy opened the discussion to audience questions. Niall Nicholson asked how China views the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Hanada responded that while the Quad primarily counterbalances China, it does not erase the regional frameworks like ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, which do not have the same counterbalancing role but can serve as communication channels with China, especially at a time when U.S.-China communications are not as strong. Aizawa added that striking a balance between engagement and deterrence with China is a difficult point in the alliance, noting that China has objected to the revitalization of the alliance in the past. China also has a responsibility to be clear in its messaging if it has concerns about the alliance or the regional order.

A question from Daisuke Kawai asked whether the scope of the alliance, or the Quad, extended to major issues outside the region, like Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Hanada asserted that the Quad’s narrow membership, resources, and purpose restrict it to the Indo-Pacific, but its members can, and have, express their own views on issues outside the region and implications for the Indo-Pacific. Aizawa also noted that views differ among members of the Quad, especially India, Russia’s traditional ally. Aizawa observed that part of the challenge in formulating the policy towards China is that there are extraregional issues like wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Kevin Maher asked how Japan’s defense industry will overcome issues of scale and competitiveness in the international market. Miura answered that the Japanese government has struggled to resolve these issues, despite easing restrictions on arms experts. It will be key for Japan to identify their potential markets and to assess the defense industry’s key technologies to determine where Japan’s strengths are, with policies following.

John Kim asked whether the relationship between South Korea and Japan hindered the U.S.-Japan alliance. Hanada noted that though South Korea has historically been focused on North Korea, maritime
security remains a secure; however, South Korea has to balance its relationship with China, so it has a different determination to make in how it can contribute to the regional order. Nishida commented on the economic security aspect, noting that trilateral U.S.-Japan-South Korea cooperation would be unlikely without political confidence. Supply chain resiliency might be one option, but Japan is currently prioritizing partners like Taiwan in that area. Nishida noted that Japan-Korea relations are not an obstacle for the U.S.-Japan alliance, but collaboration remains difficult. He also noted that Japan too has a complex calculation towards China, depending on a good business relationship with China.

Circling back to defense industry issues, Nishida noted that Japan has been under pressure to increase its foreign military sales, despite the limited budget and the Keidanren cautioning that the industry does not have the resources, human or otherwise, to meet the demands. Miura added that technology cooperation needs to be expanded not just with the U.S. but with other regional partners, especially as the complexity of supply chains means that multiple countries contribute to final products. This increases the need for Japan to improve its due diligence in tracking production along the supply chains.

Larissa Stünkel asked whether the war in Ukraine will influence the U.S. and Japan’s strategic ambiguity towards Taiwan. Hanada noted that Taiwan’s stability is important for the FOIP as a frontline issue. As the understanding of Taiwan in Japan’s security has been shifting, the Ukraine crisis is a chance to think about potential scenarios. Aizawa added that Japan and the U.S. are likely to continue their policies of strategic ambiguity. On Taiwan’s importance for Japan’s economic security, Nishida noted that “friend-shoring” is a good way for Japan to engage with Taiwan, and there need to be more conversations about including Taiwan in the economic security debate. Miura agreed that Taiwan’s semiconductor factory in Japan is an important step. Japan needs to consider whether key technologies like semiconductors will be considered merely part of a commercial deal or whether they are a defense issue, and what policies that would entail. Miura ended by noting that Japan needs to continue thinking about how it can provide the infrastructure and resources for other partners to bring their production to Japan.

With the hour at an end, Kennedy thanked the authors for the discussion and the audience for joining in the Q&A.