EU-Japan-South Korea Cooperation Is Indispensable Now

Shin, Gi-Wook . Shin, Gi-Wook.

FULL TEXT

For decades, South Korean strategy rested on a stable hierarchy within the international order. The alliance with the United States provided security; Seoul then managed relations with Japan, Europe, China, and regional institutions around that anchor. The alliance remains indispensable, but Seoul can no longer assume that this foundation will stay stable.

The evidence is visible in the way Washington now deals with allies. In 2025, the United States initially announced sharply differentiated "reciprocal" tariffs on South Korea, Japan, and the European Union. Negotiations later produced a 15 percent baseline framework for all three, but the process mattered as much as the final rate. Trade access, industrial investment, defense procurement, and alliance politics were increasingly handled as one bargaining package. Allies were not exempt from economic pressure because they were allies.

At the same time, Europe and Asia have been building connections that would have seemed highly ambitious a decade ago. The European Union signed security and defense partnerships with Japan and South Korea in November 2024. This year, the EU and Japan launched a defense-industry dialogue, while the EU and South Korea signed a digital trade agreement and began implementing cooperation on maritime security, cyber and hybrid threats, information manipulation, space, and the defense industry. The strategic map is becoming more networked.

The network, however, remains uneven. Japan already has a mature economic partnership with the EU and rapidly expanding defense-industry ties. EU-South Korea relations are deepening, but they still lack the density and regular strategic consultation found in EU-Japan ties. A trilateral format would therefore do more than add another meeting: it would reduce asymmetry among three partners whose capabilities are increasingly complementary.

South Korea, Japan, and the EU now face four converging challenges and pressures.

The first is demographic. South Korea is aging faster than any other OECD society; Japan's working-age population has been shrinking for decades; and the EU's fertility rate reached a new low in 2024. Demography is not a social-policy sidebar. It affects defense recruitment, industrial capacity, fiscal room, technological adoption, and the ability to sustain long-term commitments. Each actor is experimenting with immigration, automation, workforce policy, and welfare reform, but the security implications remain largely compartmentalized.

The second is concentrated economic dependence. None of the three can or should decouple from China. Yet South Korea's experience after the THAAD deployment, Europe's debates over economic coercion, and China's export controls on gallium, germanium, and other strategic inputs have shown that interdependence can be converted into leverage. De-risking therefore requires more than national stockpiles. It requires shared risk maps, compatible certification, co-investment in alternative suppliers, and advance consultation before export controls or industrial subsidies create collateral damage among partners.

The third challenge is U.S. volatility. The United States is still the only actor capable of providing extended nuclear deterrence to South Korea and Japan, and NATO remains central to European defense. But dependence on U.S. power now coexists with uncertainty about U.S. policy. The classic alliance dilemmas of abandonment and entrapment are no longer opposite ends of a spectrum. Today, U.S. allies fear *both* being left out and being drawn into bargains or contingencies they did not shape.

The fourth pressure is the collapse of the old geographic separation between European and Asian security. North Korean munitions, missiles, and troops have supported Russia's war against Ukraine. Moscow, in turn, has provided Pyongyang with political cover, economic support, and the prospect of military know-how. What happens on a European battlefield is changing the military balance on the Korean Peninsula. A regional response to a cross-regional threat is structurally inadequate.

This is the case for an EU-Japan-South Korea strategic dialogue. This framework should not be described as strategic autonomy, equidistance, or a hedge against the United States. A better term would be institutionalized hedging: risk diversification through standing, rule-based consultation among allies and partners that remain anchored in the broader U.S.-led system.

The proposal is more feasible than ever before. Japan-South Korea relations have improved significantly in recent years. The January 2026 summit in Nara and the reciprocal summit in South Korea in May demonstrated continuity across leadership changes in both countries since June 2025. The EU already has free-trade, digital, green, and security frameworks with both countries. The task is not to invent three new bilateral relationships; it is to connect existing ones.

The dialogue should begin modestly, through a Track 1.5 process involving officials, experts, and industry. Its early agenda must be concrete and specific: a joint critical minerals and supply chain risk assessment; consultation on export controls and investment screening; cooperation on AI, cyber resilience, and digital standards; exchanges on demographic and defense workforce adaptation; and shared monitoring of North Korea-Russia military cooperation. Successful projects could then be elevated to ministerial working groups.

Two design choices are essential. First, the initiative must remain function-driven. It is not NATO, not the Quad, and not an anti-China coalition. Its purpose is to reduce vulnerability without demanding economic separation. Second, it should be complementary to relations with Washington and transparent about that purpose. Horizontal networks strengthen alliances when they help allies absorb shocks, coordinate positions, and arrive at consultations with greater capacity.

For South Korea, the need is particularly acute. Japan already has the G7, a mature economic partnership with the EU, and expanding European defense ties. Seoul's international weight has grown faster than its institutional depth. An EU-Japan-South Korea dialogue would help close that gap.

Horizontalizing alliances is not a vote of no confidence in the United States. It is insurance for the moments when the United States wavers, overreaches, or changes course. The postwar hierarchy cannot simply be preserved by demanding more reassurance from Washington. Its resilience will depend on whether allies can build connective tissue among themselves before the next crisis forces them to improvise.

This essay is one of four to emerge from discussions at an international conference jointly organized by the Seoul Forum for International Affairs and the Hairan Series of Korea University's Institute for Interdisciplinary Unification Studies, "Democratic Multilateralism at the Edge," held in Seoul on April 20, 2026.

DETAILS

Business indexing term:	Subject: Defense industry Export controls
Subject:	Cooperation; Alliances; Demography; Defense industry; Export controls
Location:	Russia; United States--US; China; Japan; Europe; South Korea
Company / organization:	Name: North Atlantic Treaty Organization--NATO; NAICS: 928120; Name: European Union; NAICS: 926110, 928120
Publication title:	The Diplomat; Tokyo
Publication year:	2026
Publication date:	Jul 17, 2026

Publisher:	Tribune Content Agency LLC
Place of publication:	Tokyo
Country of publication:	United States
Publication subject:	Asian Studies, Political Science
ISSN:	1446697X
Source type:	Magazine
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
Publication history :	
Milestone dates:	2026-07-17 (Revised)
ProQuest document ID:	3365500728
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/magazines/eu-japan-south-korea-cooperation-is-indispensable/docview/3365500728/se-2?accountid=14558
Copyright:	Copyright 2026 - The Diplomat; distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC
Last updated:	2026-07-20
Database:	ProQuest Central Premium Korea

LINKS

Linking Service

The G7's Indo-Pacific Gap and Trump's 2027 Opportunity

Cha, Victor . Cha, Victor.

FULL TEXT

The G7 has changed almost everything – except its membership. Created in the 1970s to coordinate among the largest industrial democracies, its agenda has become impressively expansive. Canada's G7 presidency in 2025 produced initiatives on critical minerals and artificial intelligence. France's 2026 presidency has placed economic security, supply chain resilience, global imbalances, development partnerships, and new technology risks at the center of the group's work.

The G7's agenda has moved into the 21st century. Its composition still reflects the late 20th.

The G7 has tried to compensate through guest invitations and issue-specific outreach. That flexibility is valuable, but it does not provide continuity, agenda-setting authority, or responsibility for implementation. A country invited to one summit may disappear from next year's. Guest invitations can widen participation, but this cannot correct a persistent membership mismatch.

And two of the countries best positioned to contribute to the G7's expanded agenda, South Korea and Australia, remain outside the group's permanent membership.

South Korea is the world's 13th-largest economy and a pivotal producer in semiconductors, batteries, shipbuilding, nuclear energy, digital infrastructure, and defense manufacturing. When the G7 discusses chip supply, maritime industrial capacity, advanced manufacturing, or North Korea, South Korea's participation is indispensable.

Australia brings a different but equally important set of assets: critical minerals, energy, maritime geography, development partnerships in the Pacific, AUKUS, and a growing network of economic-security and defense agreements across the Indo-Pacific. A G7 strategy for trusted mineral supply chains that excludes Australia is incomplete from the start.

An original dataset I compiled using more than 300 publicly available indicators covering economic scale, technological capacity, defense contribution, governance, development finance, supply chain relevance, and democratic performance shows that South Korea and Australia meet or exceed several existing G7 members across many of the issues where the group now claims to lead.

This creates an unusual opportunity in 2027, when the United States assumes the G7 presidency. The Trump administration is an unlikely champion of multilateral reform in the traditional sense. But the relevant question is whether enlargement can be presented as a better deal for the United States.

The answer is yes. South Korea and Australia are U.S. treaty allies that already carry substantial burdens. They bring industrial capabilities, strategic geography, investment, and defense cooperation that Washington wants. Expansion can be framed not as widening a diplomatic club for its own sake, but as aligning membership with contribution. The Trump administration's own fiscal year 2027 budget planning already recognizes U.S. hosting responsibilities. That creates a concrete deadline and a presidential platform.

During the U.S. presidency, the G7 should admit South Korea and Australia as full members. The G7's legitimacy will not be restored by adding every important democracy, nor should enlargement become open-ended. The initial standard should be demanding: sustained democratic governance, advanced economic and technological capacity, willingness to provide international public goods, and direct relevance to the institution's core agenda. South Korea and Australia satisfy all four.

The new "Democratic G9" should then create a light troika secretariat linking the previous, current, and next presidencies. The G7's informality is useful, but annual rotation too often produces discontinuity. A small standing mechanism could preserve priorities, track implementation, and support working groups without turning the G9 into a treaty organization.

Critical minerals projects, sanctions coordination, AI standards, and development-finance commitments all require follow-through beyond a single summit cycle.

The G9 should also institutionalize outreach to the Global South. Inviting a changing list of guests to one summit does not constitute representation. The G9 should establish recurring, issue-specific consultations with countries from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, and with China. On debt, food security, digital infrastructure, climate finance, and mineral development, partners should help shape agendas before leaders announce them.

Enlargement of the democratic core must be paired with a more serious practice of consultation beyond it.

Three objections deserve answers.

The first is that Trump will not support G7 enlargement. But a proposal built around burden sharing, China competition, supply chain resilience, and allied industrial capacity is more compatible with his politics than a defense of inherited membership. A U.S.-led expansion of the G7 could be framed not as an extension of liberalism, but as an American-led modernization of the institution.

The second is that the rise of BRICS makes the G7 irrelevant. The opposite is true. BRICS expansion demonstrates a demand for institutions that reflect a wider distribution of power.

The third is arbitrariness: why admit South Korea and Australia, but not India, Brazil, or others? The answer is that India and Brazil are indispensable global actors and should be central to structured outreach, but full membership in a democratic steering group requires a combination of regime standards, policy alignment, contribution, and institutional readiness. In our dataset, moreover, India, Brazil, and Indonesia do not yet perform at the level of G7 countries on the key issue-areas identified as critical by the group's leaders.

The G7's problem is that it excludes countries that already perform essential functions while claiming authority over issues they help govern. The 2027 U.S. presidency offers a chance to correct that mismatch.

A Democratic G9 would be a test of whether the advanced democracies can still adapt and rebuild global rules and norms before crisis makes such adaptation unavoidable.

This essay is one of four to emerge from discussions at an international conference jointly organized by the Seoul Forum for International Affairs and the Hairan Series of Korea University's Institute for Interdisciplinary Unification Studies, "Democratic Multilateralism at the Edge," held in Seoul on April 20, 2026.

DETAILS

Business indexing term:	Subject: Supply chains Production capacity; Industry: 92111 : Executive Offices
Subject:	Digital infrastructure; Supply chains; Production capacity; Democracy; Presidency; Critical minerals
Location:	Australia; China; Brazil; United States--US; India; South Korea
Publication title:	The Diplomat; Tokyo
Publication year:	2026
Publication date:	Jul 23, 2026
Publisher:	Tribune Content Agency LLC
Place of publication:	Tokyo
Country of publication:	United States

Publication subject:	Asian Studies, Political Science
ISSN:	1446697X
Source type:	Magazine
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	3367839153
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/magazines/g7-s-indo-pacific-gap-trump-2027-opportunity/docview/3367839153/se-2?accountid=14558
Copyright:	Copyright 2026 - The Diplomat; distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC
Last updated:	2026-07-24
Database:	ProQuest Central Premium Korea

LINKS

Linking Service

Redesigning International Order for a G-Minus World

Quah, Danny . Quah, Danny.

FULL TEXT

Debates about international order usually begin with the same question: who will lead next? Will the United States recover its authority? Will China mature into a responsible provider of public goods? Will some concert of major powers manage the transition?

The question is familiar and increasingly misleading. The defining condition of this century is not a clean transfer of hegemony from one state to another. It is the erosion of the possibility that any single state, or compact group of great powers, can supply order for everyone else.

We live in a G-minus world. The term does not simply mean that leadership is absent, as in a G-zero world. It means that every plausible steering group is missing something essential. Military reach, manufacturing capacity, financial credibility, technological innovation, demographic weight, regulatory authority, and political legitimacy are distributed across different actors. The United States remains pre-eminent in several domains, but it depends on production networks it does not control. China is central to global manufacturing and trade, but lacks the alliance structure and financial trust to underwrite a universal order. The European Union can set standards, but cannot by itself secure the system it regulates. India, Brazil, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and other consequential powers cannot be treated as rule-takers, yet they do not form a coherent governing coalition.

This is more than multipolarity. It is hyper-multipolarity: power fragmented not only among states, but across domains. Strength in one arena no longer converts automatically into authority in another.

The older theory of hegemonic stability assumed that a dominant state would supply public goods because it possessed both the capacity and the incentive to do so. Today, those two dimensions have separated. The cost of underwriting open markets, dispute settlement, maritime security, financial stability, and crisis response has risen, while the domestic political return has become less certain. Great powers are therefore tempted not only to withdraw from order, but to extract from it, through tariffs, sanctions, coercive finance, and the weaponization of interdependence.

The response cannot be to ask middle powers to become a substitute hegemon. They lack the resources, and a coalition assigned hegemonic burdens would reproduce the same incentive problem on a smaller base. The more promising question is different: how can institutions make cooperation the rational choice even when no actor can command the system?

Recent experience provides three useful answers.

First, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership survived the United States' withdrawal from its predecessor. The remaining members preserved high-standard rules, brought the agreement into force, and later admitted the United Kingdom. The result is not a replacement for the global trading system. It is something more practical: a functioning arrangement that creates benefits for members and opportunity costs for outsiders.

Second, when the World Trade Organization (WTO) Appellate Body became unable to hear appeals, a group of WTO members initiated the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement. More than 60 WTO members now participate, and the mechanism has produced actual arbitration outcomes. It is an imperfect bridge, but it demonstrates that institutional function need not wait for unanimity.

Third, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) binds 15 politically diverse economies representing roughly 30 percent of global output and population. RCEP is less ambitious than the CPTPP in several areas, but that is partly the point. ASEAN's central role and the agreement's differentiated obligations made cooperation possible among

states that would not accept a single power's blueprint.
These cases suggest three design principles for a G-minus world.
The first is modularity. The next order will not be one grand covenant. It will be a set of independent but connectable modules: digital trade, critical minerals, carbon accounting, AI governance, dispute settlement, supply chain resilience, financial transparency, maritime safety, and public health. Each module must be useful on its own and more valuable when linked to others.
The second is differentiated participation. Institutions should abandon the fiction that every participant must assume identical obligations at the same speed. A state may be a core member in digital trade, a partial participant in supply chain cooperation, and an observer in security discussions. Graduated participation is not institutional weakness. It is how diverse states enter cooperation without surrendering all autonomy at once.
The third is visible benefit. Cooperation fails when costs are immediate and gains are abstract. Good institutional design front-loads practical value: faster customs treatment, mutual certification, shared stockpiles, access to trusted markets, lower financing costs, usable dispute resolution, and credible insurance against disruption. The institution becomes durable when governments can show that participation pays.
This also clarifies what democratic multilateralism should mean. Democracies do not have a monopoly on benefits to participation, and non-democracies offer genuine incentives to engagement: infrastructure finance, energy, market access, security assistance, and diplomatic protection. An incentive is not a bribe; it is what economists model as self-interest. The difference should lie in structure. Patron-client incentives are discretionary and asymmetric. An incentive-based democratic institution should be rules-based, reciprocal, transparent, contestable, and open to additional participants that willingly agree to abide by those rules.
The goal is not to restore liberal internationalism at its imagined peak. That order was never as universal or benign as its defenders remember. A more realistic objective is a multilateral-enough world: enough rules that disputes do not default to coercion; enough openness that smaller economies can reach scale; enough redundancy that one institution's paralysis does not become system-wide failure; and enough predictability that governments and firms can plan.
Waiting for Washington to return to a leadership role and waiting for Beijing to become responsible are mirror versions of the same mistake: both entrust order to power. In a G-minus world, great power companionship and permission are optional. Small states and middle powers cannot replace hegemony, but they can build around its absence. The task is to stop asking who will rule the international system and instead start designing a system that states will choose to remain in.
This essay is one of four to emerge from discussions at an international conference jointly organized by the Seoul Forum for International Affairs and the Hairan Series of Korea University's Institute for Interdisciplinary Unification Studies, "Democratic Multilateralism at the Edge," held in Seoul on April 20, 2026.

DETAILS

Business indexing term:	Subject: Supply chains Costs Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
Subject:	Supply chains; Hegemony; Costs; Cooperation; Democracy; Participation; Multilateralism; Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
Location:	China; United States--US
Company / organization:	Name: World Trade Organization; NAICS: 928120
Publication title:	The Diplomat; Tokyo
Publication year:	2026

Publication date:	Jul 30, 2026
Publisher:	Tribune Content Agency LLC
Place of publication:	Tokyo
Country of publication:	United States
Publication subject:	Asian Studies, Political Science
ISSN:	1446697X
Source type:	Magazine
Language of publication:	Engli sh
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	3370295588
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/magazines/redesigning-international-order-g-minus-world/docview/3370295588/se-2?accountid=14558
Copyright:	Copyright 2026 - The Diplomat; distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC
Last updated:	2026-07-31
Database:	ProQuest Central Premium Korea

LINKS

Linking Service

How South Korea Can Survive the Unbundling of International Order

Shin-wha, Lee . Shin-wha, Lee.

FULL TEXT

For most of the post-war era, power, legitimacy, and cooperation reinforced one another. American leadership underwrote security, open markets, and freedom of navigation. Democratic partnerships generated political trust. Universal institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the nuclear nonproliferation regime provided common rules and legal legitimacy. Though imperfect, these three pillars generally worked in concert.

That alignment has broken down. Security, economic governance, political legitimacy, and practical cooperation are no longer occurring in the same institutions or even among the same groups of states. I call this structural transformation the “unbundling of order.” The result is disalignment, a condition in which power, legitimacy, and cooperation no longer reinforce one another.

Analysts today often ask whether the liberal international order is collapsing or which great power will replace the United States. The real question is whether the essential functions of the international order can be reconnected under increasingly fragmented geopolitical conditions.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine exposed the inability of existing institutions like the United Nations to prevent or halt great power aggression. The ongoing conflict between the United States and Iran demonstrated that military superiority alone cannot ensure regional stability or the credibility of the global nonproliferation regime. Competition – especially, but not exclusively between China and the United States – over semiconductors, artificial intelligence, critical minerals, and maritime supply chains blurs the traditional boundary between economics and security.

Cooperation is increasingly necessary, but the most inclusive institutions are often the least capable of collective action. This paradox has driven the rise of minilateralism. Smaller groups of like-minded partners can coordinate quickly, protect sensitive technologies, strengthen supply chain resilience, and respond effectively to shared threats. But while minilateral coalitions can act quickly, they lack broad legitimacy. Meanwhile, universal institutions provide legal authority and political inclusion but often struggle to act.

Neither is sufficient alone. Democratic multilateralism must combine legitimacy with operational capacity.

This is why democracy itself retains strategic importance. Democratic multilateralism is more than cooperation among states with shared political values. It provides a foundation for institutional trust. Intelligence sharing, advanced technology cooperation, defense industrial integration, financial coordination, and resilient supply chains all depend on confidence that partners will safeguard sensitive information, uphold long-term commitments, and remain accountable despite changes in government. Democratic governments may disagree, yet transparent institutions and political accountability make sustained strategic cooperation more credible.

South Korea stands at the intersection of today’s defining strategic challenges: nuclear deterrence, China-U.S. competition, technological rivalry, supply chain resilience, and democratic cooperation. Its security depends on the alliance with the United States, its prosperity on an open global economy, and its future competitiveness on reliable technology networks. Few countries are therefore more exposed to the unbundling of order or better positioned to shape what follows.

Seoul must continue to diversify its partnerships, but diversification alone is not a strategy. It needs an organizing logic that connects its alliances, partnerships, markets, and institutions. It must determine which functions remain anchored in the U.S. alliance, which require broader networks, and how smaller, function-specific coalitions can be linked to or nested within broader regional and global institutions.

For South Korea, deterrence will continue to depend primarily on the U.S. alliance. Technological resilience requires secure networks for protecting sensitive knowledge and coordinating investment. Economic security depends on diversified markets, suppliers, and production chains. Wider institutions remain essential for common rules, political inclusion, and international acceptance. The task is to make these different frameworks, each built for different purposes, mutually reinforcing.

South Korea should therefore seek not simply to balance among great powers, but to develop connective power: the capacity to align security commitments, economic partnerships, technological networks, and multilateral institutions around compatible purposes. This is a distinctive source of middle power influence. It rests not only on institutional access, but on a reputation for reliability, effective brokerage, and contributions to regional and global public goods. States with that standing can bridge alliances, functional coalitions, and wider institutions, and thereby shape the terms of cooperation.

The post-war order cannot simply be restored because the architecture that sustained it has already changed. But that doesn't mean the world is doomed to a fate of closed and competing blocs. Instead, the more plausible alternative is not a singular order but several layered and overlapping ones. States will pursue national interests through different arrangements while cooperating where regional stability and global public goods require collective action. The most indispensable states will not necessarily dominate every arena, but will make cooperation across arenas possible.

For South Korea, bridging these system is a national imperative. Its security, prosperity, technological competitiveness, and diplomatic autonomy depend on its ability to operate across multiple institutional systems.

This essay is one of four to emerge from discussions at an international conference jointly organized by the Seoul Forum for International Affairs and the Hairan Series of Korea University's Institute for Interdisciplinary Unification Studies, "Democratic Multilateralism at the Edge," held in Seoul on April 20, 2026.

DETAILS

Business indexing term:	Subject: Supply chains; Industry: 92812 : International Affairs
Subject:	Supply chains; Collective action; Legitimacy; Cooperation; Multilateralism; Maritime law; Alliances
Location:	China; United States--US; South Korea
Company / organization:	Name: United Nations--U N; NAICS: 928120
Publication title:	The Diplomat; Tokyo
Publication year:	2026
Publication date:	Aug 6, 2026
Publisher:	Tribune Content Agency LLC
Place of publication:	Tokyo
Country of publication:	United States
Publication subject:	Asian Studies, Political Science
ISSN:	1446697X

Source type:	Magazine
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	3372081467
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/magazines/how-south-korea-can-survive-unbundling/docview/3372081467/se-2?accountid=14558
Copyright:	Copyright 2026 - The Diplomat; distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC
Last updated:	2026-08-06
Database:	ProQuest Central Premium Korea

LINKS

Linking Service