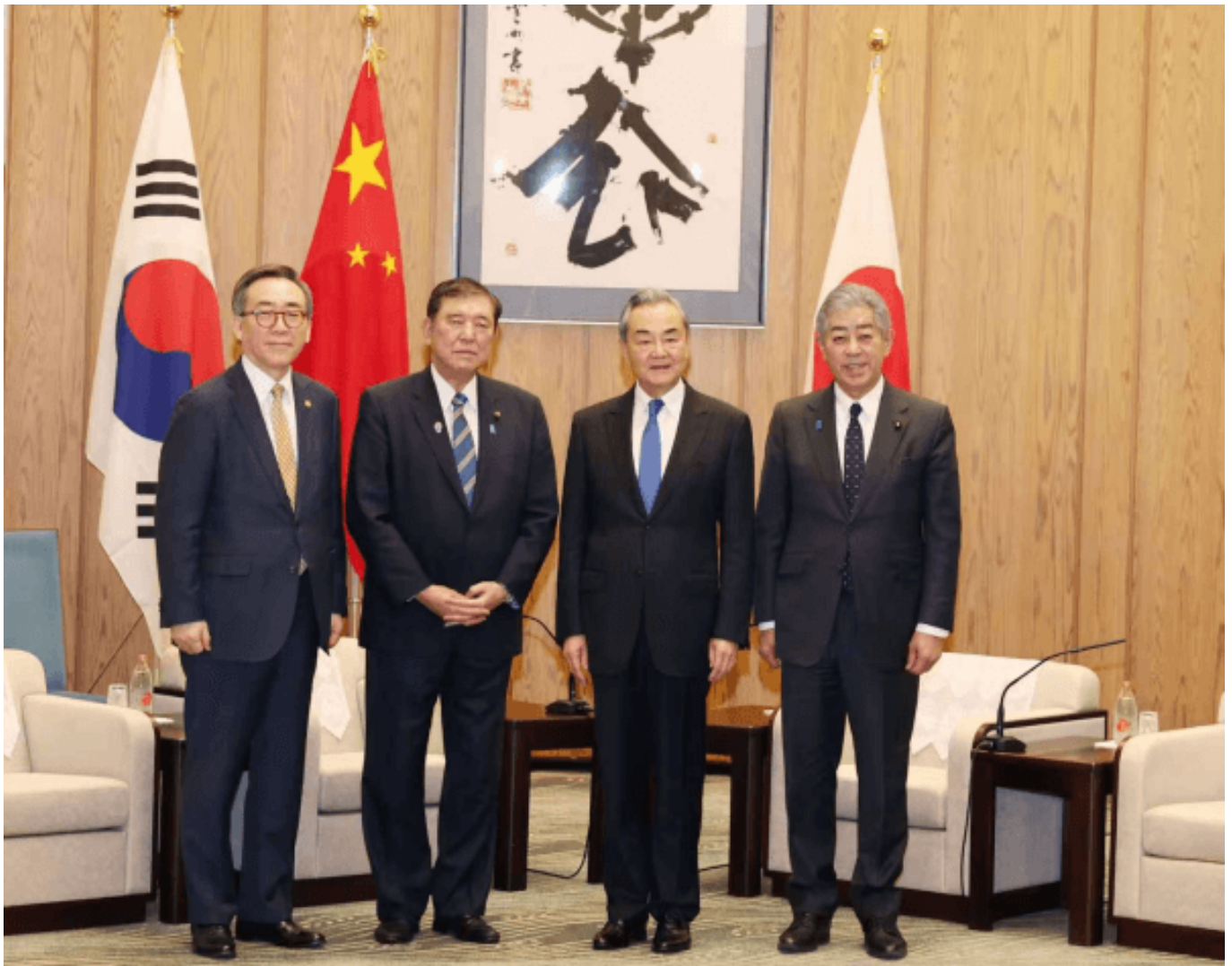




By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

China or the alliance between Japan and South Korea—who will take control of the region?



The geopolitical landscape of East Asia is changing drastically, and the recent **meeting** of the foreign ministers of Japan, China, and South Korea in Tokyo marks the moment when the region will have to choose between two opposing visions of the future.

As global uncertainty grows due to the withdrawal of American influence under President Donald Trump, China is seizing the opportunity to build a new East Asian power architecture in which it would be the dominant player.

Takeshi Iwaya, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, highlighted that the world is currently experiencing "a turning point in history".

The troika that is now in negotiations controls an economy **worth** more than USD 24 trillion and a population of almost 1.6 billion people. Such potential cannot go untapped while the US re-evaluates its long-standing alliances and presence in Asia.

China's dominance strategy—economy as a weapon

China is making it clear that it wants to strengthen its regional influence through economic levers such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (**RCEP**), the free trade zone of 15 Asia-Pacific economies.

Beijing is seeking to broaden the impact of this trade agreement by offering attractive trade deals to Japan and South Korea as an alternative to an uncertain alliance with the United States.

However, China's strategy is not only economic but also political and security in nature. Beijing is seeking to integrate Tokyo and Seoul into a broader economic platform in which Chinese influence plays a central role, marginalising the US presence in the region.

But, China's policies towards Taiwan, its

support for North Korea, and its alliance with Russia during the war in Ukraine are serious obstacles to a lasting alliance with Japan and South Korea.

If Beijing is unable to reconcile its expansionist policies with the need to create sustainable partnerships, it will weaken its influence in East Asia in the long term

If China succeeds in asserting its economic dominance, the next step will be to enforce its security conditions in the region. Beijing realises that military engagement is not necessary if it succeeds in integrating its economic interests into its political relations with Japan and South Korea.

In this way, China would become the main guarantor of stability in East Asia, which would inevitably mean greater political influence on the internal decisions of these countries.

However, China's strategy also has considerable weaknesses. The attempts to create a monopolistic economic influence through the RCEP could face serious resistance from other Asian countries such as India and Vietnam, which do not want to be completely dependent on the Chinese market.

Growing economic protectionism in China itself could also have a negative impact on the country's ability to maintain the attractiveness of its offers to foreign investors.

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Japan and South Korea—counterweight to China?

Although Japan and South Korea share concerns about China's plans, their reactions

to this crisis are not always coordinated. While Tokyo and Seoul still formally **maintain** close relations with the United States, growing economic pressure and the withdrawal of the Americans from key security positions are forcing them to consider more independent strategies.

Japan has already emerged as a major player in the regional response to Chinese expansion, while South Korea is trying to balance its economic interests with its security needs.

Recent attempts to resume economic talks with China are evidence of Tokyo's attempt to provide stability at a time when US policy is no longer reliable.

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If the trend of distancing from Washington continues, Japan and South Korea will be forced to further develop their own security mechanisms. This includes the accelerated strengthening of defence capabilities; investments in modern military technologies; and the possible formation of a bilateral military pact with or without formal US participation.

Such a scenario would completely redefine the security architecture of East Asia and give Japan and South Korea an independent power that they have not had for decades.

It would also mean the development of technological alliances with Western countries, particularly in the areas of cybersecurity and artificial intelligence, in which Tokyo and Seoul want to become global leaders.

If Washington does not provide adequate support, these two countries will divert their investments and technologies to Europe, Canada, and Australia, and America will lose one of the most important technological

collaborations in the world.

American influence on the brink of survival

US policy towards East Asia increasingly resembles a strategy of retreat and regrouping rather than actively countering the rise of China. Under President Donald Trump, the United States is forcing allies, such as Japan and South Korea, to bear the costs of their own defence while losing economic and political influence in the region.

Trump's withdrawal policy not only undermines existing alliances but also contributes to the growing disharmony between Washington's military and economic interests.



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If the isolationist approach continues, America could face internal political pressures that require it to redefine its global priorities.

If Asia permanently disappears from the American sphere of influence, this could have catastrophic consequences for US interests in Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America.

This strategy creates a power vacuum, which China is skilfully exploiting. While Washington is pursuing a policy of retreat, Beijing is demonstrating its ability to assert its power through soft methods—trade, investment, and technological cooperation.

If the Trump administration does not recognise the gravity of the situation, the United States will soon lose not only its influence in East Asia but also its global dominance.

Thus, if Beijing succeeds in effectively engaging Japan and South Korea in the expanded RCEP framework, China will assume a leading role in the regional security architecture by the end of the decade.

At the same time, if Japan and South Korea strengthen their bilateral military cooperation, a powerful defence bloc could emerge to counter China's dominance. The United States risks losing its influence in the region completely, which could trigger a series of political and economic crises in America itself.