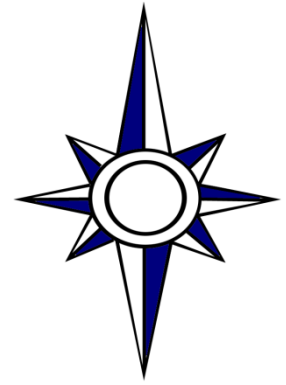


Comparative Connections

A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



Japan-Korea Relations: Grappling on a Hillside?

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Diplomatic disputes between Korea and Japan over historical issues and territory flared yet again this summer, being by far the most serious row since the mid-2000s. With both sides focused far more on proving the others' misdeeds than on finding some stable equilibrium, the disputes threatened to spill over and affect economic relations as well as distract leaders from focusing on a number of pressing domestic and foreign issues. We try to avoid overreactions in this forum, hence the title. Korea-Japan relations are nowhere near falling off a cliff, but without stabilizing relations, there are potential deleterious bilateral and regional effects that could result from the current disputes. There were three underlying themes that characterized and reinforced the general lack of rapport: first, the reverberations from these bilateral disputes onto third parties (US, China, and North Korea); second, the domestic sources of foreign policy (known as the "second-image" in international relations theory); and third, deliberate moves toward negative issue-linkage in stymieing diplomatic relations in the region.

Score: China 2, US 0 (North Korea 1?)

The familiar haunted Korea-Japan relations during the months of May to August. In the case of ROK-Japan, the controversy surrounding the so-called "comfort women" and the territorial spat over Dokdo/Takeshima drove relations, while DPRK-Japan relations were driven by the abduction issue. An unfortunate fact that is often missed in the analysis of ROK-Japan relations is that there is a perceptible absence of any reliable *mediator* to foster *détente* when tensions get high. Thus, despite the overused adage, "when whales fight, it is the shrimp whose back gets broken," (or "when two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled,"), it is probably the US that most resembles the shrimp in the fight over history and territory between Seoul and Tokyo. Consequently, the score for the US remains at zero, given its attempts to stay neutral and "even-handed" despite the highly vested interest that comes from being the common denominator linking its two allies – which coincidentally, translates into little leverage over the situation.

Meanwhile, the greatest beneficiary of tensions between Seoul and Tokyo is China, which can channel the tensions to levy even greater pressure against Japan in its own territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. It can also deter US plans to counter China by forging greater trilateralism in the region between the US, Japan, and ROK. When commentators argue that ROK-Japan relations are not zero-sum, they forget that there are more than two players involved. To slightly revise T.J Pempel's prediction for Asia that we will witness more peace but less influence by the US in shaping events [*International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2010): 465-490], we may just see "*less Pax, and less Americana.*"

Before August – a month that seems to typically downplay neighborly love given Korea’s anniversary of its independence from Japan’s colonial rule – there were a few notable highlights of cooperation especially from May to June. In mid-May, China, South Korea, and Japan met for their fifth trilateral summit and focused on launching negotiations for a three-way free trade pact. Toward the end of May, a bureau chief-level meeting was held in Seoul, to discuss plans by the US, South Korea, and Japan to press a reluctant China to “turn up the heat” on an increasingly provocative North Korea. In early June, the US, South Korea, and Japan agreed at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore to strengthen cooperation in deterring North Korean aggression. In mid-June, trilateral cooperation involving the US, South Korea, and Japan was again reaffirmed during the US-ROK foreign and defense ministers’ (2+2) meeting in Washington. In late-June, US, South Korea, and Japan conducted a joint naval exercise that marked Japan’s first official participation – it has been an observer in past exercises. In mid-July on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Cambodia, the US, South Korea, and Japan agreed to continue close consultations in dealing with common security threats.

Nevertheless, a few “sensational” events soon overwhelmed any good-will that came out of such meetings. If May was all about “comfort women,” August was about Dokdo/Takeshima. On May 5, “The War and Women’s Human Rights Museum” opened in Seoul, with the help of both private but also direct governmental funding (of 500 million won or \$427,000). In the same month, the South Korean Supreme Court ruled in favor of former conscripted Korean workers seeking reparations for forced work without pay for Japanese companies during World War II. This was in direct contradiction to Japan’s official stance that the compensation issue had been resolved in the 1965 agreement. In August, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak visited the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima, marking the first time a Korean president has ever set foot on the islands. This action was followed by a verbal remark by Lee urging Japanese Emperor Akihito to apologize to the Korean independence fighters of the Japanese colonial era, if the emperor was to visit South Korea.

Media coverage indicated that bilateral relations had again hit rock bottom. Most of the media coverage was one dimensional on both the Korean and Japanese side, asserting the voice of sovereignty. For instance, *Mainichi Shimbun* encouraged Tokyo to “take back hereditary lands” (Aug. 20 editorial), and emphasized the importance of “educating younger generations about why the Senkakus, Takeshima, and the four islands of the Northern Territories are a part of Japan” (Aug. 21 editorial). Earlier on Aug. 13, a poll was published by *Mainichi* claiming that half the Japanese population had negative views toward South Korea after President Lee’s visit to Dokdo/Takeshima. Similarly, the Aug. 20 *Chosun Ilbo* carried an editorial titled, “Japan must take a cold look at its empire,” which urged Japan to realize that “its lurch to the right since the inauguration of the Noda administration and aggressive stance on Dokdo and attempts to whitewash its World War II atrocities are constantly souring ties with Korea.” Similarly, netizens in South Korea were further enraged by reports that Kim Tae-woo, president of the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), had raised the idea of sharing the natural resources surrounding the waters of Dokdo/Takeshima if Japan acknowledges Korea’s claims to the territory and apologizes for historical issues. With the flurry created by the media in both countries, it is difficult for foreign media not to exploit the convenient yet one-dimensional caricature of the bilateral dispute as two children having a brawl.

There was, however, a poignant commentary by Lee Myeon-woo at the Sejong Institute that took a more pragmatic perspective and raised a set of necessary questions about President Lee's visit to the disputed islands ["To Embrace President Lee's Visit to Dokdo?" (Lee Daetongryeong-ae Dokdo Bangmun Hwanyeong?) *Sejong Commentary*, No. 249, Aug. 13, 2012]. The commentary states that Lee's visit to Dokdo/Takeshima should neither be problematized nor welcomed – it is not the act itself that is problematic as it represents an important diplomatic card. What we do need to problematize is why such a hand was played at this point in time, whether the visit achieved what it intended to achieve, and if the card was effective. The rationale behind the *timing* of the visit was admittedly ambiguous. In other words, what was the visit a response to? There seemed to be a general understanding that even though the idea to visit Dokdo/Takeshima may have been fermenting for a while, the final decision did not occur until a few days before the actual visit, with the official announcement being released one day prior to the visit. If Lee's visit was a show of discontent at the Japanese defense white paper that was released in August, which reaffirmed Japan's territorial ambitions for Dokdo/Takeshima (coupled with pressures stemming from the impending Korean independence day), Korea should have framed its actions as having been more meticulous and planned, rather than "spontaneous" or "sudden." As a logical corollary of the timing question, it is just as difficult to figure out whether the "diplomatic card" achieved its intended purpose and had any real impact. Considering that the impact of any card would potentially be greatest the first time it is used, the ambiguity surrounding the visit is even more palpable.

Regardless of the fuzzy rationale involved in the diplomatic spat between South Korea and Japan, the repercussions were not clear. As a direct result of the mounting tensions, some voices coming out of China portrayed satisfaction at seeing Japan "cornered." An editorial in the Aug. 20 *China Daily* by Zhou Yongsheng, a professor of Japanese studies at the China Foreign Affairs University, is a case in point. He asks "So why is Japan at loggerheads with nearly all its neighbors?" He states that "Japan's scramble for neighboring countries' islands will lead to stern countermeasures from China, the ROK, and Russia." He goes on to question the value of a Japan-ROK military alliance promoted by the US, saying that "such a military alliance will not only fail to improve security in Northeast Asia, but also risk an even bigger confrontation, which the ROK is not ready to face, because it is targeted at three countries: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, China, and Russia." Even prior to the height of the current territorial spat, Japan's diplomatic efforts had been complicated by consecutive cancellations of meetings by South Korea and China. On May 17, South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin canceled his trip to Japan. Two days later, Tokyo was notified that a visit by Guo Boxiong, vice chairman of the Communist Party Central Military Commission, would be postponed. Of course, it was unlikely that there was any conscious coordination between Seoul and Beijing, but it was evident that at least in the short-term, China did not lose much from the increased hostility between South Korea and Japan.

From the US perspective, better ROK-Japan relations would foster greater trilateral cooperation involving the US generate pressure against North Korea as well as China. This US objective was most evident in the latest report by Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye ("US-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia," *CSIS*, Aug. 15, 2012), which calls on Japan to "confront the historical issues that continue to complicate relations" with South Korea, and urges the US to "exert full diplomatic efforts to diffuse tensions" between the two neighbors. The report goes on

to suggest that “Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul should pool their diplomatic capital to jointly deter North Korean pursuit of nuclear weapons and help shape a regional environment best suited to respond to China’s emergence as a major power.” It is still unclear whether the US could stay “neutral” in bilateral disputes between South Korea and Japan while helping mend relations to bring both states under the trilateral fold. What is clear is that continued souring of ROK-Japan relations makes the US the equivalent of the shrimp in the fight between whales – whales that really care about the issue.

Another potential beneficiary of continued bilateral tensions between Japan and the ROK is North Korea. The most obvious reason would be the lack of coordination leading to weakened pressures against North Korea. The Aug. 18 *Yomiuri Shimbun* noted this fact when it stated that “the price for the worsening of bilateral relations will eventually have to be paid by both Japan and South Korea. A prolonged feud between the countries is bound to benefit only North Korea in connection with security affairs in the northeastern Asian region.” From another angle, a distracted Japan may mean greater leeway for Pyongyang to make certain “overtures” to Japan. For instance, in mid-June, North Korea allowed a select group of Japanese to visit two burial sites near Pyongyang, which allegedly contain the remains of Japanese soldiers, military officials, and civilians from World War II. This marked the first time that Pyongyang had allowed foreign media to report about the sites. Then, in August, the Japanese Red Cross Society met the North Korean Red Cross in Beijing to discuss the repatriation of the remains of those Japanese that died during and around the time of World War II, as well as allowing visits to their grave sites by bereaved family members. This was the first such meeting since August 2002. The slight thawing in relations also translated into the two agreeing to bilateral talks at the end of August – the first since August 2008. In context, Japan’s relations with North Korea looked a lot more promising than relations between South and North Korea. In fact, at around the same time that the Red Cross representatives from North Korea and Japan met to discuss the repatriation issue, the North Korean Red Cross rejected a proposal made by its South Korean counterparts for talks aimed at resuming reunions for families separated since the Korean War. Instead, the North accused the South of blocking cross-border exchanges and insisted that Seoul reopen the suspended tours to Mount Kumgang.

Inseparable domain of the domestic and international

In conjunction with the territorial dispute, it was not uncommon to hear more people attributing the foreign policy behavior of either South Korea or Japan to internal politics. From the Japanese side, an editorial in the Aug. 12 *Yomiuri Shimbun* pointed fingers at the Democratic Party of Japan-led government and its “leniency” for creating the diplomatic debacle, and that it was “only natural South Korea has exploited the fact that Japan’s diplomatic relations with the United States and China have been faltering.” Similarly, an article in the Aug. 14 *Asahi Shimbun* blamed the domestic situation in Japan, stating that “while some people criticize Japan’s weak diplomacy for allowing other nations to walk all over it, the major issue facing the administration is the fact that it cannot engage in true diplomacy with a lack of consistency as prime ministers go through a revolving door as well as due to the nitpicking being conducted by opposition parties and even within the ruling Democratic Party of Japan.”

Others have also honed in on the “incompetency” of the Noda administration, citing its preoccupation with the consumption tax hike issue as diverting attention from crafting solid diplomatic strategies. On Aug. 17, the head of the opposition Your Party, Watanabe Yoshimi, said it was “natural” to expect such actions from China and South Korea on territorial issues as the Japanese government is run by a “prime minister who can’t think of anything but a consumption tax hike.” Urushibara Yoshio, Diet affairs chief for New Komeito, stated that “politics is inward looking” in Japan, and that “the U.S.-Japan relationship has become unstable under the DPJ-led government, allowing China and South Korea to take advantage of this” (*The Japan Times*, Aug. 19, 2012). In early August, Japanese Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko promised to hold general elections “in the near term” in exchange for support from the main opposition parties in a bid to save his sales-tax legislation from defeat. If Noda were to lose the election, it would mean that Japan could potentially have its seventh prime minister in the span of just over six years. Thus, continuing woes for the administration suggest further foreign policy instability concerning South Korea.

As for South Korea, electoral politics seemed even more defined given the presidential elections scheduled for December. This was most poignant toward the end of June when the signing of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) fell through, due to backlash from the Korean people. The military accord was faulted not only for its emotional similarity to the “Eulsa Treaty” for some Koreans, but also the surreptitious manner in which the accord was approved during a Cabinet meeting without any prior notice to the public or a discussion within Parliament. There was speculation that Seoul’s announcement to forge a similar military agreement with China in May was a way to facilitate the agreement with Japan by appearing to be “balanced” and “even-handed.” Nevertheless, the negative momentum created by the incident involving GSOMIA led to the Korean government scrapping negotiations regarding the pending Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). According to Shin Yul, a professor at Myongji University in Seoul, “the Korea-Japan military pact is a good item for the opposition parties to politicize,” claiming that “more than anything the government pushed for the pact without gaining public consensus which could be said is totally against the basis of democracy. The other thing is that the pact is with Japan. Anti-Japanese sentiment prevails here irrespective of whether voters lean to the right or to the left” (*The Korea Times*, July 16, 2012). Notwithstanding the validity of whether pandering to populist policies or anti-Japanese sentiments actually translate into votes, heads did roll – Kim Tae-hyo, senior presidential secretary for national security strategy, resigned, and Cho Sei-young, director-general of the foreign ministry’s Northeast Asian affairs bureau, was replaced.

Even North Korea chimed in, criticizing the South Korean administration for adopting “diversionary tactics.” Instead of applauding the visit by President Lee to Dokdo/Takeshima as a win against the “Japanese imperialists,” *North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* accused Lee of instigating Japan’s territorial ambitions over the disputed islands by displaying “low-profile diplomacy” and claimed that the visit was “intended to cover up his true colors as a pro-Japanese lackey, calm down the angry public and weather his ruling crisis.” Moreover, *Uriminzokkiri*, a propagandist website run by the North Korean Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland targeted at South Korea, called the visit a “farce” that masked President Lee’s “true identity as a pro-Japanese traitor” and merely aided the administration’s recovery from its own political crisis. One can deduce that the “political crisis” referred to here

could include not only the pull-back of the military accords with China and Japan, but also the graft charges brought against President Lee's brother toward the end of July, following a series of corruption scandals involving the leader's aides. It seems most likely, however, that if the domestic situation did have any role in the foreign policy making of either South Korea or Japan, its role would have been constitutive rather than causal. In other words, only in combination with other factors – empirical events, public sentiments, strategic interaction, etc. – would electoral politics have a large impact.

The perils of the grim trigger for ROK-Japan relations

Typically, issue-linkage is used as a strategy to generate cooperation: the simultaneous negotiation of multiple issues fosters joint settlement by either creating benefits for an actor that would otherwise find an agreement to be of little value or by guaranteeing commitment and compliance from an actor to an agreement from which it would otherwise defect. In the case of ROK-Japan relations, there are signs that the reverse may be occurring. Traditionally, the spillover from animosity created by historical and territorial issues has been relatively well-contained. Thus, economic relations have usually run on their own momentum regardless of tensions in another sector. However, after the heightened state of hostilities in mid-August, there were reports that the bilateral relationship as a whole was moving away from normalization. On Aug. 15, Japan's finance minister met Foreign Minister Gamba Koichiro to discuss responses to President Lee's visit to Dokdo/Takeshima, announcing on Aug. 17 that "the expansion of the [foreign- exchange] swap could be put back to the drawing board." The two states had enlarged their foreign-exchange swap agreement from \$13 billion to \$70 billion in October 2011, but this accord will expire in October 2012 unless both sides agree to its renewal.

Channels for dialogue have been shut off: the annual meeting of the finance ministers scheduled for Aug. 25 was postponed; the bilateral meeting set for late August on the sidelines of the 44th ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting was cancelled; ministerial-level bilateral meetings at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders Meeting in Vladivostok in September have been scrapped, and; ministerial-level negotiations on adopting liquefied natural gas (LNG) that were scheduled for Sept. 19 in Tokyo have also been abandoned. In the terminology of game theory, the situation is looking more like the "grim trigger." The grim trigger entails a type of strategy that prescribes the "normal choice" (cooperation) until a rival deviates; once that deviation occurs, the "punishment choice" (defection) persists for the rest of the game – hence, a single defection triggering permanent defection. With the visit by President Lee to Dokdo/Takeshima as the trigger, bilateral relations are unraveling as each side seems keener on retribution than bargaining. Admittedly, the revoking of scheduled meetings and negotiations are largely symbolic, but the repercussions of closing off avenues for communication should not be dismissed.

The months ahead

As September begins, there is no apparent end in sight for the current diplomatic slap-fight between Korea and Japan. In late August, both tried to send official protest letters to the other while simultaneously trying to ignore or return the others' letter, each claiming that the other had outrageously violated established diplomatic protocol. Whether this issue will continue or even

increase in intensity and begin to have economic or political repercussions remains to be seen. Most likely a new president after the December ROK presidential elections will pledge to “begin anew” with Japan, as have all previous ROK presidents. As for Japan, Prime Minister Noda recently won an historical domestic political victory by passing the consumption tax – whether this allows him to focus more on repairing bilateral relations or whether he decides to shore up domestic support by taking a hardline stance is anyone’s guess.

Chronology of Japan-Korea Relations **May – August 2012**

May 3, 2012: *Asahi Shimbun* reports that China, South Korea, Japan and 10 Southeast Asian countries have agreed to enlarge and strengthen their emergency liquidity program amidst growing volatility from high oil prices and the eurozone crisis.

May 5, 2012: *The Hankyoreh* announces the opening of “The War and Women’s Human Rights Museum” in Seoul, with funds raised by the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, which launched a committee for the museum’s construction in 2004. Some 200,000 people contributed to the fund, raising roughly two billion won (\$1.8 million).

May 7, 2012: *The Sankei* reports that the Japanese Embassy in Seoul lodged a protest with the Korean Foreign Ministry in response to the Korean government providing 500 million won toward building the museum dedicated to the “comfort women.”

May 13-14, 2012: The Fifth China, South Korea, and Japan trilateral summit is held in Beijing. The Joint Declaration on the Enhancement of Trilateral Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership focuses on launching negotiations on a three-way free trade pact.

May 16, 2012: The 44th annual gathering of Korea-Japan business leaders kicks off in Osaka. The meeting is attended by Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujimura Osamu, Korea International Trade Association (KITA) chairman Han Duck-soo, and Mitsubishi Corporation chairman Sasaki Mikio.

May 17, 2012: South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin cancels trip to Japan two days after Tokyo is notified that a visit by Guo Boxiong, vice chairman of the Communist Party Central Military Commission, would also be postponed.

May 18, 2012: Japan successfully launches its first foreign-made commercial satellite, marking its entry into the launch business. The South Korean satellite, the *KOMPSAT-3*, is a multipurpose observation satellite developed by the Korea Aerospace Research Institute (KARI).

May 21, 2012: According to *Yonhap*, South Korea is working on a plan to forge a military cooperation pact with China. South Korean Defense Ministry spokesperson Kim Min-seok stresses the need for a mutual logistical support treaty given the history of joint maritime exercises for humanitarian search-and-rescue operations.

May 22, 2012: A bureau chief-level meeting is held in Seoul to discuss plans by the US, South Korea, and Japan to press a reluctant China to “turn up the heat” on an increasingly provocative North Korea, *Asahi Shimbun* reports. The meeting was attended by Sugiyama Shinsuke, director-general of the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, Glyn Davies, the US special envoy for North Korean policy, and, Lim Sung-nam, Seoul’s chief nuclear envoy.

May 24, 2012: South Korean Supreme Court rules in favor of formerly conscripted Korean workers seeking reparations for forced work without pay for Japanese companies during World War II. The decision directly contradicts the stance of the Japanese Supreme Court.

May 26, 2012: *JoongAng Daily* reports growing pressure on South Korea’s major companies to contribute funds to the foundation established to support conscripts. This follows POSCO’s decision to donate 10 billion won by 2014 to the state program to support Koreans who were conscripted to work in Japanese enterprises during World War II.

May 26, 2012: According to *JoongAng Daily*, Tokyo announced that the issue of conscripted laborers and compensation has been resolved. Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujimura states that the issue was completely resolved in the 1965 agreement between Korea and Japan.

May 30, 2012: Quoting Japan’s Defense Ministry, *Asahi Shimbun* claims that Japan is considering deploying *Aegis* destroyers near the West Sea to deal with the long-range missile threat from North Korea.

June 2, 2012: US, South Korea, and Japan agree to strengthen cooperation in deterring North Korean aggression at a meeting of senior defense ministers at the 11th Asia Security Summit Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore.

June 7, 2012: *Yonhap* covers the meeting between Korea’s Ruling Saenuri (New Frontier) Party Chairman Hwang Yoo-yea and Japanese Ambassador Muto Masatoshi. The main focus of the talks was economic relations including the bilateral free trade agreement.

June 12, 2012: *Yomiuri Shimbun* quotes Korean President Lee Mung-bak’s remarks urging Japan to slash its trade surplus with South Korea before resuming negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement.

June 13, 2012: Fielding questions concerning reports that North Korea’s ballistic missile launch vehicles were imported from China, Japanese Foreign Minister Gamba Koichiro states that “this is pertaining to intelligence” and that it is inappropriate for him to make any comments.

June 13-14, 2012: At the 2nd US-ROK Foreign and Defense Ministers’ (2+2) Meeting held in Washington, the ministers affirm the importance of trilateral security collaboration with Japan, and commit to expand the scope of that cooperation to include humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security, freedom of navigation, and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

June 21-22, 2012: US, South Korea, and Japan conduct a joint naval exercise in waters south of the Korean Peninsula.

June 21-22, 2012: *Mainichi* reports that journalists of *Kyodo News* and two Japanese broadcasters visited two burial sites near Pyongyang, which allegedly contain the remains of Japanese soldiers, military officials, and civilians from World War II.

June 26, 2012: *Mainichi* reports that a Japanese official in charge of collecting information on terrorism and nuclear proliferation apparently committed suicide following media reports of an intelligence leak regarding North Korean acquisition of missile launchers from China.

June 26, 2012: The South Korean government announces that it will sign a military pact with Japan. The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) provides the legal framework for the two countries to exchange and protect classified information.

June 27, 2012: Speaking at a press conference a day after the announcement by Seoul of the bilateral military pact, Foreign Minister Gamba confirms that Seoul and Tokyo are “making coordination towards early signing [of the pact].”

June 29, 2012: The signing of the GSOMIA falls through as the Korean media reports on the backlash regarding the surreptitious manner in which the pact was rushed through within the Korean Cabinet. The Korean ruling Saenuri Party requests the government to postpone the signing less than an hour before the scheduled ceremony.

June 29, 2012: According to the *Chosun Ilbo*, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta urged Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin during the “2+2” meeting in mid-June to rush the South Korea-Japan military accord, but that Seoul denies the US made the demand.

June 30, 2012: US State Department spokesperson tells *Yonhap* that if signed, the military accord between South Korea and Japan will be “useful, but it [the US] maintains a largely cautious stance on the sensitive bilateral issue.”

July 1, 2012: *Hankook Ilbo* reports that Korean beer exports to Japan have increased almost 40-fold within the past three years, while Korean beer imports from Japan have increased over two-fold within the same period.

July 2, 2012: An acerbic editorial in the *The Hankyoreh* claims that the postponing of the bilateral military pact has proven that the Lee administration is “brainless” ... “with poor judgment and weak ability to predict circumstances.”

July 2, 2012: According to a public opinion poll conducted by Korea’s *Naeil Shinmun* regarding the latest “fiasco” regarding the bilateral military pact with Japan, 63.3 percent of the Korean population did not foresee the pact being forged without prior resolution of historical issues such as the territorial spat over Dokdo/Takeshima and the issue of the “comfort women.”

July 2, 2012: North Korea's *Rodong Sinmun* accuses the Lee administration of being "a clan of traitors" aiming to "realize the wild ambition to invade the North, backed by Japan," for its attempt to push forward with the military accord with Japan.

July 3, 2012: *Yonhap* reports that due to the general public backlash against the GSOMIA, the Korean government is moving toward scrapping negotiations regarding the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) that had been put on hold.

July 5, 2012: Kim Tae-hyo, South Korean senior presidential secretary for national security strategy, resigns over the controversy surrounding the government's attempt to push the military pact with Tokyo.

July 9, 2012: The Association of Forcibly Conscripted Korean Women (AFCKW), a Gwangju-based civic group announces that its 16th round of negotiations with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. (MHI) to compensate Koreans exploited as forced laborers during Japanese colonial rule has ended without success.

July 12, 2012: The US, South Korea, and Japan agree to continue close consultations in dealing with common security threats including deterring provocations by North Korea. The decision was made on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

July 16, 2012: Korean Foreign Ministry official tells *Yonhap* that Seoul is considering changing the English term, "so-called comfort women" in international documents to "sex slave."

July 16, 2012: According to an article in *The Korea Times*, the main opposition Democratic United Party (DUP) is politicizing the failed attempt to forge a Korea-Japan defense pact, calling for the dismissal of Prime Minister Kim Hwang-sik for mishandling the controversial accord.

July 23, 2012: South Korea's Seoul National University Hospital signs a memorandum of understanding with Japan's Nagoya University Hospital to strengthen cooperation and develop joint programs.

July 24, 2012: A US-based civic group, Korean American Civic Empowerment (KACE), holds a ceremony at the Capitol in Washington DC, to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the landmark resolution on "comfort women." The resolution was first introduced by Representative Mike Honda (D-CA), and co-sponsored by 167 lawmakers.

July 25, 2012: *KCNA* criticizes Matsubara Jin, a Japanese state minister in charge of the "abduction issue," accusing him of manipulating past abductions of Japanese nationals by the North to "win popularity," branding such actions as a "politically motivated fraud."

July 25, 2012: US State Department official tells *Yonhap* that Japan's trafficking of Korean women for sex during World War II is an unassailable "fact." The official was responding to South Korean reports that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged the use of "enforced sex slaves" and not just "comfort women."

July 31, 2012: Japanese Cabinet endorses its 2012 defense white paper. Seoul immediately calls in Kurai Takashi, Japan's deputy chief of mission in Seoul to protest Tokyo's reiteration of its claims to Dokdo/Takeshima.

Aug. 9-10, 2012: Japanese Red Cross Society meets North Korean Red Cross in Beijing to discuss repatriation of the remains of those Japanese that died during and at around the time of World War II, as well as allowing visits to their grave sites by bereaved family members. This is the first such meeting since August 2002.

Aug.10, 2012: President Lee Myung-bak visits the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima, sparking Japan to recall its ambassador from Seoul. This marks the first time that a Korean president has visited the islands.

Aug. 14, 2012: President Lee urges Japanese Emperor Akihito to apologize to Koreans that lost their life fighting for independence from the Japanese during the colonial era, if the Emperor is to visit South Korea.

Aug. 15, 2012: Two Japanese Cabinet ministers – National Public Safety Commission Chairman Matsubara Jin and Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Minister Hata Yuichiro – visit the Yasukuni Shrine on the 67th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II.

Aug. 16, 2012: *KCNA* criticizes Japan for its plans to raise the “abduction issue” at the bilateral meeting scheduled for the end of the month.

Aug. 17, 2012: Japanese Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko sends a letter to President Lee via the embassy in Seoul, describing Lee's visit to Dokdo/Takeshima and the remarks about needing an apology from Japan's Emperor if he were to visit the South as regrettable. Noda also urges the territorial dispute be resolved at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Aug. 21, 2012: Tokyo sends Seoul a “note verbale” about jointly referring the territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima to the ICJ. South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan dismisses the proposal, claiming that it is “not worth consideration.” Seoul returns the note on Aug. 23.

Aug. 21, 2012: South Korean Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Unification adopts resolution pressing Japan to withdraw its territorial claims over Dokdo/Takeshima.

Aug. 24, 2012: Japan's Parliament adopts resolutions “strongly condemning” South Korea's recent actions regarding the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima and calling the successful landing by Chinese activists on Diaoyu/Senkaku “extremely regrettable.”

Aug. 24, 2012: *Yonhap* reports that the ROK military is looking to go ahead with its schedule to conduct regular military drills in waters near Dokdo/Takeshima in early September.

Aug. 29-30, 2012: Pyongyang and Tokyo meet at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, marking the first bilateral meeting since August 2008.

