

Japan, Regional Stability, and the Korean Peninsula

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ABSTRACT: What accounts for the lack of political will on the part of Japanese leadership to mend relations with South Korea and build a stronger security relationship on the Korean Peninsula? In this paper I argue that much of the dysfunction in the Japanese strategic relationship with the two Koreas comes down to the fact that domestic politics in Japan and South Korea make bilateral security cooperation prohibitively costly, and the bilateral relationship arguably offers few security benefits not already available through both countries’ separate relationships with the US vis-à-vis North Korea. I begin by briefly describing the Japanese relationship with North Korea; I focus in particular on the existential threat posed to Japan by a nuclear North Korea and the ways in which this threat has shaped Japanese patterns of military acquisition. I then discuss Japanese views of South Korea, focusing on how domestic politics and the issue of war memory have hampered security cooperation between the two countries. I conclude with a discussion of possibilities for cooperation between Japan and South Korea on the issue of stability in the Peninsula; I return to my argument that the dysfunction between these two states on the North Korea issue is a result of high domestic costs and low security benefit. From this claim, I predict two possible scenarios for increased security cooperation between Japan and South Korea on the North Korean issue: glacially slow but steady infrastructure-building between the two driven by American pressure, or relatively fast but domestically painful rapprochement in the event of perceived American abandonment.

What accounts for Japanese ambivalence toward security cooperation and diplomatic engagement with the Korean Peninsula? Since the end of the Cold War, the Japanese approach to

security in East Asia has undergone a well-documented sea-change.¹ Japanese leadership has reorganized its military, sought to acquire new technologies, reconsidered its responsibilities to contribute to regional security within the US-Japan alliance, and revised many of the legal constraints which had previously hampered its ability to participate in security cooperation. Most notably, in the summer of 2014 the current Abe administration pushed forward a reinterpretation of Article Nine, the so-called “peace clause” of the Japanese constitution, to allow for the exercise of the right to collective self-defense.² Japanese policymakers and military leaders have claimed that this shift has been a natural reaction to changes in the balance of power in the region.³ In particular, leaders identify two major sources of instability in East Asia: a nuclear North Korea and the rise of China in the context of a potentially destabilizing conflict in the East China Sea.⁴

In the context of these possible conflicts, Japan by all rights should have an interested eye on the Korean Peninsula. Nuclear North Korea represents a major existential threat to the Japanese islands, and North Korea has on more than one occasion issued threats against Japan. Given the threat posed by North Korea to both parties, South Korea should be an ideal strategic partner for Japan; in its attempts to expand its international security cooperation Japan has in the last decade actively sought out numerous Pacific allies, and it has been successful in negotiating cooperative security relationships, particularly in Australia and with other American allies.⁵ In addition to their shared American ally, Japan and South Korea share many important characteristics; both are advanced industrialized democracies, and they face similar, although admittedly not identical, strategic threats.⁶

¹ For an in-depth overview of the changes to Japan’s military capabilities pursued since the end of the Cold War, see Christopher W. Hughes. *Japan’s Remilitarisation*. Routledge for International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009. For a discussion of the specific changes made under the second Abe administration, see Adam P. Liff. “Japan’s Defense Policy: Abe the Evolutionary.” *The Washington Quarterly* 38.2 (2015): 79-99.

² Sheila Smith. “Reinterpreting Japan’s Constitution,” *Forbes Asia*. 3 July 2014. At <http://www.forbes.com/sites/sheilaasmith/2014/07/03/reinterpreting-japans-constitution/#31192a1a2fae> [Accessed 23 March 2016].

³ Pekkanen, Robert J., and Saadia M. Pekkanen. “Japan in 2014.” *Asian Survey* 55.1 (2015): 103-118.

⁴ Narushige Michishita. “The Rise of China and Japan’s New Security Strategy.” Lecture: Center for Chinese Studies & Center for Japanese Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Berkeley, CA. Lecture conducted 02/08/2016.

⁵ Mina Pollman. “US-Japan-Australia Security Cooperation: Beyond Containment,” *The Diplomat*, 21 April 2015. At <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/us-japan-australia-security-cooperation-beyond-containment/> [Accessed 24 March 2016].

⁶ Gilbert Rozman. “South Korea and Sino-Japanese rivalry: a middle power’s options within the East Asian core triangle.” *The Pacific Review* 20.2 (2007): 197-220.

In practice, however, even though there are significant strategic reasons for Japan to be focused on the Korean Peninsula, Japanese politicians, particularly in the last five years or so, seem to have made a concerted effort to avoid the “Korea Issue.” This disinterest or inability on the part of Japanese leadership represents an interesting set of puzzles in its own right: why have Japanese policymakers arguably prioritized the China threat over North Korea, and what accounts for the lack of political will on the part of leadership to mend relations with South Korea and build a stronger security relationship?

Perhaps because of the legacy of the “hub and spoke” alliance system and the continued importance of the United States as a security player in the region, much of the current literature on security relationships in East Asia has framed discussion of strategic relationships in terms of triangles. The classic example of this is the so-called ROK-China-Japan triangle of major political players in the region; experts and policymakers often refer to the North Korea-South Korea-US triangle as well. In this paper I argue that much of the dysfunction in the Japanese strategic relationship with the two Koreas comes down to the fact that a triangular relationship between the three powers simply *does not exist*, but that Japanese leadership essentially considers the Koreas two points of two separate triangular relationships, i.e., between Japan, North Korea, and the United States, and between Japan, the ROK, and the United States.

The nuclear North Korea issue is arguably the major security issue in both the US-ROK-North Korea and the US-Japan-North Korea relationships, and the lack of a functional ROK-Japan-North Korea triangle is inefficient and may even put an unnecessary burden of coordination on the United States. Even so, domestic politics in Japan and South Korea make bilateral security cooperation prohibitively costly, and the bilateral relationship arguably offers few security benefits not already available through each country’s separate alliance with the United States. In essence, I claim that it would be *irrational* for Japan to engage bilaterally with South Korea on the North Korean issue; it would be politically costly, would run the risk of alarming the North Koreans and further destabilizing the Peninsula, and could provide very little benefit for either country beyond that already achieved through their respective alliances with the United States. If this argument is correct, I predict that normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea, and in particular increased security cooperation on the Korean Peninsula, is extremely unlikely in the short-term.

In this paper I proceed in three sections. I begin by briefly outlining the empirical realities of the Japanese relationship with North Korea, focusing in particular on the existential threat posed to Japan by a nuclear North Korea and the ways in which this threat has shaped Japanese patterns of military acquisition. I outline Japanese acquisition of spy satellites and aerial surveillance specifically targeted at North Korea, and describe Japanese failure at rapprochement with the North Koreans due to domestic political issues. I then discuss Japanese policymaker views of South Korea, focusing on how domestic politics and in particular the issue of war memory have hampered security cooperation between the two countries. Third, and finally, I outline possibilities for cooperation between Japan and South Korea on the issue of stability in the Peninsula; I return to my argument that the dysfunction between these two states on the North Korea issue is a result of high domestic costs and low security benefit. From this claim, I predict two possible scenarios for increased security cooperation between Japan and South Korea on the North Korean issue, at least from the point of view of the Japanese: glacially slow but steady infrastructure-building between the two driven by American pressure, or, hypothetically, relatively fast but domestically painful rapprochement in the event of perceived American abandonment.

1. Japan and North Korea

In this section I describe Japanese military and diplomatic approaches to nuclear North Korea. I describe the threat that North Korea poses to the Japanese islands, and in particular focus on the ways in which North Korea has shaped Japanese patterns of military acquisition in the post-Cold War. I also describe how attempts to engage diplomatically with North Korean leaders have repeatedly been hobbled not only by North Korean dysfunction and unwillingness, but also by domestic pressures on Japanese leaders to resolve the so-called “abductee” issue. Overall, I find that while North Korea has been a pressing security concern for Japanese leaders in the last decade, most leaders have relied on the United States’ nuclear umbrella to protect the Japanese islands from North Korean attack, and diplomatic rapprochement has been too domestically costly to pursue seriously.

Nuclear North Korea is a pressing existential concern for Japan. By the end of 2014 North Korea had 30-34 kg of plutonium and 100-240 kg of weapons-grade uranium, enough to

produce 10-16 nuclear weapons.⁷ These estimated numbers have only grown with the North Korean nuclear program. In terms of both fissile materials and delivery capabilities, experts agree that North Korea is currently capable of launching a nuclear attack on the Japanese islands. An American Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report reads: “assesses with moderate confidence the North currently has nuclear weapons capable of delivery by ballistic missiles; however the reliability will be low.”⁸ North Korea has more than two hundred No Dong medium-range ballistic missiles with some 50 mobile launchers; these have about a 1,300 km range, and would take around 10 minutes to reach Tokyo from North Korea. Japanese experts assess with moderate confidence that North Korea is capable of attacking Japan with nuclear weapons today, although the reliability of these weapons remains low.⁹

While Japanese military friction with China has been more consistently visible as of late, North Korea has been an obvious driving force for Japanese security acquisition and reorganization in the last two decades. This has been particularly visible in the development and centralization of the Japanese intelligence community, especially in the Japanese expansion of spy satellites and drone programs. The introduction of the New Basic Space Law in December 1998 almost directly followed the North Korean launch of a Taepodong missile over the Japanese islands. The previous law, the 1969 Diet Resolution on the Peaceful Development and Use of Space, declared Japan’s commitment to the use of outer space “only for peaceful purposes.”¹⁰ The New Basic Space Law, submitted in June 2007, is based on “reinforcing Japan’s security through the development of space,” as well as on promoting research and development and developing the domestic Japanese space industry.¹¹ It adopts a policy of “non-

⁷ David Albright and Serena Kelleher-Vergantini, “Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium 2015 – Summary Charts.” Institute for Science and International Security. 1 December, 2015. At http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Summary_Tables_and_Charts_FINAL.pdf [Accessed 5 February 2016].

⁸ Jamie Crawford, “Mistake in classification led to N. Korea info being revealed” CNN.com, 11 April 2013. At <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2013/04/11/mistake-in-classification-led-to-n-korea-info-being-revealed/> [Accessed 5 February 2016].

⁹ Michishita 02/08/16.

¹⁰ It has been argued that this resolution was directed largely at preventing the proliferation of Japanese spy satellites, making it particularly ironic that the law that ultimately overturned it was directed primarily at promoting their legalization. Andrew Oros. “Japan’s Growing Intelligence Capability,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol. 15, 2002. pp. 1-25. p. 17.

¹¹ Yumiko Myoken (British Embassy Science and Innovation Section) “The Bill of Basic Space Law.” At http://ukinjapan.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/5606907/5633988/The_Bill_of_Basic_Space_Law.pdf [Accessed 20 October 2009] p. 4; 宇宙基本法本文 2008年5月13日（衆議院） (“The New Basic Space Law: Full

aggressiveness,” emphasizing “intelligence and warning” in successful defense.¹² This revision marked a departure from the long-standing postwar Japanese policy of using space only for peaceful purposes and represents a North-Korean driven breakdown in long-held Japanese norms regarding the priority placed on intelligence and the acceptable uses of space.¹³

Following the passage of the New Basic Space Law, Japan has aggressively pursued the development and acquisition of spy satellites in an attempt to gain information about their North Korean neighbors. The stated goal of the Japanese intelligence-gathering satellite program was and remains to ensure that that a photograph can be taken of any location on Earth once a day regardless of conditions.¹⁴ Japan successfully launched a radar satellite in February 2015, bringing the total number of working IGSs in orbit to five — two optical, two radar, with one radar satellite as backup, with plans to launch a sensor satellite.¹⁵ At least one of these satellites was described at time of launch as being “designed to monitor North Korean military activities.”¹⁶

In addition to these traditional satellites, new types of satellites have also been launched. Of particular interest has been the Small Advanced Satellite for Knowledge of Earth (SASKE), otherwise known as ASNARO 1, which is manufactured by NEC Corporation and distributed by PASCO, a leading Japanese provider of geospatial technology and information. First introduced conceptually in 2008, this satellite represents an improvement on Japan’s previous satellites on virtually every level. The resolution of the photos taken by this satellite is 0.5 square meters — a fourfold improvement in picture quality and precision.¹⁷ Further, the satellite possesses multispectral capabilities, indicating that it will use a variety of different filters and sensors.¹⁸ This will make it possible for the satellites to determine differences not normally visible — a

Text.” Passed by the Japanese Lower House, 13 May 2008. Full text available online at http://www.soranokai.jp/pages/kihonhouA_honbun.html; accessed 28 June 2011).

¹² Ironically, it is this clause that enables the use of satellites with military applications. Myoken p. 1.

¹³ Choi, Sung-jae (2005) “The North Korean factor in the improvement of Japanese intelligence capability,” *The Pacific Review*, 17: 3, 369-397. p. 385.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ AFP. “Japan Launches New Spy Satellite,” *The Japan Times*. 1 February 2015. At <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/01/national/science-health/japan-launches-new-spy-satellite/> [Accessed 2 February 2016].

¹⁶ Mainichi Shimbun, “Japan successfully launches new optical spy satellite,” 28 November 2009. At <http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20091128p2a00m0na014000c.html> [Accessed 4 December 2009].

¹⁷ Norihiko Saeki. “SASKE R&D Program.” Presentation given March 4th, 2009. Available online at http://usgif.org/system/uploads/1008/original/Norihiko_Saeki.pdf [Accessed 27 May 2010].

¹⁸ Saeki 2009.

decision which is almost certainly targeted at monitoring underground nuclear tests.¹⁹ SASKE was launched in August 2014 with a series of other cutting-edge, experimental information-gathering satellites, including the QSAT-EOS (Tsukushi), Hodoyoshi 1, and Tsubame satellites.²⁰ Hodoyoshi 1 is an experimental earth-observing micro-satellite built by the University of Tokyo. This satellite has a 6.8 m ground resolution and is equipped with CCD sensors with spectral bands of blue, green, red, and near-infrared. Near-infrared data will enable the satellite to track plants' growth patterns, something undetectable with visible bands. Again, this technology is explicitly targeted at monitoring nuclear testing, particularly in underground bunkers, and development of these satellites was certainly motivated at least in part by the threat posed by a nuclear North Korea.

Aerial surveillance has also been upgraded; in 1992 the then-Japan Defense Agency (JDA) announced its purchase of four Airborne Warning and Control Systems aircraft — a purchase coincident with rising concern regarding North Korean nuclear possibilities.²¹ In 1999 Japan's acquisition of in-flight refueling aircraft further expanded the possible reach of these missions, allowing for all-day surveillance operations. During this period Japan maintained and operated 100 P3-C maritime patrol aircraft that it either purchased from the United States or has produced under US license since 1978. In the early 2010s the P3-C was replaced with the Kawasaki P-1. These were introduced into the Japan Marine Self Defense Force (JMSDF) arsenal in 2013, and are fully indigenously developed. They are equipped with radar, sonar, and electronic countermeasures, all developed indigenously.²² Finally, in 2003 the JDA launched a project for development of Japanese Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), arguably in an attempt to fill holes in Japanese space-based surveillance capabilities.

Japanese pursuit of Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABM) is also directly aimed at dealing with the threat of a North Korean attack. The Japanese currently have sea-based exoatmospheric

¹⁹ For example, infrared viewers, which “see” in heat, will enable the satellite to determine if things are being hidden or otherwise obscured, or even if something unusual is taking place underground.

²⁰ NASA. “QSAT-EOS,” *NASA Space Science Data Coordinated Archive*; **NSSDCA/COSPAR ID:** 2014-070D. At <http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/nmc/spacecraftDisplay.do?id=2014-070D> [Accessed 25 March 2016]; NASA.

“Hodoyoshi 1,” *NASA Space Science Data Coordinated Archive*; **NSSDCA/COSPAR ID:** 2014-070B. At <http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/nmc/spacecraftDisplay.do?id=2014-070B> [Accessed 25 March 2016].

²¹ Choi, Sung-jae (2005) “The North Korean factor in the improvement of Japanese intelligence capability,” *The Pacific Review*, 17: 3, 369-397.

²² Kyodo. “KHI gives MSDF first P-1 antisub patrol aircraft,” *The Japan Times*. 27 March 2013. At <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/27/business/khi-gives-msdf-first-p-1-antisub-patrol-aircraft/#.UcP7Hj54Zsg> [Accessed 4 February 2016].

interception capabilities and ground-based endoatmospheric interception capabilities, and there are plans for the procurement of more Aegis destroyer-based advanced systems within the next three to four years. North Korea is given as the primary driving force in the development of these capabilities in the Ministry of Defense's official statements on Ballistic Missile Defense; "[A] BMD system," the Ministry of Defense's Chief Cabinet Secretary argued in 2003, "is the only purely defensive measure, without alternatives, to protect life and property of the citizens of Japan against ballistic missile attacks, and meets the principle of exclusively defense-oriented national defense policy."²³

Japanese military and political leadership have also pursued civil defense and advance warning capabilities in case of an attack; these include Em-Net, which is a text-based messaging system, and J-ALERT, which is an alert sent by the US government through stationary satellites in the event of North Korean launch.²⁴ Due to these systems the Japanese media and local governments should have notice within one minute of a North Korean missile launch.

The US-Japan security relationship is thoroughly tied in to the North Korean threat, and Japanese policymakers and military leaders have sought closer ties with the United States, particularly in terms of a retaliatory strike. The Japanese government has framed this in terms of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and deterrence. Incidentally, some extreme voices in Japan have argued that Japan should seek its own strike capabilities, but because of questionable constitutionality and the potential for regional destabilization (and the difficulty of ensuring a successful strike), leaders prefer to rely on the United States.

Japanese approaches to North Korea have not only been security-driven. Japan has made several attempts at diplomatic engagement with North Korea, but they have failed at least in part because of domestic issues within Japan. In 2002 the Koizumi administration offered North Korea normalization of relations and an economic support package of \$5-10 billion dollars in exchange for freezing the nuclear program and return of the so-called Japanese "abductees," several Japanese citizens who were abducted by the North Korean government in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This normalization was not successfully implemented, however, because not all

²³ Ministry of Defense of Japan, "Japan's BMD: Statement of the Chief Cabinet Secretary (Dec 19, 2003) (Summary)" At http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/bmd/bmd.pdf [Accessed 24 March 2016].

²⁴ Michishita 02/08/16.

the Japanese abductees were returned.²⁵ Strangely, the abductee issue has become something of a hot point in Japanese politics, and it will be difficult for any Prime Minister to normalize with North Korea without addressing it. This issue also caused problems during Japan's participation in the six-party talks.

Until very recently, the current Abe administration appeared willing to discuss normalization.²⁶ Domestically, Abe is in a good political position to deal with the North because he is viewed as "hawkish," so taking a diplomatic approach will not be perceived as weak. North Korea is still not forthcoming on the abductee issue, however, and in fact, in Japan's most recent attempt at rapprochement, the North Koreans denied the possibility of returning the abductees and introduced a *new* domestic politics issue, the "Japanese wives issue." The Abe administration sharply admonished North Korean leadership for the most recent test launch.²⁷ In the wake of that launch Japan is stepping up sanctions, and normalization seems unlikely as long as North Korean nuclear capabilities advance.

I argue that Japanese patterns of engagement with North Korea can be understood as fundamentally about the interplay of domestic costs and security concerns. When security concerns from North Korea increase, Japan has reliably risen to meet them. If North Korean disarmament is excluded as an unachievable short-term goal, an acceptable level of security vis-à-vis the North Korean threat has been achieved through a combination of military acquisition and cooperation with the United States. The general consensus among military leaders and policymakers seems to be that there isn't a day-to-day threat of spontaneous attack on Japan by North Korea. Instead, North Korean nuclear capabilities appear to be intended for deterrence, especially against the United States, against interference on the Peninsula.

When threats are not considered imminent, domestic political concerns, like those about the abductee issue, appear to come into play. Outside of occasional public interest in this issue, public sentiment is more concerned with the economy and with the China issue than with North Korea, and the use of the right to collective self-defense, which would necessarily have to be

²⁵ James T. Laney and Jason T. Shaplen. "How to Deal With North Korea." *Foreign Affairs* 82.2 (2003): 16.

²⁶ J. Berkshire Miller. "Abe's North Korean Advances: Why Japan Has the United States and South Korea Worried." *Foreign Affairs*. 20 August 2014. At <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2014-08-10/abes-north-korean-advances> [Accessed 10 February 2016].

²⁷ Michishita 02/08/16; Steve Herman. "Fresh Japanese Sanctions Against North Korea Imminent." *Voice of America*, 08 February 2016. At <http://www.voanews.com/content/fresh-japanese-sanctions-against-north-korea-imminent/3181299.html> [Accessed 10 February 2016].

invoked in the case of Japanese involvement with security on the Peninsula, is extremely politically unpopular. Over eighty percent of the public, as well as an appointed panel of scholars, believe that the new 2015 reinterpretation of Article 9, the so-called “Peace Clause” of the Japanese constitution, to allow for collective self-defense is unconstitutional.²⁸ Diplomatic engagement with North Korea, or any active participation on the Peninsula, may be seen as a high-domestic cost undertaking with low security benefits beyond those already provided by the current US-Japan alliance.

2. Japan and South Korea

In this section I describe Japanese diplomatic approaches to South Korea. I discuss the ways in which anti-Japanese sentiment in South Korea, fueled by the behavior of nationalists within Japan, has hampered possibilities for cooperation between the two countries. I outline in particular two major issues facing the Japan-ROK relationship: the territorial dispute over Takeshima-Dokdo, and the “comfort women issue.” Overall, I find that domestic pressures in both countries would make cooperation prohibitively costly, and that the two would not gain anything from a bilateral relationship that they do not already get from their respective relationships with the United States.

Fundamentally, Japan would like to engage with South Korea, particularly within the context of security cooperation vis-à-vis the rise of China. As stated previously, China’s rise is of particular concern to Japanese leadership; the Chinese military is becoming more “forward,” especially in the East China Sea. There have been what Japanese officials describe as Chinese government vessel intrusions into Senkaku/Diaoyu waters; leaders are particularly more concerned with the possibility of “accidents” than with outright Chinese aggression, as historically private citizens on both sides have exacerbated tensions. In order to accomplish its official policy goals of “maintenance of regional balance of power” and “creation of crisis management and prevention mechanisms,” Japan has sought not only enhanced defense capabilities and a better relationship with the United States, but also stronger defense ties with regional partners. The Abe administration has been particularly focused on cultivating a cooperative portfolio, and has described its diplomatic and security goals as “aiming to marshal

²⁸ Yoshisuke Iinuma, “Abe vs. the Constitution,” *The Oriental Economist* (August 2015), 7-8.

support of potential significant security partners.”²⁹ However, while Japanese leadership has succeeded in developing strong security relations with India and in particular Australia, a similar relationship with South Korea has thus far eluded them.

Japanese leaders see domestic politics, particularly on the South Korean side, as a sticking point blocking Japan-South Korean security cooperation. Of course, the Japanese are not blameless; for example, Japanese leaders have made several visits to Yasukuni Shrine, a Japanese war memorial that has enshrined within it several class-A war criminals, in spite of repeated Korean protests.³⁰ Notable Japanese academics and military planners have argued that Japan was a victim in the Second World War, and that South Korean infrastructure was developed under Japanese colonial rule. Furthermore, repeated revisions of Japanese textbooks to undercut narratives of Japanese wartime aggression have been met with both Korean and Chinese outrage.³¹

For many Japanese policymakers, however, the fundamental sticking point in any discussion of the Japan-ROK relationship is anti-Japanese sentiment in South Korea. This negative sentiment is arguably due in large part to so-called “history issues” regarding Japanese crimes in Korea during and before the World Wars. Eighty percent of South Koreans view Japan’s influence negatively, and the ROK is tied with China for the country with the most negative feelings about Japan. The two major sticking point issues between the two states have been the standing territorial dispute about Takeshima/Dokdo and the ongoing (although now arguably concluded) discussion of the so-called “comfort women.”³²

There is a long-standing historical debate over the ownership of Takeshima/Dokdo; the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations states “both countries will recognize that the other claims the islets as their own territory, and neither side will object when the other makes a counterargument. They agree to regard it as a problem that will be resolved in the future.” Korea occupied the islets, but with the understanding that it would not increase police presence or build new facilities on the island. This was the status quo until 2006, when then-President Roh Moo-hyun

²⁹ Michishita 02/08/16.

³⁰ JIJI. “It’s ‘Natural’ For Leaders to Visit Yasukuni, Abe Says,” *The Japan Times*. 18 February 2015. At <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/18/national/politics-diplomacy/its-natural-for-leaders-to-visit-yasukuni-abe-says/> [Accessed 24 February 2016].

³¹ Pollman, Mina. “Why Japan’s Textbook Controversy Is Getting Worse,” *The Diplomat*, 8 April 2015. At <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/why-japans-textbook-controversy-is-getting-worse/>.

³² Michishita 02/08/16.

of South Korea tied an insistence on the Korean claim to Dokdo into a demand for an official Japanese government apology for the wartime colonization of Korea. President Roh argued that “Dokdo is our land. It is not merely a piece of our land but one that carries historic significance as a clear testament to our forty years of affliction. Dokdo was the first territory of Korea to be seized in the course of Japan’s usurpation of the Korean Peninsula.”³³ The address was given a day after the Japanese announced a maritime survey around the islands, and the two countries’ disagreement quickly escalated, culminating particularly in President Lee Myung-Bak’s visit to the islands in 2012.³⁴

Japanese leadership seems to view this discussion as primarily political grandstanding on the part of Korean leadership, an effort to leverage anti-Japanese sentiment into domestic political support. That said, there is no real strategic reason for this issue on its own to remain unresolved. However, Japan’s ability to discuss the Takeshima/Dokdo issue, and thereby resolve one of the major issues standing in the way of productive engagement with the ROK, is hampered by the fear that doing so would set a precedent for China’s claim to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. While Japan might be more willing to concede the islands, or at least to discuss doing so, to South Korea, it cannot and will not do the same for the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands for strategic reasons. As a result, discussion of the territorial dispute issue is at a standstill.

The second major issue facing Japanese leaders, which may actually have finally reached a conclusion, is the issue of the so-called “comfort women.” Japanese leadership has vacillated in its approach to this issue; in 1993 Japan compiled an official statement by then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei which stated that the Japanese government had concluded through an official study that the Imperial Japanese Army was involved in the establishment and management of “comfort stations” and forced women, many from the Korean Peninsula, to work in military-run brothels during the Second World War. This “Kono Statement” followed a series

³³ **Error! Main Document Only.** Office of the President, Republic of Korea. “Special Message by President Roh Moo-hyun on Korea-Japan Relations,” Presidential Archives, 28 April 2006. At http://16c wd.pa.go.kr/cwd/kr/archive/archive_view.php?meta_id=hot_dip_etc&id=6acd4bd3647383f285862e6 [Accessed 12 April 2016].

³⁴ Min Gyo Koo. “Economic dependence and the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute between South Korea and Japan.” *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 9.4 (2005): 24-35.

of Asahi News reports that documented military links to the “brothels” which kept sexual slaves.³⁵

The Japanese stance is and has always been that Japan settled all claims for reparations with the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the 1965 Normalization Treaty with South Korea, and that government reparations are no longer possible. Moreover, the initial Asahi articles were retracted in 2014 following reports that some of the reports were unsubstantiated, anecdotal, or even fabricated. The Abe administration took a hard stance on the Asahi retraction, taking the Asahi to task for “deceiving” the public; this is not unexpected, as Prime Minister Abe himself during his first administration in 2007 expressed the opinion that he didn’t think that *all* of the comfort women were forced into sexual slavery but that some might have been willing participants or at least prostitutes.

This problem may have been resolved, at least officially, in late 2015. The new agreement, signed by the current Abe administration and the South Korean government, accepts the use of the word “responsibility” and admits to official involvement in the brothel system, but insists that the agreement is “final and irreversible” and asks the Koreans to remove a statue honoring comfort women placed across from the Japanese embassy in Seoul. There are also provisions for \$8.3 million in reparations to help care for surviving victims, classified as “humanitarian aid.”³⁶ This deal has been met with outrage on the part of nationalists in both countries, particularly South Korea; many object to the fact that the money offered by Japan did not take the form of official reparations, which would carry an acknowledgment of legal as well as moral responsibility, but instead were presented as a humanitarian contribution. Many also found the \$8.3 million — roughly \$180,000 per survivor — insulting.³⁷ In spite of these issues, however, this does appear to indicate political will to move forward with the Japan-Korea relationship, particularly, as in the case of this issue, when faced with American pressure to reach an agreement.

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. “Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of ‘comfort women’.” August 4, 1993. At <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html> [Accessed 23 February 2016].

³⁶ Daniel Sneider, “Behind the Comfort Women Agreement,” *Tokyo Business Today* (January 10, 2016).

³⁷ Soble and Sang-hun, “South Korean and Japanese Leaders Feel Backlash from ‘Comfort Women’ Deal,” *New York Times* (December 29, 2015).

Japanese patterns of engagement with South Korea can, like their relationship with the North, be understood as a result of the interplay between security considerations and domestic political costs. Both countries are major US allies; both have their security on the Korean Peninsula guaranteed for them by the United States. It is arguable that there has been no real need for bilateral security operations between the two countries because this relationship would not offer them any additional security beyond that already secured by the US-Japan (and US-ROK) alliance.

On the other hand, there are high domestic costs to engagement on the Korean issue in both countries; the bad historical relationship and anti-Japanese sentiment in South Korea makes engagement unreliable and difficult to sustain, a problem that is ironically amplified by the democratic process. The perception in Tokyo of anti-Japanese sentiment and policies in South Korea has arguably resulted in a lack of political will to cooperate on the part of Japanese policymakers; in effect, Japanese-ROK coordination on the Peninsula issue is domestically a difficult sell, and it results in very few benefits beyond those already afforded to both countries by their bilateral relationships with the United States.

3. The Future of Japan on the Korean Peninsula

I have made the claim that much of the dysfunction in the Japanese strategic relationship with the two Koreas comes down to the fact that there simply *isn't* a triangular relationship between the three powers. I have claimed that in both the case of Japan's engagement with North Korea and its relationship with South Korea, policies are a result of attempts to balance security threats against the domestic costs of cooperation, which, for historical reasons, tends to be politically unpopular. In essence, domestic politics in Japan and South Korea make bilateral security cooperation prohibitively costly, especially since the bilateral relationship arguably offers few security benefits not already available through each country's separate relationship with the United States.

Whither, then, Japan on the Korean Peninsula? If my argument is correct, it seems that there are two possible paths to greater cooperation between the ROK and Japan on the Peninsula. The first is a path facilitated by the United States. If the United States continues, as it has, to put pressure on its allies to cooperate, and in particular continues to encourage Japan to take a more

proactive role on the Peninsula, it is likely that we will see a slow building of the infrastructure of cooperation over time. Japan has proven itself very interested in accommodating the United States (particularly if the accommodation supports Japanese interests), as well as in being considered a more equal partner in the alliance.³⁸ It is particularly concerned about American abandonment; as outlined above, the United States currently serves as its major nuclear deterrent against North Korea, and also serves an important stabilizing role in Japan's standing conflicts with China in the East China Sea. If the United States continues to encourage closer Japan-ROK relations, Japan will almost certainly pursue rapprochement — at a pace consistent with Japanese domestic pressures.

To some degree the empirical record seems to indicate that this is what is happening. It has become increasingly clear that Japan is positioning itself to take a more proactive role on the Peninsula, a strategy that has been forecast in the Abe administration's attempts to resolve the comfort women issue, as well as in recent details of new Operational Plans in which Japan provides active support in the event of American and South Korean engagement with the North. Both the Abe and Park administrations are able to take political risks at the moment, and so this may very well be a situation in which security is able to trump domestic politics.

A second, somewhat less likely possibility, is that the ROK and Japan might be brought together by a mutual fear of abandonment on the part of the United States. The crux of my argument rests on the idea that domestic politics take precedence *so long as the relative gain from security cooperation is no more than what is already provided by bilateral relations with the United States*. Were Japanese leadership to become concerned that American military forces might not provide them with support in the event of a destabilizing event on the Peninsula, it is possible that security concerns would trump domestic political costs. If this were the case, the changes in the security relationship between Japan and the ROK would likely take place much more rapidly than in the first possibility, but would be more politically difficult domestically.

³⁸ Pekkanen and Pekkanen 2015.

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