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# Are They Part Of “Us” Or The “Other”?

A Discourse analysis examining how the U.S. perceives itself in East Asia region in relation to the disputes between two important allies: Japan and South Korea.

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## **Abstract**

With the trilateral meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, and South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol in August 2023, a new chapter of cooperation between the three seems to be coming closer, with new possibilities of laying bilateral issues between Japan and South Korea to rest. But how does the U.S. perceive its allies? This essay analyses the discursive identities constructed in U.S. official foreign policy discourse on Japan and South Korea in relation to their bilateral disputes. In order to create a deeper understanding of U.S. self-perception, and to gain insight into how identities are created with regard to bilateral disputes built on a long history of animosity. This essay takes on a poststructural discourse analysis building on Lene Hansens (2006), understanding identity as relationally constituted, constructed through discourse. This essay analyses how discourse has been constructed through a spatial, temporal, and ethical lens from the first Obama administration (2009) to the current Biden administration to uncover if there are any dominant discourses that are stable over time, or if they change more or less with every president. The analysis finds that there is a dominant discourse that can be seen through all the presidencies constructing South Korea and Japan as close to the core, building on shared values, democracy, the rule of law and strife for peace and prosperity. A more implicit discourse becoming clearer through every presidency is the friction between the U.S. and its ally's inability of moving beyond their bilateral disputes, a discourse building on the perception of lack of maturity and commitment to the greater good.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Discourse analysis

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## U.S., Japan, and South Korean relations

On August 18, 2023, U.S. President Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, and South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol met at Camp David for the first standalone trilateral meeting between these countries in over two decades. It has been described as a historic meeting, bringing these two American allies together to look forward. To reaffirm their strong ties and place as leaders in the international community, working together side by side for a better future for all (Depetris, 2023).

This trilateral meeting comes in a period when relations between these two American allies are particularly icy. With the legacy of colonisation, relations are not always easy, and wounds from the past often flare up and spill over into other aspects of their relationship. While relations between these two countries were formally normalised in 1965, in recent years, there have been multiple flareups between these countries concerning forced labour issues, comfort women (sex slaves), territorial disputes, the name of the body of water that separates them and so on. This has, in tense moments, spilled over into disturbing their cooperation on the denuclearisation of North Korea and disrupted trade through export controls. Attempts to reconcile these two countries have mostly been future-oriented, focusing on economic cooperation and security interests. These spillovers have affected not only them but also the U.S. in its position in the region (USIP, 2022).

Japan and South Korea are understood as two of America's closest and most important allies in the region, as fellow democratic countries working against injustice, insecurity, and oppression. They are the cornerstones of peace and security (Nilsson-Wright, 2023) and assure continued American influence in the region (Stangarone, 2023). The U.S. involvement in the region has been described as significant ever since the mid-nineteenth century, first through trade and then through their military presence. However, its influence is broadly understood today as threatened by a growing China and an aggressive North Korea. American reengagement was made a new top priority when the Obama administration took office in early 2009. Where a pivot to Asia was made because of its perceived growing importance on the world scene. This pivot was encouraged during both of his terms and meant greater engagement with long-standing allies. While the "Pivot to Asia" was meant to reinforce its commitment to its allies and assure them, it has been criticised for not implementing enough resources, more bark than bite (Chang, 2020). The following administration took another turn and built their strategy on the idea of America first. The Trump administration took a harder stance on China and engaged more freely with North Korea. This was perceived by many spectators as giving legitimacy to the North Korean regime and worried its closest allies. The Biden administration can be understood as repivoting to the region and continuing where the last Obama administration left off (Nilsson-Wright, 2023). While all three presidents can be understood as seeing the region as important, their approaches have mainly been described as different, especially the Trump administration, as

being unorthodox and radically different from the more traditional engagement with the region and long-standing allies.

To come from a poststructural perspective is to think about and investigate the underlying power dynamics that shape the room within which actors, states, nations, individuals, can act and how some things come to be seen as valid or obvious. We need to look at what seems to be normal, what is hidden behind the facade (Hansen, 2006). In this essay, we turn to investigate how the U.S. creates its own identity in relation to Japan and South Korea in the context of their bilateral disputes. The U.S. is understood as the global hegemon; some scholars may disagree on this and start talking about regional hegemons. However, the point I want to make is that the U.S. is almost always seen as the superpower, a lighthouse for democracy, sovereignty, and the liberal order (Mead, 2001; Hunt, 1987; Hadley, 2017). It is understood to fight against all that is evil. And most importantly for this essay, the mediator between South Korea and Japan. Therefore, this essay seeks to uncover what is not apparent at first glance, to question the ideas that are perceived as true in order to understand how the U.S. position itself in relation to Japan and South Korea. The importance of this inquiry comes from the need to understand how the U.S. perceives itself in relation to two close allies, if we assume an already pre-discursive understanding of American identity, we cannot understand how the U.S. interacts and acts with these countries and therefore lack understanding in how some things are possible, and others are not.

### Purpose and research question

The aim of the essay is to examine how the U.S. discursively constructs its identity vis-à-vis South Korea and Japan in relation to their bilateral disputes, to explore the dynamics of identity construction and provide a deeper understanding of how the U.S. views itself and its allies in a changing global order. When studying discourses on the relationship between Japan and South Korea in U.S. foreign policy, we are given the front row to an array of complex ideas about how the U.S. thinks of itself (Pan, 2012).

- Which (USA) “selves” and (South Korea & Japan) “others” are constituted in the United States of Americas foreign policy discourse on South Korea and Japan in relation to their bilateral disputes from the first Obama administration till today?
  1. How radical is the difference between the self and other?
  2. How is difference composed through the articulation of spatial, temporal, and ethical identity?
  3. Are there any differences between the administrations?

## Literature review

### The state, identity, discourse and FPA

Foreign policy analysis, like other sub-disciplines in I.R., is multifaceted and has both more traditional and critical perspectives and modes of analysis. The traditional understanding of foreign policy analysis is greatly concerned with the Why-question. This means that the researcher seeks to explain why a particular decision was made and why the outcome was what it was. This is, according to Doty (1993), problematic because it presupposes a specific mode of being, a particular subjectivity, and takes the possibility of a particular decision or course of action to happen unproblematically. It is concerned with the conduct and practises between different actors, the primary being the state, in the international system. At the core, there is a preoccupation with the investigation into the individual decision-makers, decision-making, the outcome of these decisions and the processes and conditions that affect foreign policy (Alden & Aran, 2012).

A traditional understanding of the state and security sees international politics as different from national politics in that international politics is subjected to anarchy, where there is no higher authority. This places states in a security dilemma, where the goal of the state is to ensure its survival. It is thus the goal for states to protect their decision-making authority, and territorial control from other states. States are understood as rational actors that assess situations from an objective stance, e.g. cost-benefit analysis where the state has all the necessary information for making decisions. Therefore, states must assess power relations to determine their interests (Cox & Stokes, 2012). Every state must pursue their national interests, which are understood in terms of power. Interests are treated as exogenous and predetermined. The state is thus one entity with one goal, and that is survival. This means that security and insecurity are something that a state experiences not in relation to other things but prediscursively. That threat is determined by material factors. In contrast to this, Campbell (1998) focuses on how inscribing foreignness others creates identity, and how foreign policy works to (re)produce it. This is by differentiating itself from those it saw as threatening (Coulson, 2023). Campbell (1998) understood U.S. policy as a practice central to upholding and producing U.S. political identity as well as its discursive productions of others. How the U.S. views and describes other parts of the world is thus a practice of interpretation. It is dependent on how the U.S. perceives itself and its role toward other actors (Campbell, 1998). It is thus a practice of interpretation that decides how other countries are perceived, contingent on how the U.S. understands itself and its role towards others. This can be understood through Judith Butler's (1993) concept of "performance", it is only through performances that identity comes into being. Further, according to Hansen (2006), foreign policy does not exist without identity; they are conceptually inseparable, and it is this inseparability that is reenacted through discourse. It can also be said of foreign policy that it does not exist independently of identity discourses.

More broadly, there has been a considerable amount of research focusing on identity in international relations. However, despite poststructural and constructivist dispersion and the ignited interest in identity, critique is still loud. Complaints about identities' fuzziness, vague-ness, and slippery-ness (Chafetz et al., 1998; Kowert, 1998) and, as Hagström (2015) explained, the allegations made by some scholars of its 'definitional anarchy' (Abdelal et al., 2006). What Hagström (2015) notes is also that the use of identity is not a new phenomenon, and instead that more orthodox strands of I.R., e.g. the realist school, that even though it does not allow for much difference between states, does attribute some states the title of superpower, great power identities while others are middle powers or small powers.

Turning to U.S. foreign policy, this body of literature is often concerned with one of three debates: between the international system and domestic institutions, national interests, and ideology, and lastly, the role of the individual decision-maker. At the beginning of the century, there was much emphasis on bringing the individual decision maker back into the analysis (Byman & Pollack, 2001) as well as a renaissance of the study of the background of leaders to understand their approach to foreign policy (Jervis, 2001; Nye, 2013; Saunders, 2017). According to Drezner (2020), the primary aim of such inquiry has been to see if traits such as gender, prior military experience, pathway to power, influence their behaviour (e.g. Dafoe & Caughey, 2016). With the election of Donald Trump, this research program has been supercharged. Trump, understood as an unorthodox president, provides an experiment where a variety of questions about American politics and foreign policy can be assessed (Nye, 2019). Drezner (2020) argues that while it is important to look at the president, to understand, we must look at the president's psychology in relation to institutional forces that were established before him. Other scholars look at the differences and commonalities between American presidents and the room of action in different policy actions (e.g. Skidmore, 2005).

Moreover, there has been an extensive engagement with analysis of the American role in East Asia more specifically. Rahawestri (2010) highlights the continuity of American foreign policy toward Asia from the Bush administration to the Obama administration. Cho (2012) states that the Obama administration drastically set itself apart from its predecessors by, e.g., renouncing the freedom agenda. Despite this, however, Cho (2012) notes that Obama shares Bush's conviction that democratic allies in East Asia are the most critical partners in the region. Heginbotham and Samuels (2021) further look at how Japan and South Korea have reacted in relation to the Trump administration's America-first policy to the Biden Indo-Pacific strategy. At the same time, other scholars such as Huyng (2023) have investigated how South Korea has responded to America's Indo-Pacific strategy from Trump to Biden. Others have focused on how U.S. foreign policy in the region is implicated by South Korean-China relations (Lee, 2020). There is a vast amount of scholarly work that looks at several aspects of U.S. foreign policy in relation to the region as a whole, looking at differences between presidents (e.g. Limaye 2022), but mostly the continuity of American foreign policy. What this body of literature needs to look at, even though there are some articles focusing on identity, is

precisely how the identity of the U.S. is created in relation to a specific ally. There are many articles that emphasise mainly China but also North Korea as different and potential threats to U.S. influence and existence. This is, however, done from a more traditional IR perspective, looking at the U.S. as a balancer or understanding trade as an assurance for stability. Research has been done on the dynamic between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, for example, by Cha (1999), Park (2011), and Rozman (2022).

## Theoretical framework and Methodology

This section builds on Campbell's (1998) and Hansen's (2006) discussions and understandings of language, identity, foreign policy, and the state. The section begins by introducing language as both social and political; then it goes on to look at how language is understood as simultaneously having a structured and collective nature. This section is concerned both with the theory and method of this essay. These two sections have been merged because the framework used sees these as intimately intertwined with each other.

The ontological understanding of poststructuralism is deeply intertwined with language and how humans, through its use, produce meaning. Language is responsible for what is brought into being. Hansen (2006) explains that language is both social and political. Language is understood as an inherently unstable system of signs, which generates meaning through the simultaneous construction of identity and difference. In contrast to the structural understanding of language, a transparent tool used to register data, it is understood as a practice. Hence, there is no objective truth or proper meaning of language (Shapiro, 1981). Language is thus understood as a series of collective systems of understanding that individuals need to make themselves understandable to others (Hansen, 2006, p.18). According to Hansen (2006), the social character of language suggests that there is a socialisation of individuals into how particular objects are given sounds and further into a broader set of political discourses. The political aspect of language is understood as a place where particular subjectivities and identities are (re)produced simultaneously as others are discarded and excluded (Hansen, 2006). An example of this is the way that women and their political identity have been constructed and made radically different from men's. How the construction of women as motherly, emotional, and unable to participate and comprehend complex political and financial questions (Pateman, 1983) was held as an objective report of the female character through language and not as a particular construction of identity (Hansen, 2006). According to Hansen (2006), this was reproduced through linguistic practises and continuously reproduced the male norm and privileged political position.

Language as having a structured and collective nature can be understood through Foucault's (1974) articulation of a discursive formation, a system of dispersion which forms regularity. According to Derrida (1976), meaning is created through juxtaposition, where one element is regarded higher than

its opposite and not by the essence of the thing itself. Following, language is argued to be a system of differential signs (Derrida, 1976). Identity can and should, therefore, be understood in relational terms. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) understand identity as being constructed along two dimensions; being different from and inferior to the privileged sign. They argue that identity should be understood as particularly structured as well as fundamentally unstable at the same time. Therefore, discourses seek to fix the meaning of a particular structure. This aspect of language, as simultaneously structured and fluid, alludes to the strife of discourses to construct stability. However, this also means that there will always be slips and a lack of stability in any dominant discourse. Identity is created through the process of differentiation and linking. This means that dominant discourses can be challenged or changed; a negative sign might be constructed as positive or being constructed as positive in another discourse. This thus makes the clear distinction between the positive and negative sign more complicated (Hansen, 2006).

The importance of political agency, the reproduction of discourse and the identities produced within them becomes apparent with the inherent instability of language in mind (Foucault, 1977). Policy discourses construct both the problems, objects, and subjects simultaneously as they create the policies to address these problems (Shapiro, 1988). Therefore, the creation of identity is understood as a political practice, while policies are seen as different directions for action. At the centre of the poststructural research agenda is the relationship between identity and foreign policy, Hansen (2006) explains; "Foreign policy relies upon representations of identity, but it is also through the formulation of foreign policy that identities are produced and reproduced (Hansen, 2006, p. 1)." This can, further, be understood as a concept of performativity as articulated by Butler (1993). It is through performance that identity becomes. There are, therefore, no preexisting identities in a pre-discursive realm out there, but rather, identities are produced and reproduced through performance (Campbell, 1998). With this understanding, Campbell (1998) emphasises that states have no ontological essence; the state is only created through the practises that constitute them. Therefore, danger is not an external condition. We cannot avoid danger and seek to transcend it; it is part of all our relationships with the world and can be experienced as both positive and negative.

In his book *Writing Security*, Campbell (1998) focuses on the creation of identity in relation to a radical other. He does not, however, close the door to the possibility of identity being constructed against more nuanced "others." Hansen (2006) argues that there are other ways in which identity is created through differentiation, which draws on more ambiguous constructions of difference. Examples of this are the construction of the Baltic Sea region that previously constituted a group of disjoined states, a Nordic identity (Norwegian, Sweden and Denmark), as well as the articulation of identities that are simultaneously superior and identical to the self. This more fluid and complex creation of identity through differentiation, Hansen (2006) explains, can be understood as "how the

other is situated within a web of identities rather than in a simple Self-Other dichotomy (Hansen, 2006, p. 40-1)."

In this essay, it is argued that identity and the self are not presocial and, therefore, do not exist outside the interactions with other entities (imagined or real). Important to note with the departure from Campbell and Hansen is the understanding of the "self" and "other" not as predetermined or static. Which also means that there are different nuances of otherness. Campbell shows the importance of the other in identity creation, and Hansen builds on this idea and moves beyond the simple self-other dynamic, which is the starting point of the theoretical understanding of identity in this essay. To understand the relationship between the U.S. and its allies Japan and South Korea, it needs to be understood as potentially both self and other.

### How do we read identity?

Based on the former section of the essay - the understanding of poststructuralist ontological assumptions, language as both political and social, and the importance of linking and differentiation – this section goes on to look at three analytical lenses as well as formulate the research design of this essay. The main starting point for a discursive analysis is to examine explicit articulations of identity and to identify signs used to construct "self" and "other" through the process of linking and differentiation (Hansen, 2006, p.38).

### Spatial, Temporal, and Ethical Identity

The second tool needed to read identity, in addition to the understanding of linking and differentiation, is an analytical lens. Hansen (2006) formulated three such lenses; spatial, temporal and identity, which reflect the boundaries of space, time, and responsibility. These lenses provide a dynamic way of identifying and highlighting the “political substance” of identity construction (Hansen, 2006, pp. 46-47). These concepts are rarely used explicitly in discourses. Instead, they are elements implicitly articulated in the construction of identity and are methodologically identified through the process of linking and differentiation. It is important to note, as Hansen (2006) does, that these are not signs, and there is no hierarchy between the three.

Understanding identity as spatially constructed means understanding it as creating boundaries and the delineation of space. Historically, in foreign policy discourse, this delineation has centred on the nation-state. Spatial identity can be understood when referencing to other countries, e.g. “South Korea” and “Japan,” but it is not limited to this privilege granted to national security discourse. Spatial identity can also be articulated “as abstract political space, boundaries, and subjectivities (Hansen, 2006. p.42).” It is possible to find discourses that develop around political structures such as “Savages,” “humanity,” “the people,” “the international community,” “women” and “civilisation.” Spatial identities are often constructed as a mixture of the abstract political and territorially bounded. This form of identity can also be articulated to conceptions of universal discourses such as

“international community,” “universal human rights”; these conceptualise boundless political subjects. However, it is always discursively mobilised in relation to a set of identities. Politics is then formulated to act against violations of these rights (Hansen, 2006, p. 43). Difference is constituted between the self that has adopted these values and those who have not. This creates both spatial and temporal identities.

Secondly, we have *Temporal* identities. This lens refers to the construction of identity with themes of development, continuity, or change where the temporal identity of the other can be constructed as either temporally different or similar to the self (Hansen, 2006, p. 43). This tells us if the other is something to be achieved and an object to be emulated in the pursuit of progress or prosperity, or is it articulated as less temporally developed? Identity does not have to be constructed against an external “other” but can also be constructed against the “other” of its own past. This is usually done within the process of distinguishing and building the “self” through continued refinement.

Lastly, turning to *Ethical* identities, and thus othering, refers to how identity is constructed around themes of responsibility and morality. When, for example, international responsibility is explicitly enunciated in discourse, it signifies a strong discursive move because it places the issue “within the higher ground of the morally good (Hansen, 2006, p. 50),” simultaneously as it forms identities of temporality and spatiality of those involved.

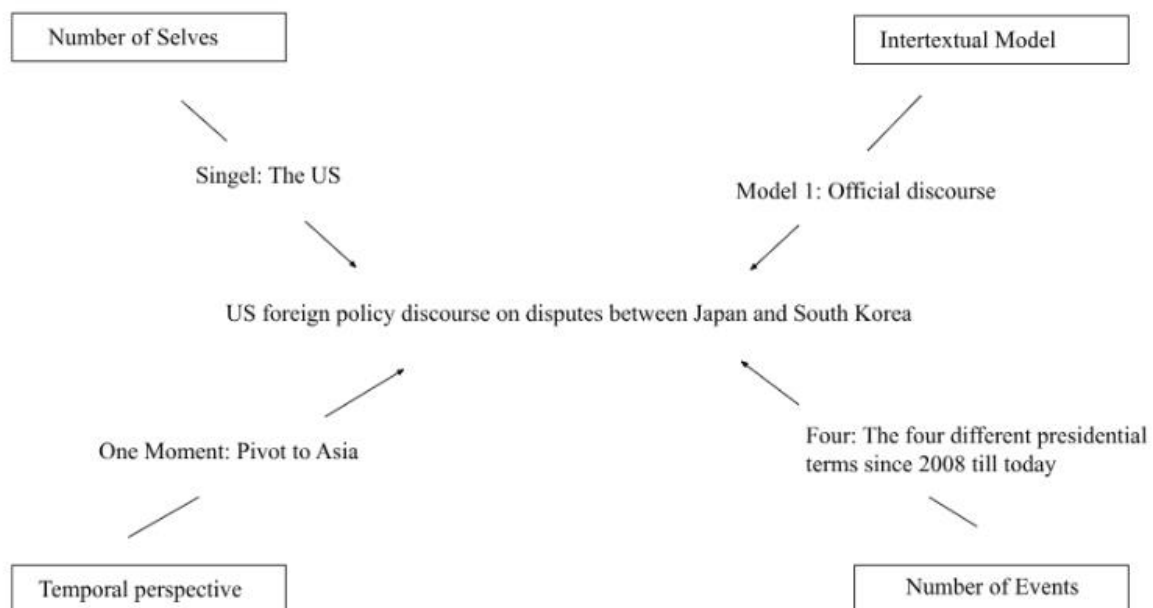
## Research Design

Following the theoretical and methodological framework, this section continues the essay by presenting how these will be applied to develop a research design. It explores models of analytical focus, the number of moments, Selves, and foreign policy events to examine.

Hansen (2006) developed three intertextual models that are structured around foreign policy discourse. They are locations to study political debate. The first model, Model 1, focuses on official foreign policy discourse. The object of study is thus political leaders who have formal authority to make statements about the country's foreign policy. Secondly, model 2 includes oppositional discourses, and models 3A and 3B add popular culture and marginalised discourses. This essay will apply Model 1, official discourse, as its analytical focus. In this study, the three presidents in office from 2008 to today, Obama, Trump, and Biden, are chosen as actors considered to have formal authority in articulating U.S. discourse on its two allies, Japan, and South Korea. In addition to this, official statements made by respective administrations as well as key individuals are also understood as having the authority to influence and shape the official discourse.

Complementing the location of political debate, this research design also tackles the choices of the number of “selves”, temporal perspective, and the number of events to be included. Starting with the number of selves, this question concerns a choice of how many states, organisations or nations are to

be analysed. This essay will focus on one “self,” the United States of America and the articulation of its foreign policy discourse. This can be interpreted as less interesting or ambitious in comparison to a multi-self-study; however, as Hansen (2006) explains, one "self" does not equal 'single'. Hansen (2006) clarifies that discourses of the self are never complete; they are in a process of trying to stabilise the self-identity. Continuing with the question about the temporal perspective, which moment is to be analysed? This essay will focus on one moment that is subdivided into four events. The moment that is identified is the turn to Asia with the first Obama administration and the perceived distance from 9/11 and the war on terror. Even though there is still much emphasis given to the war on terror, we have departed from the direct aftermath, and there is a shift from full engagement in the Middle East to slightly less engagement. This moment is further divided into four moments: the first and second Obama administrations, the Trump administration, and the Biden administration. These moments have been chosen because they are all relevant in the context of the pivot to Asia, and all four presidencies had to consider the bilateral relationship between Japan and South Korea. Put together these dimensions produce the following research design used in this study:



*Figure 1 Research design of the U.S. foreign policy discourse on bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea, inspired by Hansen (2006, p.75).*

## Material

Hansen (2006) suggests that the chosen texts should have: firstly, a clear articulation of identity; secondly, it should be widely read and attended by the public, other governments, or other politicians; thirdly, the texts chosen should have formal authority to define political positions. The selection of the material was first based on a reading of Hansen (2006) to understand what kind of material is suited to an official discourse analysis. She explains that the texts in official discourses that are given

epistemological and methodological priority are, among others, presidential statements, speeches, and interviews.

The empirical material underlying the analysis in this essay is comprised of four official national security strategies, one from the three first presidencies and from the Biden administration the Indo-Pacific strategy was used instead. In addition to this underlying material - that provides a basic understanding of U.S. representation of itself, the region, and its radical others - speeches, statements and interviews are used to gain further insight into the specific area of interest in this study. This material is taken from the official website of each presidency; the only exception is one quote taken from a news article because the official statement could not be found. The text chosen and read are summarised in the table below:

Presidential term	Number of texts
Obama Administration 2009-2013	9
Obama Administration 2013-2017	18
Trump Administration 2017-2021	12
Biden Administration 2021- ongoing	8

*Tabel 1 Text Selection*

Given the limits of this essay and the vast amount of potential material the selection favoured texts that concerned specifically disputes between Japan and Korea, US-Japan relations, US-ROK relations, and US-Japan-ROK relations. With the search filters of “Comfort women,” “History question,” “History issue,” “ROK,” “Seoul,” “Tokyo,” “Japan,” and “Yasukuni shrine.” These were combined in different constellations to get as many relevant results as possible. A challenge in the selection of material was both the vast amount that was provided (most of it not relevant) and that some of the search engines did not accept groupings of search words. To solve the problem of finding material in the sea of official statements, which are relevant to the research problem and question, two strategies were used. Firstly, looking at when there were flare-ups between Japan and South Korea, using media outlets, it was easier to find a narrow timeframe to find statements and interviews, from the U.S. side. Secondly, YouTube and the official YouTube channels of each presidency were used to find relevant speeches where references to the official transcripts were available. However, some texts were excluded from the analysis based on their lack of identity construction. Another means of selection was based on the possibility within the restrictions of this essay to make room for them. These were, despite this, integral in paving the way for understanding the bigger picture.

### Demarcations

This essay is not all-encompassing and is limited in the sense that there is neither enough room within the word limit nor in the context of time to take a broader and deeper approach to the research question. The paper will limit itself to four presidential terms, starting with the first Obama (2008-

2012) administration and ending with the present Biden administration (2021->). This time frame was chosen because it depicts a time when the American state explicitly shifted their focus to Asia, as well as the refocus of “America first” by the Trump administration. It is also relevant to the research problem because disputes over the “history problem” between Japan and South Korea came to the surface within this time frame. For example, there was the 2015 comfort woman issue, and then in 2018, there was the concern of the forced labourer issue. There could be an argument for looking at a longer time span, that it should at least also look at the two presidencies preceding Obama because of the shift in Japanese and South Korean understanding of the money given to South Korea, whether the money was compensation or simply a gift. Until the late 90s, Japan's stance was the understanding that the money was a gift and not compensation. This, however, changed in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Simultaneously, South Korea changed their stance from seeing the money as compensation and settling the matter until the early 90s to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century doing a 180. Because of the long military rule in South Korea, civilian sentiments were not heard (Park, 2022). However, because of the limitations of this essay, it is deemed that for looking at U.S. identity, it is suitable to demarcate with the first Obama administration because this posed a shift central to the U.S. and not in Japan and South Korean understanding.

## Analysis

The analysis investigates how the U.S. discursively constructs its identity *visa-à-vis* Japan and South Korea within the context of their bilateral disputes. This section is based on the theoretical and methodological framework laid out earlier in the essay that builds on Hansen's relational approach to identity construction and discourse. To conduct the analysis, it will be divided into four moments, each exploring the three dimensions of spatial, temporal, and ethical identity construction through linking and differentiation. Following, the section will look at the main findings of the analysis and see if there are any differences between the four moments. It is to investigate how close South Korea and Japan are to the core and if their disputes have any influence on this.

An important note to give the reader before they head into the analysis is the fact that the three analytical lenses are intertwined, many times they can be seen together and therefore, some repetition might occur as well as evidence for one lens in one of the other two sections.

### Obama Administration 2009-2013

The shift to the Asia-Pacific built on the idea that the U.S. had to look ahead, to look toward the horizon beyond the wars that the U.S. was fighting (in the Middle East) and to envision a more robust and better America (The White House, 2010 May). This rebalance to Asia was, according to Vice President Biden, made with the realisation of Asia's growing importance (The White House, 2013 November 27). The U.S. emphasised the importance of strengthening its alliances in the region and declared that Japan and South Korea were the bedrock of security and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific.

Further, the national security strategy emphasised the increasing importance of Japan and South Korea as leaders in addressing regional and international issues whilst embodying and promoting their common democratic values (The White House, 2010 May).

### Spatial

From a traditional understanding, spatial identities are identified through the construction of other states, and territoriality is given primacy. From this understanding of spatial identities, the articulation of “South Korea” and “Japan” makes them “other.” They are "others" because they are not part of the United States. However, the spatial creation of identity also deals with abstract political subjects and boundaries. Starting with a close reading of the National Security Strategy (White House, 2010 May) articulated by the first Obama administration creates spatial distance between countries such as "China" and "North Korea," and the U.S. and its allies. The U.S. and its allies (South Korea and Japan) are linked, with signs, both implicitly and explicitly, as upholding the international community, the rule of law, democracy, “a common history of struggle on behalf of security, prosperity, and democracy (The White House, 2010 May, p 11).” They share common values and common commitments to international norms that recognise both the rights and responsibility of all sovereign nations (The White House, 2010 May, p 11). This is a creation of universal discourse, which is the most frequented differentiation created throughout the material. These articulations of universal discourse construct both spatial and temporal identities. The U.S. and its allies have adopted these universal principles, while states such as China and North Korea have not. This reading of the spatial aspect puts both South Korea and Japan as being close to the core of the U.S.; there is a process of linking these three countries that produces a positive identity. This positive link between Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. can be understood as overcoming their pasts and, therefore, also represents a temporal discourse. Further, the U.S. can be seen as spatially closing the gap between itself and South Korea and Japan. This is by stating that it is and has always been an Asia Pacific country, thus reorienting American engagement on geographical notions of closeness.

### Temporal

When looking at the differences constituted through the temporal dimension, it is usually seen through an ethical lens. It can be viewed this way because it concerns issues of morality, responsibility, and ethics. With an emphasis on the close ties between the peoples of the U.S. and South Korea and the U.S. and Japan it can be understood through the temporal as well as ethical lens. This linking does not, however, look exactly alike in the case of Japan and South Korea. Turning, firstly to South Korea and the U.S., it is emphasised that their people are "tightly bound" because of their shared values, their friendship, and mutual respect. It further emphasises the role their long partnership has played, over 50 years, which has strengthened and created a solid base. They are working together, shoulder by

shoulder, regionally and globally, to tackle challenges (The White House, 2009 June 16). This is a positive characterisation of their relationship and can be understood as creating closeness spatially based on political ideas. In regard to this imagined political space, the U.S. also portrays its relationship with Japan as strong and rooted in the deep friendship of its people. However, there is more emphasis on "alliance" than "friendship." Further, the relationship with Japan could be understood more as that of a partner in comparison to the relationship with South Korea. This by statements such as:

“I'm proud to announce that we have agreed to a new joint vision to guide our alliance and help shape the Asia Pacific for decades to come, The U.S.-Japan alliance will remain the foundation of the security and prosperity of our two nations but also a cornerstone of regional peace and security” and “our joint vision lays out the future we seek in the Asia Pacific -- a region where international rules and norms are upheld, where nations contribute to regional security, where commerce and freedom of navigation are not impeded and where disputes are resolved peacefully (The White House, 2012 April 30).”

Concerning South Korea there are also mentions of partnership and regional security. However, it is more tightly coupled with the stability of the Korean peninsula and America's strength in securing South Korea (The White House, 2009 June 16).

In addition to this, the discourse involves articulations of South Korea as a “growing force” and the emergence as a significant contributor to the global good (The White House, 2012 March 20). This construction of South Korea is made with concern to its role as a regional and global actor. It can be understood as emphasising the importance of South Korea's continued engagement on the world scene while promoting their shared values. It can be understood as a temporal differentiation from when South Korea was more closed to the world and did not have democracy. This indicates the change that South Korea has made, that it has undertaken substantial work in achieving shared values such as democracy, the rule of law. Something that they together should continue to undertake; the U.S. shoulder the burdens of the changing world on coming generations (The White House, 2009 June 16).

### Ethical

This aspect refers to how identity is discursively constructed around themes of morality and responsibility. How issues can be placed "within the higher ground of the morally good (Hansen, 2006, p. 50).” Looking at the U.S. and its discourse on the two countries in relation to their bilateral tensions, there are no explicit constructions of differentiation between them. Both allies are described as sharing values and securing the region. They share the same understanding of the world and what is essential (The White House, 2012 April 30). Thus, it positions Japan and South Korea close to the core of the U.S. and its self-perception, especially in the region. They may not be seen as part of the self;

however, they are not understood as radical others. They are positioned around and against, for example, Iran, China, and North Korea to uphold common values and interests.

The U.S. articulates itself as a world leader, crucial in securing the world order and promoting the rule of law, human rights, democracy, and stability (The White House, 2010 May). While these attributes are also given to South Korea and Japan, there are nuances to this understanding of temporal differences. The two allies are seen as the cornerstones of security and prosperity in the region. However, there is also an understanding that these two allies would not be able to secure this on their own. It is something that has been achieved through the leadership of the U.S. and its continued commitment to its allies. The influence America has come not from perfection but from strife to overcome its imperfections. It emphasises the importance of looking back and overcoming its past shortcomings and highlights its efforts to overcome them (The White House, 2010 May). This functions as a means of promoting its values. This can be understood as temporal othering, that the U.S. strives to be better than it was before, to look ahead and focus on the future to promote core values such as democracy, international law, and sovereignty. This can also be seen as an understanding of itself as evolving, learning and capable of change, which can be understood as an integral part of the self.

Moving on to Japan and how it is described during this presidency and how it can be viewed within this discourse, we can see some of the same rhetoric that is used in describing and talking about the alliance with South Korea. The alliance with Japan is described as one of the cornerstones of peace and security throughout the world, which is a small but potentially significant difference from how South Korea is described. In the descriptions of the Japan-U.S. alliance, there is an emphasis placed on how the alliance is leading in securing not only the region but also the world more broadly (The White House, March 9, 2012). A friendship and alliance based on shared values and interests that has provided peace and security for the region in unprecedented ways (The White House, 2012 April 30). Also, it emphasises a new and invigorated approach that fits the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Something that is also brought up when talking about South Korea is the need to look forward and work for the coming generations. Through this discourse, Japan can be understood as more tightly coupled to the self (the U.S.) than South Korea.

The cooperation between South Korea, Japan and The U.S. is lifted as moral, rule-abiding, and strong, especially in relation to North Korean. These three countries are thus seen as standing on a moral high ground. They are working together shoulder by shoulder trying to spread their beliefs for a better world. An important aspect to note is that the U.S. puts itself higher in relation to its allies when it emphasises the importance of U.S. leadership in the region, which indicates that there is a perception on the American side that they are integral, which could implicitly indicate a nuance of difference

between itself as looking forward and turning a new page for all and its allies that are in much stuck in their past and self-interests.

### Obama Administration 2013-2017

A common theme that is also present in this strategy is the weight that is given to the Asia-Pacific; this year's strategy has further developed this theme and highlights the importance of its allies in the region and how these alliances enable prosperity throughout the Asia-Pacific. The strategy states that the U.S. will continue to revitalise and modernise these alliances while enhancing the security of its allies (The White House, 2015 February).

#### Spatial

Following the presentation from the first Obama administration, Japan and South Korea can both be understood as other, because they are other countries, they do however, try to close the geographical gap by stating that the U.S. has always been an Asia-pacific country. Turning to the more abstract understanding of this lens, looking at political structures and boundaries, we find that both South Korea and Japan fit within most of the ideas and understandings of what makes up the U.S. identity.

The spatial closeness between the U.S. and its allies is reinforced with the statements of Japan as being the corner stone of security in the region and with South Korea described as the linchpin. Both allies are described as sharing values; they are all democratic countries that strive for a stable, safe, and free world based on international law and human rights. However, the allies can be understood as not fully being totally integrated into the self and still exhibiting signs of otherness. The U.S. emphasise the importance of the rule of law and cooperation on open engagement in trying to mend and move beyond territorial issues for a more secure place for all. This is explicitly directed towards Japan in relation to China. This implies that even though Japan adheres to the same norms and occupies the same political sphere with shared values, it is not yet fully transgressive of the older disputes that put safety, security, and rules at risk. This can also be seen through the temporal lens. Implicitly, this can be understood as concerning South Korea as well because of the territorial disputes over the Dokdo/Takashima islands. And therefore, position them outside the self.

#### Temporal

The U.S. alliance with the ROK is described as stronger than ever and is legitimised and attributed weight by looking back at their shared history. The alliance is described as built on and forged by the shared sacrifice of their people; "This alliance is special, forged in the battlefield, and it has been fortified by the common values and mutual respect of our peoples (The White House, 2014 April 26)." In another statement, it is further emphasised that the Korean and American people have fought side by side, "our people have fought and bled and died for one another's freedom (The White House, 2015 Oktober 16)." This alliance is labelled as the lynchpin of security and stability in the region (The White House, 2014 April 26), and it was in Korea, at the frontier of freedom, that these values were

fought for. There is no assurance for these things; freedom, democracy, and progress are something that has to be fought for, which is something that the Korean people have done (The White House, 2014 April 26) and continue to do and set an example around the world (The White House, 2015b October 16). South Korea is seen as a country that fights for their shared values, and by working together with the U.S. they can make the world "safer, healthier and more prosperous (The White House, 2015a October 15)." This description of South Korea and its alliance with the U.S. can be understood as close, that they have worked together to become better and stronger.

The US-Japan alliance is described as the "cornerstone of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific and a force for progress around the world (The White House, 2016 December 27)." A theme in this presidential period that was also seen in the description of the US-ROK alliance, which was absent in the former presidential period, is the stories told about how the two respective alliances were built. These stories reinforce the importance of these alliances and are framed as examples for others to follow. These stories help reinforce the self-perception of the U.S. as a mature, future-oriented, responsible power. The US-Japan story is different from the US-ROK story in the way that it is not based on the universal fight for peace, security, democracy and prosperity but on the maturity of these two countries and people's ability to move past grievances in order to realise the goals of prosperity for both their peoples. Exemplified by the following quotes:

"Thank you for your presence here today an historic gesture that speaks to the power of reconciliation and the alliance between the American and Japanese peoples; a reminder that even the deepest wounds of war can give way to friendship and lasting peace (The White House, 2016 December 27).",

"The US-Japan relationship highlights the power and possibility of reconciliation between two former adversaries (The White House, 2015 April 24)." And

"From the tragedy of war, the us and Japan have been able to build an extraordinary alliance that benefits both of our people (The White House, 2016 May 20)."

Both Japan and South Korea are positioned part of the temporal self, as being able to move forward, as mature. However, an indication of frustration, in relation to the temporal aspect, is the call for acknowledging and addressing the past in an honest and transparent light that promotes healing; thus, also emphasise the need for a final resolution concerning bilateral disputes. This is to be able to look forward to meeting the new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Where the emphasis is given to how "the interests of the Korean and Japanese people so clearly converge (The White House, 2014 April 25)" The U.S. emphasise the commonalities between their countries and a small quantity of incomprehension as to why disputes over grievances so long ago in a new era with new security threats is still ongoing. There is a wish from the U.S. that their allies would look at their young people and what is best for them, to look forward to the "possibilities of peace and prosperity for all people

(The White House, 2014 April 25)." This can also be understood as producing both ethical and spatial differences simultaneously as creating closeness with South Korea and Japan.

### Ethical

The U.S. tries to uphold and reinforce an international order that is rule-based and promotes global security and prosperity, as well as human dignity and human rights for everyone. The need for continued American leadership is again reinforced and is further emphasised by claiming that this is an "undeniable truth (The White House, 2015 May)." That there is no question about whether the U.S. should lead, but rather how. The U.S. should lead the world from a position of strength by reinforcing and promoting human rights and democracy, advancing a global community that is following international law and allowing their people to live in freedom and prosperity. Which clearly demarcates between what the U.S. is and strives to be and what it is not and is fighting against. They also exhibit self-reflexiveness and matureness of admitting when they do not uphold national norms and standards (The White House, 2015 May). In addition, the U.S. also understands its role as indispensable by stating that "there are no global problems that can be solved without the U.S." It should be noted that they also say that the U.S. cannot solve all problems by itself. However, this statement shows how the idea of U.S. exceptionalism and global role has been cemented in their approach to the international system. This creates the idea of the U.S. being the norm, the model for all others to follow and that without its steadfast commitment to international security, the world would spiral down to a place run by authoritarian leaders filled with isolationism, human suffering, and a zero-sum game where only some win. This can be exemplified by the following quote from the strategy:

“American values are reflective of the universal values we champion all around the world – including the freedoms of speech, worship, and peaceful assembly; the ability to choose leaders democratically; and the right to due process and equal administration of justice (The White House, 2015 May, p.20).”

The strategy states that the U.S. will continue to revitalise and modernise these alliances while enhancing the security of its allies (The White House, 2015 May). Here, they reinforce their commitments to their allies; however, they also add the goal of enhancing the interaction among their allies for them to cooperate better and act on global and regional challenges. In this new focus, Japan and South Korea are understood as two important allies were strengthening bilateral ties between them would be welcomed by the U.S. Following, it is also emphasised that the U.S. does not have a stake in territorial disputes. However, they are clear to state that they “denounce coercion and assertive behaviours that threaten escalation, “We encourage open channels for dialogue to resolve disputes peacefully in accordance with international (The Withe House, 2015 May, p.13)." This can be related to the explanation of territorial disputes. That it expects and holds all countries accountable and to the standards of the "civilised world", where disputes are settled through diplomacy and according to

international law. This implies that South Korea and Japan, even though they are close to the U.S., are still exhibiting instances of a lack of both morality and maturity. Creating a distance from the U.S.

Turning back to the theme of stories presented under the temporal section, it can also fit within the ethical lens because of the context and what it indicates for their relations. There is an irritation that can be identified and understood as a calling to the people and leaders to live up to the examples set by the U.S., the norms, and the challenges that they are facing. In a kind of prompting manner, then these stories that were described above can be understood as used to show how we are alike and make both allies strong, resilient, mature, etc., to keep an open and constructive dialogue to lay these differences to rest. The U.S. is placed as more mature and open minded and indicates to its allies that they should follow this example.

## Trump Administration 2017-2021

### Spatial

Following the other two precedencies, the spatial lens, from a traditional understanding, places Japan and South Korea separate from the U.S. because of their status as other countries. Turning to the more abstract political boundaries, there is a contrast to earlier administrations. The Trump administration put much emphasis on free trade and how this relates to the rule of law. This administration presents itself as a selfless country that wants to trade with everyone on equal terms (The White house, 2017, December). This is a political space that the administration means that many countries do not share with the U.S. because they have taken advantage of the U.S. and mistreated them, especially concerning trade. This, in much encompasses the view that the Trump administration has of its two allies, Japan and South Korea. While South Korea is seen as committing to the idea of free trade and the line of the Trump administration, Japan can be understood as holding on to the unfair trade deal in relation to the U.S. For example, Trump talks negatively about Japan's choice to have high tariffs, bans on U.S. products, and imply that it should not be so hard for them to change this, that they have already done great and fair deals with South Korea (The White House, 2017, September 27). Which positions Japan as not sharing the same space as the U.S. while South Korea can be understood as doing more to be able to do this.

### Temporal

The Trump administration draws a stark line between itself and its predecessors by stating that "the American people elected me to make America great again (The White House, 2017 December)," as well as in different forums, blaming the previous administrations for signing trade deals that are unequal and giving unfair opportunities. That they are letting other countries take from the United States without gaining anything in return. Two kinds of "others" can be identified through the temporal lens. Firstly, we have an "other" as well as a "self." The Trump administration draws a great deal on the founding fathers and the ideals and the founding of the constitution as integral to itself and its greatness. The other one is the differentiation from its earlier administrations that have "weekend" the

U.S. both internationally and nationally and have for too long entertained enterprises that only drained resources and money from the U.S. and its people. As well as letting down the principle of human worth and liberty when withdrawing troops, causing human pain, and suffering (The White House, 2017 December).

Turning to South Korea, first, we see a picture of a nation and people who share the same values and fundamental ideas on human rights and dignity for all peoples (The White House, 2017 November 10). The U.S. share the spirit of the Korean people as diligent, righteous, brave, selfless, and courageous. A people who has established a true friendship, with eternal bonds between both the people and the nations that are forged from the tremendous sacrifice of both peoples (The White House, 2017 April 18). At the same time, another picture is drawn of the Korean people and nation as not so like the American one. It is described more in terms of a parasite that lives and flourishes at the expense of the U.S. It was not a shared sacrifice that helped lay the foundation of South Korea, but rather at the cost of a great sacrifice of America. This is a practice that is still going on today, especially regarding security and the cost of the military:

“Truly the friendship between our two nations – our two free nations are as eternal as the bonds between those who fought to win it.” “We have bled together. We have prospered together. And on that foundation, the people of the United States of America and South Korea will face the future together. With Courage, determination and faith, we go together (The White House, 2017 April 18),”

“As I recently observed in South Korea, the people of the republic took a poor country ravaged by war, and in just a few decades turned it into one of the wealthiest democracies on earth. South Korea enjoys higher incomes than the citizens of many European union countries (The White House, 2017 November 10),”

“Now, giving would be if I took the sanctions off. I did not want to do — if you asked General Mattis, for a year and a half, I said, “Why don’t we stop these ridiculous,” in my opinion, “the military games?” I call them the “military games.” If I told you how much those games cost — and, frankly, I told South Korea, “You should be paying for these games.” We pay for them (The White House, 2017 September 27,” and

“I told a number of countries over the last few days, I said, listen you’re a very rich country. We protect you. Without our protection, you would have real problems. You would have real problems. I said you should reimburse us for this protection. Why are we protecting you? I mean, I’ll be honest, I just asked Japan. I said, “We’re defending you. You’re a very wealthy country. You’re sending us millions of cars. You’re making a fortune. We have a tremendous trade deficit with you. And we’re defending you, and we’re subsidising your military with a massive amount of money.” I said it to South

Korea. We have 32,000 soldiers in South Korea. They're a very wealthy — these are great countries. These are very wealthy countries. I said, "Why aren't you reimbursing us for our costs? (The White House. 2017 September 27)"

There is a dual understanding of the relationship steeped in frustration. That a country, a close ally that advocates for the rule of law, a democracy, and a friend, does not pay for itself, and continues to take advantage and drain its ally, friend, and protector. While there are many words of admiration directed toward South Korea, that it is a great country and that they have a tremendous spirit (The White House, 2017 November 7), the U.S. does not seem to be content with its ally and how it is conducting itself. This temporal differentiation from the U.S. is both seeing South Korea as a country to look up to because of their immense accomplishment, from war to a very rich country; however, at the same time as less than the U.S. by not conducting themselves as a country sharing the burden of security and stability in the international community. Something that creates spatial and ethical aspects as well.

While there is also a dual understanding of Japan, this takes on a different form than the one of South Korea. This is understood as admiration and jealousy of the Japanese and their achievements; "in Japan, we see a dynamic democracy in a land of industrial, technological, and cultural wonders. In fewer than 60 years, that island nation has produced 24 Nobel prize winners for achievement in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and the promotion of peace (The White House, 2017 November 10)." And a frustration that they, despite their tremendous advances and economic prosperity and capability, still treats the U.S. unfairly. Here, the U.S. is differentiating itself from Japan, both with envy, something they wish to accomplish or do themselves and irritation over the continued unfairness in their relationship. Japan can be understood as depicted as both less and more simultaneously.

### Ethical

Turning to what is often perceived as two central allies in the region - South Korea and Japan – we find two conflicting views of these countries and how they are perceived in the official picture made by the Trump administration. They are simultaneously described as "great" and close allies and "immoral" in the way they use the U.S. for their own profits.

While the Trump administration saw and acknowledged the tensions between its allies, the official stance explicitly stated by Trump was in the lines of "how many things do I have to get involved in?" that he engaged in the containment of North Korea, involved in trade deals. Despite this frustration, he also claimed that maybe if both parties wanted him to get involved, he would (The White House, 2019 July 19). In another comment, he stated that it is like a full-time job getting involved, something that also sounds demining, hinting at the frustration of these two countries not looking at today's problems

of North Korean proliferation, the threat of China and trade issues on the American agenda. Other statements made by U.S. officials at the time also indicate this frustration as well as unwillingness to get involved. For example, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David Stillwell said, "I don't plan to mediate or engage, other than again to encourage both sides to focus on the key issues in the region, especially with North Korea (Sneider, 2019)." This implies that it is an issue between the two countries and that they should not let it spill over into other areas affecting others. This is not a dispute that is put into the realm of the higher moral good but rather seen as a bilateral issue that points out that they are not yet as mature and do not take the responsibilities expected by democratic countries. This also creates spatial and temporal differentiations.

### Biden Administration 2021->

What the Biden administration's new Indo-Pacific strategy emphasises and stands for is familiar from earlier administrations. For example, there is an emphasis on how central the region is to U.S. national interests as well as its characterisation of China and the challenges that come with it. However, there are two significant differences between the Biden administration and its predecessor, Trump. This strategy places more emphasis on cooperation and flags its plans for an "Indo-Pacific economic framework." Furthermore, there is an explicit part of the strategy that addresses existing internal conflicts between trusted U.S. allies. Nations that the U.S. seeks to bring closer together and prevent further bilateral escalations (The White House, 2022 February).

#### Spatial

Japan and the ROK and their ties are explicitly addressed in a manner that suggests that prioritising bilateral differences over transnational issues will not be viewed in a good light by the U.S. The two allies should, based on their shared values and interests as democratic and free states, focus more broadly on the region and the world. To lay old wounds to rest and look forward to how to create a safer, more prosperous, and freer Indo-Pacific. As well as a world where human rights, self-determination, democracy, and freedom are promoted. While also making both temporal and ethical differentiation in this instance, it can be understood as putting South Korea and Japan outside the "self"; depending on their actions, they are either perceived as sharing the same space or they are left outside because of their inability to move forward (The White House, 2022 February).

#### Temporal

Turning to how the Biden administration looks at and reinforces the idea of these alliances as ironclad and crucial to peace and security, we begin with South Korea. South Korea is defined as a close ally, a linchpin of security in the region and a global player. The relationship between South Korea and the U.S. is further described as stronger than ever, "the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea was forged on the battlefield, as we stood shoulder-to-shoulder in war (The White House, 2022 May 21)." This is a story that has been retold by the other presidents as well. This one is,

however, more in line with the Obama administration's understanding of the strong historical bond between two strong, selfless, and righteous people who have fought side by side in the name of democracy and freedom. This contrasts with the Trump story, which, even though it reiterates these sentiments in some statements, also tells the story of the big selfless sacrifice of the American people that made it possible for South Korea to be what it is today. The South Korean state and people are described by the Biden administration as very much like the American one, as sharing the same values and sentiments. A site for friction is the disputes between Japan and South Korea that do not go in hand with these attributes that the U.S. sees in itself and, in many cases, with South Korea. Through the cracks of this perceived we-ness is frustration with these countries not living up to it, and it seems like the U.S. views itself as an older sibling trying to stop its siblings from fighting. Creating both a temporal and ethical difference.

The Biden administration presents the partnership between Japan and itself as being historic and a cornerstone for peace and security around the world and in the Indo-Pacific. Despite these two countries being separated by a vast sea (spatial identity), they share the commitments to “universal values and common principles, including freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, international law, multilateralism, and a free and fair economic order, unite us (ethical) (The White House, 2021 April 16).” In addition, the relationship was forged in the wake of conflict and has ever sins become stronger through the turns and changes in the world (temporal). A difference between how the two countries are seen, which has not been quite so clear under previous administrations, is that while South Korea is placed in relation to North Korea in almost every mention, Japan is viewed in a broader light, as both a bilateral partner, but also an active participant in the QUAD, G7 and the world. And can thus be perceived as temporally closer to the “self.” Here we can see both identity through the temporal, spatial and ethical lens. The U.S and Japan has overcome their past, which indicates the identification with matureness.

### Ethical

The Biden administration also asserts that American leadership is stronger than ever. However, they cannot do it alone. To ensure an Indo-Pacific that is secure, resilient, free, and open, countries must work together and cooperate; "changing strategic circumstances and historic challenges require unprecedented cooperation with those who share in this vision (The White House, February 2022 pp.7).” Two countries that are specially mentioned are Japan and South Korea, and the Biden administration reaffirms their ironclad commitment to both countries’ safety and their growing importance for peace and security both in the region and the wider world. Moreover, there is a clear emphasis on the importance of strengthening the Japan-South Korea relations to achieve this:

“Nearly every major Indo-Pacific challenge requires close cooperation among the United States allies and partners, particularly Japan and the ROK. We will continue to cooperate closely through trilateral channels on the DPRK. Beyond security, we will also work together

on regional development and infrastructure, critical technology, and supply chain issues, and women's leadership and empowerment. Increasingly, we will seek to coordinate our regional strategies in a trilateral context (The White House, February 2022, pp.17).”

This points to a return to an active wish and engagement on the American part to make bilateral ties between allies run smoothly to secure its interests in the region, and also their place of part of the self. This is a strategy that was seen throughout both Obama administrations. This can be perceived as a difference between Japan and South Korea, and the U.S. While the U.S. is a responsible power, it urges its allies to also become responsible powers and come closer to the "self" in pursuing the moral high ground that the U.S. holds.

### How close are they to us?

The section above illustrates the main structural positions of four presidencies official foreign policy discourses on the bilateral tensions between South Korea and Japan. This last section will summarise which “self” and “other” are articulated and if there are any differences between the presidencies or if the official foreign policy discourse is characterised by continuity spanning the entire time frame.

First, the dominant U.S. “self” that is represented across all four presidencies is the U.S. as responsible, mature, upholds the rule-based world order, stability, peace and prosperity, and an example for other countries to follow. This does not however, create a significant othering from itself and South Korea and Japan. As has been showcased in the analysis Japan is most of the time understood as sharing these values, as contributing to the peace and stability of the world, being a responsible power that abides by the rule of law and a leading state globally. These are also characteristics that are in most part given to South Korea as well, they share the values of democracy, the rule of law and works for peace and stability regionally. This thus position these countries as close to each other, as being part of a shared space. However, this discourse of a “we,” of closeness and same-ness, does not give the whole picture of these relationships, but is however the dominant understanding of U.S. foreign policy discourse on the issue. Turning to a small summary of each presidency, we see a more nuanced picture of how the U.S. positions itself to its allies.

The first Obama administration focused on closing the gap between itself and its Japan, and South Korea. By positioning itself as an Asia-Pacific nation and as a long-standing friend and ally to South Korea and Japan it can be understood as a discourse of “we-ness” which is the dominating one. It is implicitly made clear that they are part of “us” and the U.S. part of “them.” Furthermore, the second Obama administration also exhibits this discourse of “we-ness,” however it can be understood that a competing discourse shines through in their official statements. This is a discourse where the U.S. is understood as a mature, forward-looking country working for prosperity, safety, and security for all, while South Korea and Japan in contrast can be understood as resentful, narrow minded and selfish in not bridging their bilateral gaps to work with the U.S. for a better future. This differentiation can be

seen from both a temporal, ethical and spatial lens and creates a distance between the U.S. and its allies. This construction of discourse, does however, imply that both South Korea and Japan is capable of change and can thus be integrated in to the “self.”

In contrast to the two Obama administrations the Trump administration can be understood as portraying a different understanding of the “self.” While the U.S. is understood as a strong and a leading country in the region and world, working for universal and selfless goals, it simultaneously presents itself as a victim that has been taken advantage of, especially by countries that are supposed to share the same ideals and values. Both South Korea and Japan are depicted as being outside the self, as being selfish and greedy. This construction of otherness is made simultaneously as the dominant discourse of sameness is being constructed. Compared to the other presidencies, the Biden administration can be understood as following in the same path, with a discourse of “we-ness,” that exhibits them as spatially and ethically close. However, does also exhibit the other articulation of other, that puts them outside of the self. Generally, Japan is understood as a mature country that has and is trying to atone for its past and work together with the U.S. for a more secure and prosperous world characterised by the rule of law, leading the world together with the U.S. as well as setting examples for others to follow. In this this discourse, there is a more significant difference between Japan and South Korea, that while Japan already is all of this, realises its faults and is working to be better, South Korea can be understood as not as mature in meeting Japan in laying the past to rest and moving forward.

While there are differences in the four different administrations, and they emphasise somewhat different aspects, the dominant discourse that can be seen by this analysis is the importance that the U.S. places on the good relations with and understanding of we-ness with its allies. However apparent throughout the last presidents a different discourse is emerging that builds on frustration over its allies’ inabilities of moving forward and cooperating. Even though the rhetoric and will to act differs between Obama, Trump, and Biden it can be understood as a somewhat continuous construction of otherness.

Taken together, the analysis found both stable and unstable discursive constructions of other, understanding that the degrees of otherness changed: the previous section showed that while explicitly constructing South Korea and Japan as close to the self, it is implicitly indicated that the U.S. positions itself has higher than its allies and a frustration with them can be seen. While South Korea and Japan are mostly constructed as close in both ethical, spatial, and temporal identities, there is a varying degree of this sameness. However, they cannot be understood as positioned as radical others.

## Conclusion

The essay has explored and analysed the discursive identities created in the U.S. official foreign policy discourse on Japan and South Korea in relation to their bilateral disputes. In an endeavour to deepen

our understanding of how the U.S. sees its role in relation to its allies and in what context U.S. action can be understood. The questions underlying the analysis were:

- Which (USA) “selves” and (South Korea & Japan) “others” are constituted in the United States of Americas foreign policy discourse on South Korea and Japan in relation to their bilateral disputes from the first Obama administration till today?
  1. How radical is the difference between the self and other?
  2. How is difference composed through the articulation of spatial, temporal, and ethical identity?

The analysis found that the official creation of identity positions the U.S., and its allies close together, with a more implicit discourse showing the differences between them. There is no clear dichotomy between the “self” and “other,” it is in most cases toned down, however, surface in the three last presidencies. Both Japan and South Korea can be understood as both being part of the inside and the outside. They are vital in assuring American presence in the region, they are close trading partners and share in much religion, society and what constitutes the idea of the sovereign nation in the liberal world order. However, they also exhibit traits that does not align with the US self, such as backwardness, bigotry and as being irrational in their bilateral conflicts. This can be understood as an anxiety of the US understanding of “self.”

As Campbell (1998) explained, identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries, it is achieved in the differentiation of the inside and outside. He further explains that it is made through repetition of an act, that there is no one founding act, but rather a reiteration and controlled process of repetition. This aspect of identity creation can be seen in the way the US perceives itself and reiterate their core values, building on the story of the founding of America, of the free world order, by retelling the story of America being the greatest county in the world and a natural leader. This could be described as what Campbell describes as a “discourse of primary and stable identity.” That all the four presidencies had aspects, ideas about the self, that can be understood though Campbells work and emphasis on the fact that without this retelling of the self and the practise of representation, the lack of a prediscursive foundation would be exposed. This depiction of the American identity can be understood as reinforcing as well as being situated in the static discourse of international relations that builds on the understanding of the peace of Westphalia (1648) as a demarcation of a new modern era, that has left barbarianism and where the international system is made up of sovereign states under anarchy. It is integral for the state to create discourses of danger, to create an understanding of what we are not, of what we must fear. So, when the US talks about what it is not, what it should fear it invokes discourses of danger. It can thus be understood through the analysis part that the US legitimises its position and centreless to the region and its allies by promising security to its people. In Campbells words “Both the stat and the church require considerable effort to maintain order within and around

themselves, and thereby engage in an evangelism of fear to ward off internal and external threats, succumbing in the process to the temptation to treat difference as otherness (Campbell, 1998, pp.50-1).” Therefore, what the US has in this analysis identified as its threats, its discourse of threat, is not an unproblematic reality, but rather a way of maintaining and reinforcing its identity built on the conception of the Westphalian peace and seeing itself within this “international system.” These articulation of particular others and dangers must be understood as serving a particular political function. This conception and understanding of “self” operate within the paradigm of sovereign, as described by Campbell. While Hansen (2006) looks at a more inclusive way of differentiation, that otherness does not have to be radical, gives the depth to this essay that sees that they are not absolute, however, during the analysis it became clear that the understanding of identity constructed through differentiation can also but limits on our understanding of U.S. identity construction in relation to South Korea and Japan. This regarding their close position to the self, and the more implicit articulation of irritation and “otherness,” that is harder to capture by only looking at specific signs that indicates differentiation.

The undertaking of the essay, looking at the period from the first Obama administration till today and the construction of identity in relation to South Korea and Japan, in the context of their bilateral disputes, can be seen as ambitious within the frame of this paper. Which may have some negative implications for the study. That because this essay is restricted both in time and space, there is not enough time to explore all the material that would have been potentially relevant to form a well-rounded understanding of the U.S. official policy discourse. Further, it also begs the question of generalisability, can the constructions of discourse presented in this essay be seen through a broader material? However, as has been explained before, this is not an exhaustive study, and it cannot consider all statements made in official discourse. However, it has been an attempt to shed light on how U.S. foreign discourse is created in relation to these two allies to further understand the complexities that shape how states act. With this the relevance of the essay can be seen as twofold. Both because of the new turn of relations with the trilateral summit in 2023, after icy relations, but also the contribution of further understanding the U.S. and its allies adding to the work of USIP. While the purpose of this essay is not to give policy recommendations that can be acted upon, it is to create an understanding of how the U.S. perceives these conflicts between two allies that are repeatedly given importance and primacy in its foreign policy. Which gives a new perspective to the USIP work that seeks to explore approaches to resolve the Japan-South Korea tensions. These essays are a mix of exploring innovative approaches and refreshing old ones. These are focused on practical policy, which can be of value to policymakers. This essay then contributes to broadening the understanding of how the U.S. understands its identity in the region and in relation to these allies. Opening and laying out the structures that shape U.S. action.

Concluding, since this is not an exhaustive analysis, further research could, building on Hansens (2006) elements look more deeply into the discourse on Japan and South Korea, looking at both countries individually as well as ad for example marginal, media or oppositional discourses or look at a longer historical perspective to deepen understanding and see what these tell us about U.S. conceptions of itself and in turn how this legitimises and rationalises policies in Asia.

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