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JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

ON BOARD FOR A DUAL TRACK APPROACH

DAVID KANG, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
KYURI PARK, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

With the inauguration of Moon Jae-in in South Korea on May 10, relations between Seoul and Tokyo witnessed a significant turnaround over the summer months of 2017. In particular, the dispute over the “comfort women” agreement reached in 2015 escalated as the Moon administration reversed course, launching a task force on July 31 to review the agreement. Meanwhile, concerns that measures the Park administration had adopted to improve security ties with Japan might be revoked were dispelled when Seoul and Tokyo agreed to maintain close security cooperation on the North Korea issue. In addition, despite the continued tension over Dokdo/Takeshima and Japan’s wartime crimes, Seoul and Tokyo chose to “pursue forward-looking relations” through diplomatic exchanges. Given that the Moon administration has indicated that it wants relations to go smoothly regardless of the comfort women issue, we expect diplomatic exchanges and security cooperation to continue. Sustained improvement will depend on South Korea’s “final” decision on the 2015 comfort women agreement.

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From a bundle deal approach to a dual-track approach

Given the new administration and the switch from a conservative to liberal leader in South Korea, changes in the foreign policy stance of the South Korean government were more influential. The Park Geun-hye administration (February 2013 – March 2017) employed a “bundle deal” approach toward Japan, demanding a change in Abe’s attitude toward history as a prerequisite to resolving other issues. Moon Jae-in’s administration has relied on a “dual track” approach to Japan during the first four months of its tenure, separating issues.

The Moon government took a critical approach to the history issue by revisiting the 2015 “comfort women” deal. However, at the same time, Seoul strengthened diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation with Tokyo. President Park refused to hold a bilateral summit with Prime Minister Abe Shinzo until her third year in the office, while President Moon agreed to hold a summit with Abe “as soon as possible” in their first [telephone](#) talks held a day after Moon’s inauguration. The first [summit](#) was July 7, on the sidelines of the Group of 20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany. At the meeting, the two leaders agreed to resume “shuttle diplomacy” – annual reciprocal visits by the leaders – that was suspended in December 2011, and agreed to maintain close cooperation on policies toward North Korea, despite differences over the comfort women agreement.

War of words

Contention over the 2015 comfort women agreement began as soon as Moon assumed office. Although Moon had explicitly indicated his intent to [renegotiate](#) the agreement during the campaign, once in office he has toned down his rhetoric and refrained from specifically using the word “renegotiation.”

In the first telephone call between Abe and Moon on May 11, Moon [said](#) Japan should “face up to history” to avoid making historical issues an obstacle to moving toward mature and cooperative relations. Abe [expressed](#) Japan’s expectation for “faithful implementation” of the agreement. Moon replied that the “reality is that the majority of South Koreans could not emotionally accept the agreement over the sexual slavery issue,” and “there are limits to

government’s capacity in managing the issues taking place in the private sector.” Thus, they needed “more time and effort” to solve the issue.

The differences continued, first, at their [summit](#) in Germany on July 7, and then through regular diplomatic exchanges. President Moon’s special envoy Moon Hee-sang visited Japan from May 17–20. When he met Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio on May 17, envoy Moon [relayed](#) President Moon’s position that many South Koreans disapprove of the 2015 agreement. The envoy also reminded the minister of Japan’s past acknowledgment of the wartime atrocities in the 1993 Kono Statement and the 1995 Murayama Statement, calling for joint efforts to resolve the problem with wisdom. Kishida did not comment specifically on the agreement. Instead, he said that Japan hopes to pursue forward-looking relations with the Moon administration. During the visit, Moon handed over a letter from the president saying that he hopes to restart frequent exchange visits by top government officials.

As a sign of consent to the resumption of “shuttle diplomacy,” Prime Minister Abe sent Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Nikai Toshihiro as his special envoy to South Korea from June 10–13. The thorniness of the comfort women issue was evident at a meeting with South Korean lawmakers on June 10, when Nikai called for efforts to “eradicate” those “seeking any tricks” to spoil South Korea and Japan relations. Although, he did not specify the target or the context of those remarks, both South Korean and Japanese [media](#) interpreted them as referring to those demanding renegotiation of the 2015 agreement. A few days later, South Korea’s Foreign Ministry called for Japan to be more [careful](#) in making comments on bilateral relations. During a meeting between President Moon and Nikai on June 12, Moon [reiterated](#) that, “South Koreans do not accept the 2015 comfort women agreement” and both countries should understand “more time is needed” on this issue. Later in June, Moon went further and [urged](#) the Japanese government to “take legal responsibility for its actions” and “make an official apology” to the victims of wartime sexual slavery.

The contention over the comfort women agreement also took place at the ministerial level. Even before Kang Kyung-hwa assumed the position of foreign minister of South Korea,

Kang's background as the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights raised expectations that she would [review](#) the issue of Japan's wartime sexual enslavement of Korean women. Kang expressed her willingness to meet the victims of Japan's wartime sexual slavery on May 25, the day she returned to Seoul from New York, when she visited a house sheltering some of those [victims](#) and stated that "victims" should be at the center of resolving the "comfort women" issue. The following day, Japanese Defense Minister Inada Tomomi said her government regards the "comfort women" issue with South Korea as "fully resolved." Inada noted that Seoul and Tokyo have an "irreversible and final" agreement. She added that the agreement is "a country-to-country agreement" and "[Japan has already done its part in the agreement](#)" during a session at the Shangri-La Dialogue on June 3.



IFM Nominee Kang Kyung-hwa visiting shelter of former comfort women (Yonhap)

The distance between the foreign ministries on the comfort women agreement was evident at the National Assembly confirmation hearing of Kang Kyung-hwa and Kang's first phone call with Japanese counterpart Kishida after taking office. At the National Assembly [hearing](#) held on June 7, confirming her eligibility as the foreign minister, Kang said, "From a standpoint of a person who had been involved in human rights affairs at the UN, I found (the deal) very strange in many aspects. Doubts linger over whether it was surely reached with a victims-oriented approach." She added that she "will try to gather wisdom from the victims' perspective and continue talks with Japan so that sincere measures will be taken," insinuating that she would seek talks with Japan to revisit the agreement, which has been criticized for not sufficiently reflecting the opinions of victims. Kang's expression of interest in the issue led three victims of Japan's wartime sexual slavery

to come forward in [support](#) of her. During the first phone conversation between Kishida and Kang on June 21, Kishida [urged](#) South Korea to "steadily implement" the agreement. Kang repeated Moon's position that, "The reality is most of our people and victims are not able to accept the deal, and both sides should directly face the point and make mutual efforts to resolve the issue in a wise manner."

Actions speak louder than words

South Korea and Japan's dispute over the 2015 deal escalated as the Moon administration approved policies that could be regarded as a rejection of the agreement from the Japanese government's perspective. Given that the agreement is confidential, its specific terms can be only be inferred from the joint press [announcement](#) made by Foreign Minister Kishida and then-Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se on Dec. 28, 2015. Four major points of agreement [were summarized](#) in an article originally in *The Japan News*:

Japanese government's responsibility	The government is "painfully aware of responsibilities." Prime Minister Abe Shinzo "expresses anew his most sincere apologies and remorse."
Support projects	The South Korean government establishes a foundation aimed at providing support for former comfort women, with the Japanese government providing the fund with a lump sum from its budget. The two governments conduct projects "for recovering the honor and dignity and healing the psychological wounds of all former comfort women."
Refraining from criticism	The Japanese government confirms that the "issue is resolved finally and irreversibly." The two governments will "refrain from accusing or criticizing each other" in the international community, such as at the United Nations.
Girl statue	The South Korean government will "strive to solve" the issue of a girl statue placed in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul through measures such as consulting with related organizations.

Final and irreversible?

Since announcing the agreement in December 2015, Japan's official stance has been that the comfort woman issue is resolved "finally and irreversibly" and that both governments should implement it "faithfully." Thus, whenever South Korea implemented new measures regarding comfort women, Japan reiterated that position. For instance, on July 18, President Moon [approved](#) a plan by the State Affairs Planning Advisory to designate a "national memorial day" to remember the victims of sex crimes committed by Japanese soldiers during World War II. On July 21, Tokyo [lodged a protest](#) with Seoul about the plan, saying, "As we have been pursuing a future-oriented Japan-South Korea relationship, we cannot allow (South Korea) to cover old ground."

On July 31, South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs took another step by officially [launching](#) a task force to review the comfort women agreement, announcing that it will focus on fact-finding and assessing the processes leading up to the signing of the agreement, as well as its terms. The task force is under the direct control of Foreign Minister Kang and she specifically asked the nine-member team to examine the agreement from the perspective of the victims of sexual slavery. In response, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide [stated](#) that, "both South Korea and Japan should acknowledge that the 2015 agreement resolved the [comfort women] issue finally and irreversibly," and "also, the agreement has been highly praised by the international community and it is extremely important that both Japan and South Korea implement it with responsibility. Thus, the Japanese government will take various opportunities to tenaciously urge the South Korean government to faithfully implement the agreement."

Reconciliation and Healing Foundation

The Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, established to provide support for former comfort women as a part of the agreement, ended under the Moon administration. The foundation received ¥1 billion (\$8.7 million) from Japan to conduct projects "for recovering the honor and dignity and healing the psychological wounds of all former comfort women." However, South Koreans have been critical since its launch in July 28, 2016 due to suspicions that the organization provided

reparation funds to some former comfort women without first gaining their assent. On July 23, 2017, less than a year after its establishment, the head of the foundation Kim Tae-hyeon [resigned](#) amidst rising doubts about the role and purpose of the foundation after President Park's impeachment. On July 27, South Korean Gender Equality and Family Minister Chung Hyun-back stated that the ministry had [launched](#) an inspection team that will review and assess activities of the foundation.

UNESCO's Memory of the World Register and museum

In 2016, an alliance of civic groups from eight countries, including South Korea, asked the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to list records of Japan's wartime sexual enslavement of women on its Memory of World Register. The documentary records included photos and recorded tapes of the victim's statements, their treatment, and the investigation process. However, Japan has attempted to prevent records related to the comfort women from being registered. Japan, currently the largest donor to UNESCO, has [withheld](#) annual funding to the organization for two years in a row, according to *Hankyoreh's* report on May 8. On July 10, Gender Equality and Family Minister Chung Hyun-back announced government plans to set up a [museum](#) for Korean victims of Japan's wartime sexual slavery by 2020 in downtown Seoul, at "a place easily accessible so that it can play a role as a mecca for people to remember and recall the human rights violations that the war brought." On July 11, a day after Chung's remarks, Foreign Minister Kishida lodged a [protest](#) with the South Korean government over its decision to support the UNESCO bid. Tokyo also expressed opposition to the museum project, arguing that the project runs counter to the philosophy of the 2015 comfort women agreement.

Girl Statues

One of the [terms](#) of the 2015 agreement was the removal of "girl statues," a statue symbolizing comfort women that had been placed in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul and the Japanese Consulate in Busan. In the joint press announcement that followed the signing of the agreement, then-Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se said South Korea will "strive to solve" the issue of a girl statue through measures such as

“consulting with related organizations.” Since then, the Park administration tried to remove the girl statue, but faced fierce protests from the “Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan,” who erected the statue in December 2011, and from the South Korean public.

After Moon’s inauguration, the “girl statue” issue took a new turn. The Moon government did not offer outright support of the statues, nor did it exert pressure on civic organizations or the local governments to remove them. For instance, rather than removing the statue, the Busan Metropolitan Assembly passed an [ordinance](#) that entrusts municipalities with the protection and care of statues symbolizing the comfort women on June 30. The Japanese government expressed concern over the ordinance because it is likely to make it even more difficult for Tokyo to demand removal of a statue erected in front of the Consulate General in Busan. Foreign Minister Kishida said that, “Moves to enable the statue of the girl to remain where it is run counter to our country’s stance,” at a news conference in Tokyo.



2 Display of Comfort Women Statues at Cheongye Stream Square, Seoul (Yonhap)

The statue issue has taken on a life of its own, and the number of comfort women statues in South Korea has increased during the first four months of Moon administration. On Aug. 3 and 4, respectively, the city of [Yongin](#) and [Hongseong](#) County announced that they would unveil a statue commemorating comfort women on Aug. 15, Korean National Liberation Day. On Aug. 14, marking “international comfort women day,” a series of events were [held](#) in South Korea, which included the display of 500 statues of a girl symbolizing comfort women at Cheongye Stream Square in central Seoul. Five

public buses that passed the Japanese Embassy in central Seoul carried a girl's statue to commemorate the day and the traditional Korean folk song, *Arirang*, was played as the buses passed the embassy. On Aug. 15, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga [expressed](#) his concern over the parade of buses at a press conference saying, “Japan and South Korea are making efforts to develop a future-oriented relationship,” and the setting up of the statues “may put a damper on the efforts.”

The dispute between Korea and Japan over the statues has also affected the United States. On May 23, a comfort women statue rejected by the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta found a new home in [Brookhaven](#) after a vote by the city council of Brookhaven. On June 10, Japan’s consul general in Atlanta, Takashi Thomas Shinozuka, remarked in an interview with a local US newspaper that there is “no evidence” that the military sexually enslaved women during WWII and rather that the women were “paid prostitutes.” Further, he urged the Brookhaven City Council to withdraw its decision to accept a comfort women memorial, claiming that the statue is a “[symbol of hatred and resentment](#).” South Korea issued a strong [protest](#). On June 27, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson said, “If the report is true, it’s unbelievable that such a high-ranking diplomat would make that statement... It would be a really inappropriate remark that goes against the international community’s consensus that the ‘comfort women’ issue is about wartime sexual violence, and that it was a gross violation of human rights.” Despite the controversy, the comfort women statue was [unveiled](#) in a Brookhaven park on June 30 as scheduled. About 200 people attended the ceremony, including a surviving victim of the slavery, city officials, and South Korean activists.



3 Comfort Women Statue on a Bus on August 15 (Yonhap)

North Korea – pushing Japan and South Korea together

In contrast to the squabbling over the comfort women issue, the Moon administration strengthened security cooperation with Japan on North Korea. Moon implemented the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a controversial military intelligence pact that was signed by the Park and Abe administrations in November 2016. From May 17–20, President Moon’s [special envoy](#) Moon Hee-sang visited Japan and met Prime Minister Abe and Foreign Minister Kishida. Special envoy Moon told Abe and Kishida that South Korea and Japan pursue “identical values” and the leaders of the two nations should meet at an early date and frequently to discuss North Korea. Abe and Kishida stated that South Korea and Japan are “most important” neighbors who “[share strategic interests](#)” and Japan plans to “pursue forward-looking relations” with the Moon administration. On July 27, Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine Yasumasa [noted](#) that South Korea is an important country for Japan that “shares strategic interests” and that their good relations are “indispensable” for the sake of peace and stability in Asia at a forum held in Seoul.

Since the Moon administration took office on May 10, Pyongyang [fired](#) missiles seven times and have successfully launched an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) twice, on July 4 and July 28. Under those circumstances, Seoul and Tokyo shared classified information on Pyongyang’s activities based on the GSOMIA and repeatedly expressed a strong commitment to close security cooperation against North Korean provocations. On May 14, Pyongyang launched a *Hwasong-12* medium range missile, from a test site in Kusong. In response to the launch, then-Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se and Foreign Minister Kishida held [telephone talks](#), where they exchanged information on the launch, agreed to maintain close cooperation between the two countries and with the US, and agreed that China and the international community should cooperate in dealing with the North Korea problem. On May 29, North Korea fired a short-range missile that traveled 450 km and landed inside Japan’s exclusive economic zone where fishing and cargo ships were active. Following the launch, Moon and Abe talked on the [phone](#), agreeing that the repeated provocations by North Korea were “totally

unacceptable” and reconfirming their commitment to close cooperation on North Korea issues. Abe stated that dialogue with North Korea for the sake of dialogue is not worthwhile and Moon expressed his appreciation for the leading role that Japan played in issuing a strong communiqué on the issues regarding North Korea at the G7 Summit on May 26–27. On June 8, South Korean National Assembly Speaker Chung Sye-kyun, Japan’s House of Representatives Speaker Oshima Tadamori, and House of Councilors Speaker Date Chuichi met and called for the two countries’ closer cooperation against North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats.

South Korea and Japan also strengthened trilateral cooperation against North Korean provocations with the US. On July 7, on the eve of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, President Donald Trump, President Moon, and Prime Minister Abe issued a [joint statement](#) condemning North Korea’s unprecedented July 4 test firing of a ballistic missile with intercontinental range and agreeing to tougher UNSC sanctions against North Korea. On the same day, Moon and Abe held their [first meeting](#), agreeing to close bilateral cooperation on North Korea issue.

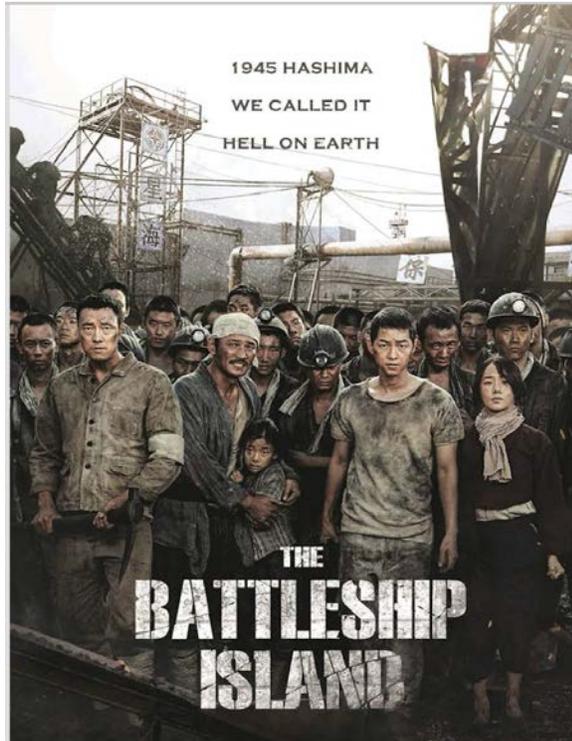


4First bilateral summit between Abe and Moon in Hamburg, Germany (Chosun)

Top officials from Japan and South Korea continued to meet, as Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and Foreign Minister Kono Taro met on the sidelines of the ASEAN+3 meetings in Manila in early August and [promised](#) to cooperate to ensure the faithful implement the new UN Security Council Resolution 2371. They underscored that China, Russia, and ASEAN have important roles to play in pressuring North Korea and making UN sanctions more effective.

Kang and Tillerson also “[strongly backed](#)” Japan’s efforts to address the issue of Japanese abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s.

Battleship Island



5Poster of the film *The Battleship Island* (CJ Entertainment)

Despite increased interaction between Japan and South Korea over the North Korea issue, other contentious issues remain. In July, a new South Korean film, *The Battleship Island*, depicted the atrocities suffered by Koreans forced to provide labor for coal mining on Hashima Island during Japan’s colonial rule of Korea in the early 1900s. The film brought an immediate response from official Japanese sources. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga [dismissed](#) *Battleship Island* as a “fictional” film. The South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson responded by saying that, “It is a clear fact that many Koreans were forced into labor on *Battleship Island* in the past under cruel conditions against their will.” The spokesperson also prodded Japan to implement its promise to acknowledge and commemorate the forced labor on the coal-mining island and other UNESCO-listed world heritage sites. CJ Entertainment, the distributor of the film, held a [prescreening](#) for 160 foreign diplomats in South Korea on July 25 and another at UNESCO headquarters in Paris for officials and diplomats

on July 31. The distributor said the events increased the world’s awareness of the dark history of Hashima Island where hundreds of Koreans were forced to work as coal miners and sex slaves during World War II. On Aug. 4, a South Korean civic group announced that it would unveil a [statue](#), named “Hunch of Liberation,” in the city of Incheon, South Korea, to commemorate victims of forced labor under Japan’s colonial rule.

Dokdo/Takeshima Islets

The territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima islets remained a sensitive issue. On May 17, [Asahi Shimbun](#) reported that Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs lodged a complaint against a South Korean ocean research vessel’s intrusion into Japan’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima islets “without permission.” South Korea [dismissed](#) the charge with the Foreign Ministry spokesperson saying, “There is no need for us to ask for prior admission, and we don’t have to do such a thing.” From June 15–16, the South Korean Navy held a two-day “[Dokdo defense drill](#),” to practice defending Dokdo from possible aggression by “outside forces.” On June 15, Director General of the Foreign Ministry’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Kanasugi Kenji [told](#) a senior diplomat at the South Korean Embassy in Tokyo, Lee Hee-sup, that South Korea’s Dokdo defense drill “is unacceptable ... extremely regrettable in light of our country’s stance” on the sovereignty of the islets. In response, South Korean Navy’s spokesperson said, “It’s natural (for us) to conduct the drills since it’s a regular one aimed at defending our territory.”

Over the summer, the dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima escalated as both Seoul and Tokyo announced further plans to claim the islets. On July 19, South Korea published the [administration’s five-year management plan](#), listing 100 issues the Moon government will seek to deal with. The plan included bolstering South Korea’s control over the Dokdo islets from 2018, and expanding and strengthening berthing and security facilities at key ports on the islets for use by the South Korean Coast Guard. On Aug. 2, Japan’s Defense Ministry responded by releasing a [white paper](#) referring to Takeshima as its sovereign territory. It was the 13th straight year Japan has made that claim in its annual defense paper.

Seoul and Tokyo made efforts to advance their territorial claims over Dokdo/Takeshima within the international community, as well. In June, Japan's *Kyodo News* reported that the Japanese government left messages on the websites of approximately 70 overseas diplomatic missions, encouraging readers to report to the embassies if they see any maps or publications in which the islets are named "Dokdo" or its surrounding waters referred to as the "East Sea." In response, the South Korean Foreign Ministry stated on Aug. 7 that it would [promote](#) the use of the term "East Sea" at the 11th meeting of UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names scheduled for Aug. 8.

Prospects

It is likely that South Korea and Japan will continue to pursue the dual-track approach in their bilateral relations in the remaining months of 2017. Remarks by President Moon and Prime Minister Abe on Aug. 15 – National Liberation Day of Korea from Japanese colonial rule and the 72nd anniversary of the end of World War II – suggest that Seoul and Tokyo will continue efforts to improve bilateral relations and strengthen security cooperation against North Korea, but remain divided on the history issue. Moon [emphasized](#) that historical issues between Seoul and Tokyo cannot be overlooked, saying, "In dealing with history issues between South Korea and Japan, such as Japan's sexual slavery and forced labor of Korean people, there exists an international standard of restoring one's honor, compensation, fact-finding and a promise to prevent a recurrence of such events based on universal values of humanity and national consensus. Our government will stand by these principles." Meanwhile, Abe [sent](#) a symbolic offering to the Yasukuni Shrine, a controversial war shrine in Tokyo that honors 2.4 million war dead of Japan, including 14 Class-A war criminals, but refrained from making a visit himself to the shrine on Aug. 15. Indeed, [none](#) of the members of Abe's Cabinet paid their respects to Yasukuni Shrine on that day. This is noteworthy in that it was the first time since 1980 that no member of Cabinets of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-led governments visited the shrine on the war anniversary. This change in behavior indicates the Japanese government's will to improve relations with South Korea.

The most important and pressing issue for the autumn will be North Korea's missile launches,

which have driven tensions between the United States and North Korea to new heights. South Korea and Japan will work with the US to dampen both North Korean and US reactions to each other. Whether there is any way forward on the North Korea issue remains to be seen. On bilateral issues, South Korea and Japan seem to be repeating the "one step forward, one step back" dance they have conducted for years, and the coming months appear set for more of the same.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

MAY – AUGUST 2017

May 3, 2017: Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine Yasumasa urges South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se to remove “comfort woman” statues. Yun notes the need for all parties to respect the spirit of the agreement and for the South Korean government to gain the understanding of the civic group and others who set up the statues.

May 3, 2017: South Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family states that the ministry will distribute the 216-page report on Japan’s wartime sexual slavery of Korean women to government agencies and post it online in the coming week.

May 4-5, 2017: South Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family modifies the report on Japan’s wartime sexual slavery distributed online and offline after receiving complaints from some contributors that the positive description of the 2015 comfort women agreement does not reflect their view and the decision to publish the report was not discussed with them in advance.

May 5, 2017: Finance ministers and central bank governors of South Korea, Japan, and China meet in Yokohama to coordinate policies and strengthen cooperation to fight trade protectionism. The top officials also attend the ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors’ Meeting scheduled on the same day.

May 8, 2017: Japan withholds annual payment of ¥3.48 billion in funding for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

May 9, 2017: Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio issue statements congratulating South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s election victory and urge a future-oriented South Korea-Japan relationship in a broad range of fields as each other’s most important neighbors that share strategic interests.

May 10, 2017: Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga tells reporters, “The [comfort women] agreement has been highly praised by the international community and it is extremely important that both Japan and South Korea implement it with responsibility,” and “The Japanese government will take various opportunities to tenaciously urge the steady implementation of the agreement.”

May 11, 2017: President Moon and Prime Minister Abe hold telephone talks. Abe congratulates Moon on his election victory and they agree on developing a future-oriented South Korea-Japan relationship and holding a summit meeting as soon as possible.

May 13, 2017: UN Committee against Torture calls on Japan and South Korea to revise the 2015 comfort women accord to “ensure that the surviving victims of sexual slavery during World War II are provided with redress, including the right to compensation and rehabilitation and the right to truth, reparation and assurances of non-repetitions.”

May 14, 2017: Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se and Foreign Minister Kishida hold telephone talk. They exchange information on North Korea’s ballistic missile launch, agree to maintain close cooperation between two countries and the US.

May 16, 2017: South Korean Foreign Ministry says it is reviewing a UN Committee against Torture’s recommendation to modify the 2015 comfort women deal.

May 17, 2017: Asahi Shimbun reports that Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs lodged a complaint against a South Korean ocean research vessel’s intrusion into Japan’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima islets “without permission.”

May 18, 2017: South Korea dismisses Japanese government’s protest of maritime research near Dokdo/Takeshima islets.

May 23, 2017: A comfort women statue rejected by the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta finds a new home in Brookhaven after a vote by the city council of Brookhaven.

May 25, 2017: South Korean Foreign Minister-nominee Kang Kyung-hwa, expresses willingness to meet the victims of Japan's wartime sexual slavery on the day she returns to South Korea from New York.

May 28-29, 2017: Japanese media, including Kyodo News, The Japan Times, and Mainichi, reports that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Prime Minister Abe that he supports the 2015 comfort women agreement during their meeting in Italy on the sidelines of the G7 Summit. Secretary general's office rejects Japanese Foreign Ministry's claim.

May 30, 2017: Following the missile launch by North Korea on May 29, President Moon and Prime Minister Abe hold telephone talk. They share the view that provocations by North Korea are "totally unacceptable" and agree to maintain close cooperation on North Korea issue. Moon expresses appreciation for the leading role that Japan played in issuing a strong communique on the issues regarding North Korea at the recent G7 Summit.

June 2, 2017: Foreign Minister-nominee Kang visits a house sheltering Japan's wartime sexual slavery victims and remarks that "victims" should be at center of resolving "comfort women" issue.

June 3, 2017: Japanese Defense Minister Inada Tomomi says her government regards comfort women issue with South Korea as fully resolved.

June 8, 2017: South Korea, Japan, and China hold Second Trilateral High-Level Dialogue on the Arctic in Tokyo, adopting a joint statement agreeing to enhance cooperation on Arctic research.

June 8, 2017: South Korean and Japanese parliamentary leaders meet and call for the two countries closer cooperation against North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

June 8, 2017: Three victims of Japan's wartime sexual slavery come forward in support of Foreign Minister-nominee Kang.

June 10, 2017: Japanese government calls on its citizens abroad to contact Japanese diplomatic missions if they find a map labeled as the "East Sea," the name favored by South Korea, instead of the "Sea of Japan."

June 12, 2017: President Moon tells Nikai Toshihiro, Prime Minister Abe's special envoy, that the people of South Korea do not accept the 2015 comfort women agreement and "more time is needed" to resolve the issue.

June 13, 2017: Seoul Central District Court concludes that South Korean sex slavery victims still have individual rights to sue the Japanese government for compensation despite the 2015 agreement.

June 14-15, 2017: South Korean Navy announces a two-day "Dokdo defense drill," an effort to defend Dokdo from the possible aggression by "outside forces."

June 15, 2017: South Korean government condemns Japanese government's recent order to its foreign missions to report maps with marking of "Dokdo" or "East Sea."

June 20, 2017: In a newspaper interview with The Washington Post, President Moon urges Japanese government to "take legal responsibility for its actions" and "make an official apology" to former comfort women.

June 20, 2017: South Korea calls in the minister for political affairs at the Japanese embassy, Kitagawa Katsuro, to voice strong protest against Japan's "repeated" and "unjustified" territorial claims to Dokdo islets in the new education manuals.

June 21, 2017: Foreign Minister Kang and Foreign Minister Kishida hold phone talks. Mainichi reports that the ministers were at odds over the 2015 comfort women deal.

June 23, 2017: A local newspaper reports that Japanese consul general in Atlanta Shinozuka Takashi stated in an interview with the newspaper that there is "no evidence" that the military sexually enslaved women during WWII; rather, the women were "paid prostitutes."

June 27, 2017: South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson condemns Japanese Consul General Shinozuka's comment in a press conference.

June 30, 2017: Busan Metropolitan Assembly passes ordinance that entrusts municipalities with the protection and care of statues symbolizing the “comfort women.”

June 30, 2017: Comfort women statue unveiled in the city of Brookhaven, despite Japanese efforts to block it.

July 4, 2017: Blue House announces that President Moon and Prime Minister Abe will hold their first summit on July 7 on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany.

July 4, 2017: South Korea’s Gender Equality and Family Minister–nominee Chung Hyun–back says that she will examine the “Reconciliation and Healing Foundation” closely, resume the ministry’s support to register the comfort women related materials to the UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register, and restart publishing a white paper on comfort women.

July 7, 2017: President Donald Trump, President Moon, and Prime Minister Abe issue a joint statement condemning North Korea’s testfiring of a ballistic missile on July 4 and agreeing to draw tougher UNSC sanctions on North Korea.

July 7, 2017: President Moon and Prime Minister Abe hold the first summit meeting at the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany.

July 10, 2017: During her visit to a shelter for former sex slaves, South Korean Gender Equality and Family Minister Chung says that the government plans to set up a museum for Korean victims of Japan’s wartime sexual slavery in Seoul by 2020.

July 11, 2017: Foreign Minister Kishida lodges a protest over South Korea’s support for efforts for UNESCO listing of documents related to comfort women. South Korean Foreign Ministry states that, “The government’s consistent stance is to continue efforts to make the comfort women issue a lesson from history and pass down to future generations the truth of the issue.”

July 18, 2017: South Korea announces that it has approved a plan by the State Affairs Planning Advisory to designate a national memorial day in 2018 to remember the victims of sex crimes committed by Japanese soldiers during the World War II.

July 19, 2017: South Korea publishes administration's five-year management plan.

July 20, 2017: A joint annual opinion poll by Genron NPO in Japan and the East Asia Institute of South Korea shows that 53.8 percent of Japanese respondents and 75 percent of South Korean respondents think that the 2015 comfort women deal did not resolve the dispute.

July 23, 2017: Head of “Reconciliation and Healing Foundation” Kim Tae–hyeon resigns.

July 25, 2017: South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson says that a task force to review the comfort women deal is soon to be launched and the ministry is “in the middle of preparations for personnel composition of the task force.”

July 27, 2017: Gender Equality and Family Minister Chung says the ministry has launched an inspection team to review and assess the “Reconciliation and Healing Foundation,”

July 27, 2017: Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine Yasumasa calls on South Korea to “faithfully” implement the 2015 comfort women deal at a forum held in Seoul.

July 29, 2017: Foreign Minister Kang has separate emergency phone calls with US Secretary of State Tillerson and Foreign Minister Kishida to discuss responses to North Korea’s missile launch on July 28.

July 31, 2017: South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs declares that South Korea has officially launched a task force to review comfort women agreement.

Aug. 1, 2017: In response to South Korea’s launching of a task force to review the comfort women agreement, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga states that South Korea should note that the agreement is “final and irreversible” and should implement it faithfully.

Aug. 2, 2017: Japan’s Defense Ministry releases white paper that refers to Takeshima islets as its sovereign territory, the 13th straight year Japan has made that claim in its defense paper.

Aug. 4, 2017: Top security officials of South Korea, US, and Japan hold a video conference and agree to maximize pressure on North Korea to stop its missile and nuclear provocations.

Aug. 5-6, 2017: UN Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopts new sanctions resolution (Resolution 2371) on North Korea.

Aug. 6, 2017: South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries states that fishery goods exports to Japan increased 9.1 percent on-year to \$82.5 million.

Aug. 7, 2017: During a telephone conversation, President Moon and Prime Minister Abe agree to put maximum pressure on North Korea until it chooses the path of dialogue.

Aug. 7, 2017: Foreign Ministers from South Korea, Japan, China, and Southeast Asian nations share concerns on North Korea's provocations and agree to bolster financial cooperation at the annual ASEAN+3 meeting in Manila. South Korea, Japan, and the US foreign ministers meet to discuss North Korea issue on the sidelines of the ASEAN meetings. Foreign Minister Kang and Secretary of State Tillerson "strongly back" Japan's efforts to address the issue of Japanese abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s.

Aug. 7, 2017: ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) issues a statement expressing "grave concern" over North Korea's escalation of regional tensions and urging Pyongyang to "fully" comply with UNSC resolutions.

Aug. 7, 2017: Yonhap reports that South Korean Foreign Ministry will promote use of "East Sea" at the 11th meeting of UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

Aug. 8, 2017: Foreign Minister Kang and Foreign Minister Kono vow to step up joint efforts to rein in North Korea and improve national ties at their bilateral talks in Manila on the sidelines of ASEAN meetings.

Aug. 8, 2017: Gwangju District Court of South Korea rules in favor of victims of Japanese forced labor during World War II, ordering the Japanese firm Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to pay compensation to an elderly surviving victim and a family member of a deceased victim.

Aug. 8, 2017: South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs issues a commentary "strongly protesting" Japan's renewed claim to Dokdo islets in its annual defense white paper and calls for "immediate withdrawal." South Korea summons a minister at Japan's Embassy in Seoul, Mizushima Koichi, and a defense official at the embassy to lodge a protest against the claim.

Aug. 14, 2017: A series of events are held for international comfort women day in South Korea, including the display of 500 statues of a girl symbolizing comfort women at Cheongye Stream Square in central Seoul. Five public buses pass the Japanese Embassy in central Seoul carrying a girl's statue and the Korean folk song, Arirang, is played when the buses pass the embassy.

Aug. 14, 2017: Naver, South Korea's major Internet portal operator, adds updated images of the "Dokdo islets in the East Sea" on its online map service a day before the 72nd Anniversary of the National Liberation day.

Aug. 15, 2017: At the 72nd Anniversary of the National Liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule ceremony, President Moon urges other Northeast Asian countries, including Japan, to participate in institutionalizing regional security and economic cooperation.

Aug. 15, 2017: Prime Minister Abe sends offering to Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, but he and all his Cabinet members refrain from visiting the shrine. Senior Vice Foreign Minister Masahisa Sato and two groups of Japanese lawmakers visit the shrine. South Korean Foreign Ministry issues a statement of "deep concern" over the Shrine visit by the Japanese politicians.

Aug. 15, 2017: Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga expresses concern over the operations of buses in Seoul carrying statues that symbolize comfort women.

Aug. 17, 2017: Japanese government confirms that all its citizens residing in South Korea can be admitted to shelters designated by the South Korean government should North Korea attack the South. The evacuation plan would include repatriating Japanese nationals after they evacuate to shelters. South Korea has not consented to the dispatch of Japanese Self-Defense Forces' transport vessels and aircraft.

Aug. 20, 2017: Jeju Air Co., South Korea's leading budget carrier, announces that it will add another route to Japan in November to offset falling demand on Chinese routes.

Aug. 21, 2017: President Moon meets Japanese members of the Japan-Korea Parliamentarians' Union at the Blue House. He urges improved Seoul-Tokyo cooperation on security and hosting of a series of global sporting events in the region, despite the need to address history issues.

Aug. 22, 2017: Third Korea-Japanese Youth Debate Forum is held; the theme is the "Korean and Japanese youth's role to create a joint youth culture" at the National Assembly in Seoul.

Aug. 25, 2017: President Moon and Prime Minister Abe hold telephone conversation and agree to maintain sanctions and pressure on North Korea, but to resolve the nuclear issue through peaceful measures.

Aug. 25, 2017: At 19th Trilateral Environmental Ministers Meeting between South Korea, China, and Japan in Suwon, South Korea, ministers agree to step up cooperation on air pollution.

Aug. 26, 2017: At the ninth annual Culture Ministers Talks held in Kyoto, South Korea, China, and Japan vow to cooperate too ensure Seoul's successful hosting of the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang and to increase cultural exchanges among the three countries.

Aug. 28, 2017: Japanese government returns a complaint filed by 11 South Korean comfort women seeking compensation for forced sex with Japanese soldiers during World War II. A South Korean victim of Japan's wartime sexual slavery, Ha Sang-sook, dies at the age of 89, reducing the number of surviving victims to 36.

Aug. 30, 2017: President Moon and Prime Minister Abe agree to increase pressure on North Korea to an "extreme" level and vow to push for new and stronger sanctions by the UN Security Council. Top security officials of South Korea, the United States, and Japan hold three-way talks to discuss cooperation against North Korea's threats.

Aug. 30, 2017: President Moon names Lee Su-hoon (63), an international relations professor from Kyungnam University, as ambassador to Japan. Lee served as the head of the foreign relations and security division on Moon's transition team.

Aug. 30, 2017: Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon pays respect to a late victim of Japan's wartime sexual slavery and instructs the government to fulfill dying wish of Ha Sang-sook, a comfort woman who passed away recently, which is to be buried at a state cemetery.

