

U.S.-Japan Joint Committee Statement

Under the framework of the Joint Committee established by the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the Government of Japan and the U.S. Government have been working together to address issues of mutual concern over the years. In the spirit of alliance cooperation, throughout the year 2025, the two Governments continued to discuss the on-going activities by U.S. Forces Japan to maintain order and discipline among SOFA-status personnel, with a particular focus on behavior outside SOFA facilities and areas to foster a harmonious relationship with local communities.

Law enforcement patrols are one such activity intended to maintain order and discipline, including the U.S. Forces Japan's Liberty Order, among SOFA-status personnel outside SOFA facilities and areas. When U.S. Forces law enforcement authorities conduct unilateral patrols outside SOFA facilities and areas, they liaise with Japanese authorities in accordance with SOFA.

During a unilateral patrol on November 22, 2025, U.S. Forces law enforcement personnel mistakenly detained an American citizen who did not have SOFA status. With limited exceptions as articulated in the SOFA framework pertaining primarily to the security of vital military property and the security of SOFA facilities and areas, U.S. Forces law enforcement authorities are not permitted to detain non-SOFA-status personnel outside SOFA facilities and areas.

In response to the incident, the Commander of U.S. Forces Japan directed an immediate suspension of unilateral patrols outside SOFA facilities and areas. These unilateral patrols have been suspended until the personnel participating in the unilateral patrol receive additional standardized training produced by U.S. Forces Japan to reinforce the limited scope of U.S. Forces law enforcement authority outside U.S. Forces Japan facilities and areas permitted by the SOFA.

The Government of Japan expressed regret over the incident and urged the U.S. Forces Japan to implement preventive measures to ensure that such incident will not recur. In response, U.S. Forces Japan share the view that it is important to prevent the recurrence of such incidents by taking all necessary measures. U.S. Forces Japan intends to resume such patrols as early as late December 2025, once the additional standardized training has been provided. Recognizing the value of unilateral and joint patrols through close coordination with the local communities, the two Governments continue to coordinate to promote positive behavior among SOFA-status personnel.

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