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Master's Thesis of Raveena Madhushri Ugale

**Dynamics of US Intervention in
Korea-Japan Conflict**
**-Conditions for Intervention into Korea-Japan
Bilateral Conflict-**

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August 2020

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Abstract

Since the end of Japanese colonization in 1945, the relationship between South Korea and Japan can be characterized to be a series of highs and lows with key volatile conflicts inciting heavy tensions between the two. Especially in the last decade, there has been a heavy resurgence of conflicts between the two, that have led to concerns of alliance sustainability especially for the United States who are key alliance partners of these two countries. With this in mind, it begs the question of what role the United States should play in considering mediation between Korea and Japan. Is it the individual leaders, domestic government or specific conditions that drive the decision making of the US towards active conflict mediation?

This paper sets to present a comparative analysis from the Obama Administration to the current Trump Administration to identify what conditions must be met to result in the US enacting certain modes of intervention. Through a detailed analysis of three case studies where there was exacerbated conflict between the two, this dissertation argues that the US decisions on enacting a certain mode of intervention is dependent on whether the results meet the strategic interests of each respective administration.

Keywords: bilateral relations, national security, Korea-Japan, U.S. intervention post-cold war, conflict intervention, historical controversies

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I. Introduction

1-1. Background of US-ROK-Japan Trilateral Alliance

To preface, trilateral refers to “cooperative security behaviors between three states or strategic polities to promote specific values and orders.”¹ The trilateral alliance of US-Korea-Japan is significant in that it historically promoted harmony and security in the Northeast Asian region. The trilateral security relations among these three countries have often been portrayed as the relationship between two “strong legs” and one “weak leg.” To explain further, it builds upon joint relations between the United States and Japan on one end, and the United States and ROK (South Korea) on the other.² Yet, there have been instances where trilateral cooperation has been characterized as a multilateral three-legged structure where there is an emergence of an institutionalized political cooperative unit. Moreover, trilateral cooperation between these three countries are integral in issues such as policy coordination regarding North Korea.³ With continued issues such as North Korean nuclear proliferation and aggression, as well as China’s more active

1 Jo, Hyeran, and Jongryn Mo. "Does the United States Need a New East Asian Anchor?: The Case for U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateralism." *Asia Policy*, no. 9 (2010): 67-100.

<http://www.jstor.org/proxygwa.wrlc.org/stable/24904972>.

² *Ibid.* 73.

3 Goo, Young-Wan, and Seong-Hoon Lee. “Military Alliances and Reality of Regional Integration: Japan, South Korea, the US vs. China, North Korea.” *Journal of Economic Integration* 29, no. 2 (2014): 329–42. <https://doi.org/10.11130/jei.2014.29.2.329>.

role in the region, it is integral for the United States that the US-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship be strong.

Furthermore, in consideration of the Korea-Japan bilateral relationship, much of it has been built upon the idea of joint national security and banding together to overcome a common threat as well as their corresponding alliances with the United States. Lingering animosities, especially those towards historical dispute settlement, have spiked tensions to a point where cooperation has been threatened despite the common security threat of North Korea nuclear proliferation and China still being present. With this in mind, it begs the question as to what responsibility the United States should play in these conflicts, and furthermore what determines whether or not the United States intervenes in these aforementioned spikes of conflict.

To illustrate further, one of the biggest issues facing a stable regional alliance between the three countries is the bilateral strategic mistrust between Korea and Japan.⁴ The United States has traditionally played the role of as the conduit to ensure cooperation between the two. As established allies, the three states are known to be the symbol for promoting peace and security in Northeast Asia region. Their share values, which is ideal for an open East

4 Botto, Kathryn. "Overcoming Obstacles to Trilateral U.S.-ROK-Japan Interoperability - Korea Net Assessment 2020: Politicized Security and Unchanging Strategic Realities." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 18, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/18/overcoming-obstacles-to-trilateral-u.s.-rok-japan-interoperability-pub-81236>.

Asian environment. However, despite the shared values, sporadic spikes of conflict between the two have led to concerns over Korea-Japan alliance sustainability and furthermore sustainability of the US-ROK-Japan trilateral alliance relationship.

With this in mind, it is no surprise that the Obama Administration set to play a stronger leadership role in East Asia to ensure that its trilateral partnership would not falter. That is to say, a strong and friendly bilateral relationship between its two alliance partners, Korea and Japan, was an integral part of the national security agenda for the Obama Administration. Showcased through the ‘rebalance to Asia, the Obama Administration decided it would increase its focus on Asia due to its expanding influence in the global economy. As part of this agenda, the US took an active stance to rebalance against the rise of China and maintain their security interests. Furthermore, the administration hoped to create a regional concert of likeminded states in its favor.⁵ In the case of its alliance partners (Korea and Japan), the Obama Administration made a conscious effort to improve relations through many initiatives. His policy of “rebalancing” paid a special focus towards linking alliances by strengthening alliances with Japan and South Korea. This included supporting the possible revisioning of the

⁵ Zulfqar Khan, and Fouzia Amin. "‘Pivot’ and ‘Rebalancing’: Implications for Asia-Pacific Region." *Policy Perspectives* 12, no. 2 (2015): 3-28.
doi:10.13169/polipers.12.2.0003.

Japanese constitution to grant greater Japanese military engagement and in the case of South Korea it included supporting FTAs (KORUS) and espousing a safety guarantee against North Korean nuclear threats.⁶ Most important, President Obama made an active effort to improve relations between President Park and Prime Minister Abe by orchestrating a trilateral meeting with the two leaders at The Hague following the Nuclear Security Summit with the hope of overcoming historical disputes (“the comfort women issue”) between both of its key alliance partners.⁷

Yet, in terms of ensuring friendly relations between both, the Trump Administration policies are quite the opposite from those taken under the Obama administration. Aside, disinterest in South Korea-Japan bilateral relations, in the case of multilateral trade agreements for example, within the first three days of his presidency, President Trump removed himself from the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership). With actions such as this, it can be inferred that U.S. foreign policy under the Trump administration is one that is one that is unilateral and transactional in nature with no interest in promoting international cooperation. This has consequently led to a decline in American leadership on the world stage. There are five key aspects of the Trump

⁶Kelly, Robert E. “Obama's Legacy: Leaving Northeast Asia on a High Point.” Lowy Institute. The Interpreter, March 1, 2017. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/obamas-legacy-leaving-northeast-asia-high-point>.

⁷ Tow, William T. "The United States and Asia in 2014: Reconciling Rebalancing and Strategic Constraints." *Asian Survey* 55, no. 1 (2015): 12-20..

administration's foreign policy that have precipitated this decline: a decay in U.S. moral leadership, a retreat from multilateralism, the embrace of unilateralism, the undermining of the rules-based international order, and the weakening of alliance relationships.⁸ Of these five, one that is particularly important to discuss is the weakening of alliance relationships, especially that of the trilateral cooperation between US-Korea-Japan.

To elaborate further, prior to foreign policy actions taken under the Trump administration, as acknowledged earlier, the Obama Administration held a much tighter alliance system with Korea and Japan and played a much stronger role in conflict intervention as an international leader in the East Asian region. Contrary to the Trump Administration, the Obama Administration made a conscious effort to promote a strong alliance and further worked towards improving the rapport between South Korea and Japan. President Trump on the other hand, has almost dismissed the relationship, especially more recently due to the coming of the forced labor issue between Japan and South Korea. It was not until the concern of the military agreement between South Korea and Japan was threatened to be absolved permanently [GSOMIA] did the Trump Administration decide to intervene in the increasing tensions and conflict between the two nations. As trilateral cooperation is integral for the promotion of US strategic interests, it

⁸ Tanaka, Hitoshi. "The Crisis of US Credibility in East Asia." East Asia Insights. Accessed November 11, 2019. <http://www.jcie.or.jp/insights/201910.html>.

is critical to assess what conditions must be met for the US to consider intervention between Korea and Japan.

1-2. US Strategic Interests and Concerns: Obama Administration vs Trump Administration

US National Security Strategy during the Obama Administration

As this main purpose of this thesis is to show the how US intervention is closely linked with ensuring perceived national security interests are met, it is integral to assess the key national security interests of each respective administration. As noted in the Obama Administrations National Security Strategy (NSS), Obama notes that “defending democracy and human rights is related to ever enduring national interest.”⁹ That is to say, one of the main agendas of the United States is to ensure that all threats to national security are dealt with. In some cases, the actions taken by the US have backfired in that sometimes the ambiguous position of the United States as an amplifier of Conflict have led to strategies where the US has acted towards Korea-Japan that put the US in the dilemma of rising being seen choosing one ally partner over the other.

⁹ The White House. NSS 2015.

In addition to the commitment to combatting threats against national security, in terms of international cooperation, it can be seen that the Obama Administration espoused a more multilateral cooperation agenda by pledging “a rule-based international order advanced by the US leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.”¹⁰ With this in mind, it can be seen that the Obama Administration put a heavy emphasis towards collective action and furthermore towards the commitment to the UN and other multilateral organizations with the goal to meet persistent global threats.

Furthermore, with the Obama Administrations NSS strongly focusing on the importance of multilateral cooperation, it is integral to examine the regional strategies of the Obama Administration. That is to say, the 2015 NSS showcases the international order into isolated regional challenges. Further, the Obama Administration emphasis the “rebalance” or pivot to ‘Asia and the Pacific.’ Under the lens of the NSS for the Obama Administration, due to China’s growing power and its increased active assertiveness in territorial disputes at the time, the administration wanted to ensure its regional allies and partners that the United States would ‘advance it rebalance to Asia and the Pacific.’¹¹ In that “American leadership will remain essential to shaping the region’s long-term trajectory to enhance stability and security, facilitate

¹⁰ The White House. NSS 2015.

¹¹ Ibid. 24

trade and commerce through an open and transparent system, and ensure respect for universal rights and freedoms.”¹² The 2015 NSS under the Obama Administration, it can be seen that there was a heavy emphasis on a more transparent and connective security alliance a framework with America playing a heavily active leadership role. Therefore, in considering the aforementioned statements, it is apparent that for the Obama Administration, alliance management was a key strategic interest and is something the US would take active effort in ensuring the sustainability of their current alliance systems.

US National Security Strategy during the Trump Administration

The National Security Strategy from the current Trump Administration paints a very different picture. Among various values presented in the 2017 NSS under the Trump Administration, it highlighted specifically how US security policy should correlate with that of economic welfare as a means of protecting national security.

According to the 2017 NSS, in relation to military and priority actions, it states that “We will maintain a forward military presence capable of deterring and, if necessary, defeating any adversary. We will strengthen our long-standing military relationships and encourage the development of a strong defense network with our allies and partners. For example, we will

¹² Ibid. 24

cooperate on missile defense with Japan and South Korea to move toward an area defense capability. We remain ready to respond with overwhelming force to North Korean aggression and will improve options to compel denuclearization of the peninsula. We will improve law enforcement, defense, and intelligence cooperation with Southeast Asian partners to address the growing terrorist threat”¹³

However, despite these claims to prioritize a “strong defense network” with allies, in the case of the Trump Administration, security correlates a strong economy. That is to say, noted in Pillar II of the NSS (2017), it clearly states that “a growing and innovative economy allows the US to maintain the world’s most powerful military and protect our homeland”, which recognizes economic welfare as one of foundation factors to improve/protect national security. Also, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (2019) clearly states that “economic security is national security”, which again, clearly identifies which value the Trump administration desires to uphold the most.¹⁴

In terms of conventional military, the US wants to retain military overmatch, have efficient forces for major war, and increase the size of forces that is capable of functioning at an efficient scale. Meanwhile, US recognizes America’s manufacturing base as well as supply chain have weakened and thus pursues increased support to revitalize it. The nuclear weapons are the

¹³ The White House. NSS 2017.

¹⁴ US National Security Strategy 2017

foundation of US strategy to preserve its security by deterring aggression for the past 70 years. Therefore, US wants to continue developing, manufacturing, and deploying its nuclear weapons. When it comes to cyberspace, US concerns malicious states and actors using cyberattacks. Therefore, they will improve its capability to defeat them with enhanced tools and expertise. Lastly, the US recognizes the significance of intelligence especially when understanding and anticipating US adversaries. Therefore, they will not only forge appropriate links with US allies but also enhance synthesizing the data.

Overall, it can be seen that the Trump Administration, contrary to that of the Obama Administration oftentimes is heavily critical of multilateral initiatives and trade pacts and it sees them ineffective towards bolstering the economy due to the fact that economic security directly correlates with the perceived national security interests of the Trump Administrations. There is a much less emphasis on alliance management or fostering security cooperation. Therefore, by examining the following case studies, it is important to examine where the specific case studies will fall on the spectrum of alliance management vs. fostering perceived national interest.

1-3. Criteria for Case Study Selection

In considering this empirical puzzle on the inconsistency of US intervention into Korea-Japan conflict, it was integral to assess what would

be the ideal case studies to better examine what specific conditions must be met that would result in US intervention. This study will examine: “The Comfort Women Issue” under the Obama Administration, “The Forced Labor Issue” under the Trump Administration, and “the November 22nd GSOMIA Decision” under the Trump Administration. The motivation for selecting these three case studies is that they highlight some key inconsistencies in US conflict mediation policy. That is to say, despite the fact that both administrations presented fairly similar prose in their respective national security strategies it can be seen that key priorities are highly divergent. Furthermore, these three case studies present situations that have diverged from the traditional “strategic flexibility” that was frequently used under the Bush Administration.¹⁵ The aforementioned three case studies provide a means in which to better understand and elucidate what part of the spectrum each administration is on and furthermore provides empirical evidence to illustrate key conditions that will in turn move the US to take certain strategic options towards Korea-Japan Conflict. Thus, as the purpose of this thesis is to under the key conditions that must be met for US to intervene into Korea-Japan conflict, these three case studies provide the best scenarios to analyze and discover the conditions needed for the US to take certain action.

¹⁵ Glosserman, Brad, and SCOTT A. SNYDER. "IMPLICATIONS FOR ALLIANCE MANAGEMENT." In *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*, 120-54. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. Accessed July 5, 2020. 120.

II. Literature Review

2-1. Transformation of US Bilateral Alliances in Northeast Asia in Post-Cold War Era

To preface, bilateral alliances have been a core part of the US-led security order in East Asia following the end of World War II. That is to say, alliances became a key apparatus towards the containment of Asian communism.¹⁶ In the mind of the US, it held the belief that the most efficient way to protect America's national security interests was to foster these alliances. Yet, along with the end of the Cold War, there has also been a change in the nature of America's alliances in Northeast Asia.

One author who delves into this extensively is Hee-Yong Yang who, by using the perspective of a national role conception model and applying the theory of bilateral alliance, argues that the network of US alliances in Northeast Asia have gradually transformed from "an instrument of balance of power or restraint" into a "power-management (ROK-US) or power-sharing (US-Japan) instrument."¹⁷ To expand further, the author expounds that the US security alliance in Northeast Asia is characterized as bilateral and

¹⁶ Bush, Richard. "America's Alliances and Security Partnerships in East Asia: Introduction" *The Brookings Institution*. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/fp_20160713_alliances_introduction.pdf

¹⁷ Hee-yong Yang. "The Change in US Security Role Prescriptions towards Its Northeast Asian Allies at the Onset of the Post-Cold War Era" *The Korean Journal of Security Affairs (KJSA)*20, no.2 (2015): 48-74.

asymmetrical in nature and furthermore that post-Cold war US alliance management has changed greatly from the past.

Figure 1. The Formation of US Security Role Prescriptions for South Korea and Japan.

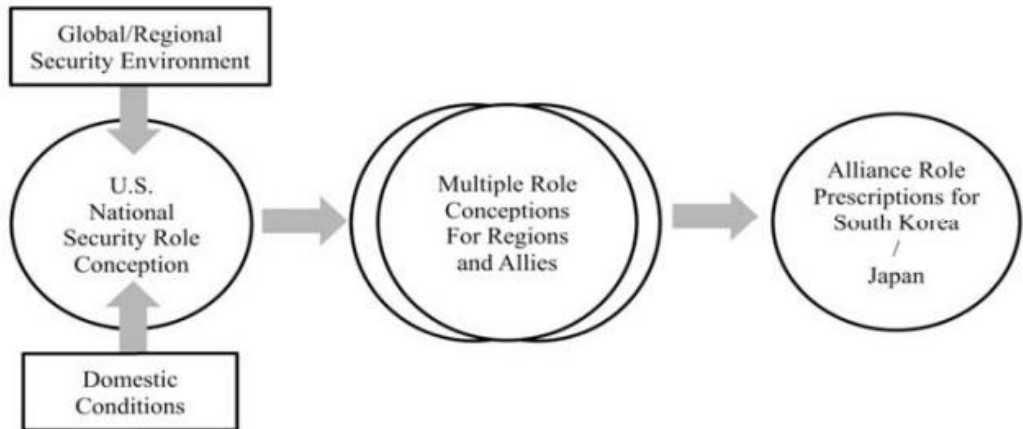


Figure 1: Role Prescriptions of US Security Role 18

By looking at Figure 1 from her paper, it shows that the US alliances in Asia are characterized as asymmetric in nature, where the chief power in the alliance sets a certain role conception of its minor power partner where in emergencies the major power would assess the partner's role performance based on their prearranged role. Thus, according to Yang, under this national role conception perspective, the US security role conceptions for specific

18 Figure Source: Hee-yong Yang. "The Change in US Security Role Prescriptions towards Its Northeast Asian Allies at the Onset of the Post-Cold War Era" *The Korean Journal of Security Affairs (KJSA)*20, no.2 (2015): 54.

allies are contingent towards both domestic and external conditions, as noted in the Figure 1.¹⁹

In considering the aforementioned US Security role expectations towards South Korea and Japan, according to the author, the post-Cold War is categorized by the US encouraging its allies, oftentimes assertively, to assume greater responsibilities or increase the breath of burden sharing. Essentially, as changes in regional security situations due to the rise of China and the instability of North Korean actions will result in the redefinition of South Korea's security role within the ROK-US alliance, it should remain alert to changes in US alliance policy.²⁰ Similarly, Japan should also consider the US desire for them to take a more leading role in the case of global security.

¹⁹ Ibid. 54.

²⁰ Ibid. 70.

Figure 2. Redefinition of the US Security Role Conceptions towards South Korea and Japan

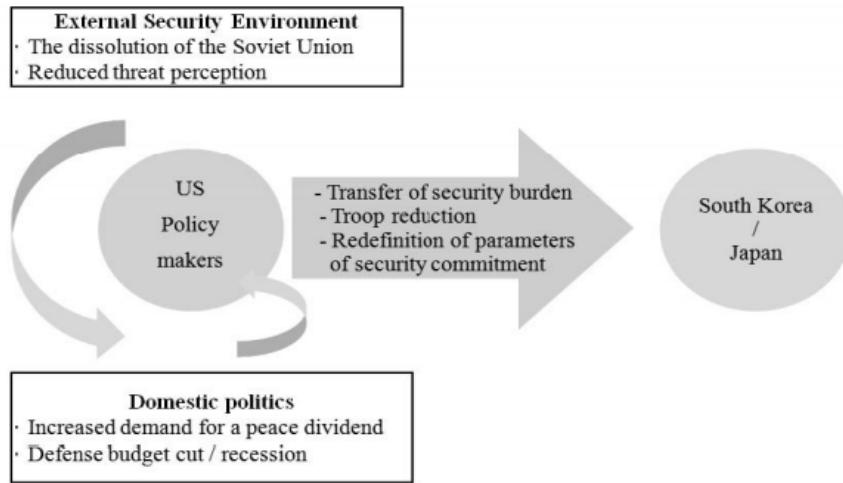


Figure 2: Post-Cold War US Security Role Conception towards South Korea and Japan²¹

With this in mind, as noted in his conclusion, *Figure 2* from the paper depicts the need for the US to redefine the security partnership with its Northeast Asian allies. US bilateral alliances in Northeast Asia were ultimately transformed where the terms of mutual security arrangement changed, and the parameters of respective security roles and responsibilities were redefined in ways that would ensure US security interests were maximized in the eyes of the US.²² For example, Yang argues that the US wanted South Korea to play a leading role in deterrence against North Korea,

²¹ Figure Source: Ibid. 70.

²² Ibid. 70.

thus giving the US forces in Korea a more “strategic flexibility” in responding to regional security challenges. In the case of Japan, the US expected Japan to increase its regional and global security role as the US security strategy of preponderance and containment had been thus replaced by selective engagement or off-shore balancing.

However, while Yang’s argument illustrates the change in US perception through this transformation of national role prescriptions, change in US perception alone cannot account for the inconsistencies in conflict mediation from the US. That is to say, not only has there been this transformation of national role conception on the side of the US, but additionally there has been a transformation of South Korea and Japan’s internal dynamics post-Cold War that also play an integral part in the spectrum of US decision-making on intervention. According to Snyder and Glosserman, the end of the Cold War resulted in a new era where domestic constituents and civil society play a bigger role in foreign policy decision making.²³ The opinion of the South Korean public became more influential for this formation of foreign policy, therefore making the task of managing previous alliances all the more challenging.²⁴ Similarly, in the case of Japan, the author postulates that domestic constituencies or “hot-button” domestic

²³ Glosserman, Brad, and SCOTT A. SNYDER. *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. Accessed July 8, 2020. 3.

²⁴Ibid. 134.

political issues have superseded alliance concerns, thus halting alliance management issues such as that of US troop presence on Okinawa. Snyder and Glosserman, in considering the puzzle of persisting tension in Japan-South Korean relations note that the politicization of the alliance relationship with the United States has become a tool for attracting political support and further winning elections.²⁵ The authors further argues that this transformation of a stronger domestic presence and public opinion has created a sense of identity that helps shape national choices, which include that of responses towards alliance management.²⁶ By conducting public opinion surveys and interviews along with commentary, the authors have set to understand the specific conceptions of national identities of South Korea and Japan. In conducting this research, Snyder and Glosserman note that there seems to be this emergence of a situation where there is a inclination to put domestic-political gains ahead of international aims in ways that appeared to showcase national identity against alliance cooperation.²⁷ Additionally this perceived national identity has in turn led to an impact on US alliances where both alliance partners use the US as their benchmark to measure itself against the other. Glosserman and Snyder further note that this has put the US in a

²⁵Ibid. 5.

²⁶Ibid. 6.

²⁷ Ibid. 120.

difficult position where the US avoids taking sides in an effort to evade entrapment into historical disputes.

Moving forward, in their chapter on “Implications for Alliance Management,” Glosserman and Snyder argue that the US has developed a concept of “strategic flexibility,” used heavily during the Bush Administration, where in the US will concentrate on its individual needs in the realm of global security trends and coordinate with alliance partners in Asia only as needed to preserve the highest flexibility to respond to both conventional and non-conventional threats.²⁸ Thus, cooperation would be based on the assets and support alliance partners can offer yet minimal concern is given to which alliance work together and minimal coordination is necessary to promote collaboration among alliance partners.²⁹ This thinking is in line with that of Yang, where US has concerns towards burden sharing and the evading entrapment. However, it is important to note that while Glosserman and Snyder provide a sound argument on actions taken under the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration and Trump Administration are likely to handle alliance management very differently. This traditional avoidance of entanglement may not be applicable anymore as it may be conflictual with pursuing contemporary US strategic interests.

²⁸ Ibid. 145.

²⁹ Ibid. 145.

As noted earlier, the beginning of democratization and the development of civil society brought many changes to alliances and to the US-ROK alliance system as well. Gi-Wook Shin, for example, makes the argument that “history, values, memory, and identity are significant elements that can influence the ‘soft power’ of an alliance built on ‘hard power’.”³⁰ To clarify, Shin asserts that Korean perceptions and the power of a collective memory play a significant role in how the alliance relationship between US-ROK is handled. While the influence of these “soft power” elements are critical in considering the transformation of the US-ROK alliance relationship, the authors argument heavily focuses on the ROK perspective and does not cover the strategic interests of the US towards alliance management. Thus, this thesis hopes to expand on this idea in considering the spectrum in which alliance management becomes a priority for US strategic interests.

Therefore, in considering what are the specific conditions that may account for US intervention to intervene, it is integral to not only consider how national role conceptions have transformed, but also how the transformation of the domestic-political environment has also led to a new era that may put the US in a difficult position in consideration intervention.

³⁰ Shin, Gi-Wook. “Values and History in U.S.–South Korean Relations.” Chapter. In *U.S. Leadership, History, and Bilateral Relations in Northeast Asia*, edited by Gilbert Rozman, 45–71. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010..

2-1. Approaches by the US Towards Historical Dispute

Settlement between Korea and Japan

To preface, in considering how to discover key conditions that spur certain actions of the US, it is critical to examine how the US has handled historical dispute settlement in the past between Korea and Japan. Gilbert Rozman, in considering the US handling of historical memories, made the argument that US leadership of alliances with Japan and South Korea have avoid history which has consequently led to the stifling of candid discussions on historical memories.³¹ Similarly Kazuhiko Togo also touches upon the struggle of historical memory as an obstruction towards Korea-Japan relations. In his article, he analyzes the complex relations among geopolitics, values, and historical identity and further assesses how the gap on historical memory is perceived by the US. He further offers three approaches that US administration can take towards historical dispute settlement that include: the traditional approach of keeping distance, the judge-mediator approach, or the integrated approach.

To explain further, in terms of the traditional approach, Togo asserted that US desire for normalization between Korea and Japan in a rapid manner ultimately led to the 1965 Normalization Treaty. However, in the case of

31 Rozman, Gilbert. "U.S. Leadership, History, and Relations with Allies." Chapter. In *U.S. Leadership, History, and Bilateral Relations in Northeast Asia*, edited by Gilbert Rozman, 72–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 72.

addressing discrepancies in historical memories between Korean and Japan, the US is in a difficult position where on one hand the Japanese side would prefer the American to show understanding on how Japan tries to understand and accept Korean grievances and the other hand, any shows of American sympathy towards Japan is out of the question for the Korean side.³² Thus, it shows that the US cannot really play an active role. He offers two more approaches one being the judge-mediator position where the US would play a more proactive role to convince Japan's neighbors that postwar Japan has become a trustworthy partner of the US and thus becomes a mediator and judge.³³ This approach was practiced in 2007 under the initial happens of the "comfort women issue." However, as seen now, the issue is still lingering and there has not been a mutual understanding on the issue. Therefore, despite Togo stating that this approach to dispute settlement may be a possible approach, its success has not been seen in the past and further could put the US in a delicate situation. The last approach he discusses is that on a historically integrate approach consists of a situation considering US role inside the historical events, thus being a part of East Asian history, which could ultimately promote a deeper basis for mutual understanding.³⁴ However,

³² Togo, Kazuhiko. "Japan-South Korea Relations and the Role of the United States on History." Chapter. In *U.S. Leadership, History, and Bilateral Relations in Northeast Asia*, edited by Gilbert Rozman, 97-123. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 114.

³³ Ibid. 115.

³⁴ Ibid. 118.

as he noted in the article, if the US becomes more cognizant of its historical position, it could backfire and work against them. Despite this fact though, Togo ultimately argues that practicing a balanced mediator-judge position and having a deeper historical knowledge might eventually create an opening for the United States to assume a more insider position into East Asian history. Thus, he concludes by stating in the case of the Obama administration, while non-interference is advised, it would be useful to consider the mediator-judge approach and historically integrated approach.³⁵ Togo's argument and evidence while valid, present a few key issues. First of all, in considering parameters that would encourage US intervention, both of these approaches in past practice have not led to successful results. Therefore, as both the Obama and Trump Administration prioritize actions that will result as successful towards US strategic interests, it is unlikely either of these approaches would be undertaken.

On a similar vein, in considering US Strategic options in historical controversies, scholars like that of Cheol Hee Park notes that oftentimes the United States is in a difficult position as taking a strong position could lead to the risk of dampening relations with one side vs the other. Furthermore, active intervention could raise the possibility of accusations being directed

³⁵ Ibid. 123.

towards US historical responsibility in postwar settlement.³⁶ He further argues that the US position would change overtime depending on the strategic context in which the historical dispute was unfolding. Park then offers four strategic options the US could take that include: active disengagement, passive disengagement, passive engage, and active engagement.³⁷ However, what is key to note from his article is his suggestions for US strategy. That is to say Park suggests that in order to avoid unnecessary costs and maximize policy feedback when engaging with historical controversy the United States should: practice diplomacy based on norms and principles accepted by its multilateral partners and send a signal to countries in Asia that South Korea and Japan are valued allies showcasing successful American engagement.³⁸ He finally argues that the United States has incentive to hold the two allies together for its own strategic interests. In considering Park's argument, he offers detailed approaches towards US intervention and specific instances in which certain modes of engagement into historical controversies were undertaken by the United States. This thesis will attempt to do something similar by taking Park's approach a bit further to clearly outline what are the

³⁶ Park, Cheol Hee. "Getting Away or Getting In?" Chapter. In *U.S. Leadership, History, and Bilateral Relations in Northeast Asia*, edited by Gilbert Rozman, 124–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 131.

³⁷ Ibid. 138.

³⁸ Ibid. 140.

specific actions to occur that will spur the US to enact certain modes of intervention into Korea-Japan conflict.

The last thing to consider in US approaches towards historical dispute settlement is US strategic thinking. Gilbert Rozman noted that in the case of US-ROK-Japan, forging a genuine alliance triangle proved to be difficult not only because both Japan and South Korea refused to anchor their foreign policy towards regional dangerous, but also because the two took sharply divergent views of historical issues perceived as critical to their identities.³⁹ He further highlights that US involvement into a dispute that encompasses nationalist sentiments on both side might trigger a downward spiral of accusations and counteraccusations targeted towards historical behavior by the United States. With this in mind, Rozman asserts that history rises to the forefront when priorities become confused. That is to say, latching on to these emotional issues as a means to cast doubt towards balanced foreign policy initiatives.⁴⁰ He further highlights cases wherein Japan especially has used this tactic to deter certain initiatives. However, what is most important to note in his article is his concluding statement wherein he emphasizes that history triangulation could be a part of the US regional agenda, and furthermore all

³⁹ Rozman, Gilbert. "U.S. Strategic Thinking on the Japanese–South Korean Historical Dispute." Chapter. In *U.S. Leadership, History, and Bilateral Relations in Northeast Asia*, edited by Gilbert Rozman, 143–68. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 148.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 159.

leaders should work to bring history to the forefront so as to avoid having it be used as a tool that can be harmful towards alliance needs.⁴¹ Rozman effectively highlights not only the challenge that the US faces with how to acknowledge historical controversies, but also posits the importance of bringing them to light so they are not used as a tool that would harm alliance partnerships. Keeping this idea in mind, this paper will expand on this idea by examining the strategic thinking of the US during the Obama and Trump Administration, and how that in turn has affected decision making towards certain modes of intervention.

2-2. Dynamics of US Intervention in Post-Cold War

2-3-1. Preventative Diplomacy

Much of contemporary academic rhetoric have attempted to understand what may be the key characteristics that could explain post-Cold war US intervention and conflict intervention strategy. One such strategy is that of preventive diplomacy. Inspired by the 1994 Clinton Administration's report "*National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*," the idea of preventive diplomacy came about as a means to combat terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Lund notes preventative diplomacy as: action taken in susceptible areas to avoid the threat or possible implementation of armed force and related forms of intimidation by actors to settle the political

⁴¹ Ibid. 167.

disputes that can arise from the result of instability that effects of economic, social, political, and international change.⁴² With this in mind, rather than taking the more direct method of intervening in conflicts at the height, this strategy works rather to encourage dialogue and facilitate a nonviolent resolution to conflict.⁴³ The author highlights the effectiveness and key tools of preventive diplomacy such as confidence-building or preventative deployment.⁴⁴ While the idea of preventative diplomacy has merit and in fact could ensure conflict does not come about, in a situation such as that of Korea and Japan, where much of the conflict is deeply rooted by historical dispute settlement, it is unlikely that this method would be effective and that the US would utilize this method as it may not line up with US national interests as well. Furthermore, as noted in the previous section, the changes in the nature and perceptions of the alliance structures in Northeast Asia has also changed US expectations towards their alliance partners which may also hinder the desire to practice preventative diplomacy. Therefore, it is remiss to argue that this form of diplomacy as being an action the US would take in post-Cold War conflict intervention.

⁴² Lund, *Preventing Violent Conflicts*, p. 36.

⁴³ Ko, S., W. Choi, and T. Yoon. "Conflict Management in the Post-cold War Era: Preventive Diplomacy and PKO." *Korean Journal Of Defense Analysis* 17, no. 2 (2005): 35-62.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 40.

2-3-2. US Perceived Strategic Interests: Challenges for Trilateral Cooperation

According to Cheol Hee Park, in his report for the Atlantic Council, he argues that despite the demand for trilateral cooperation between the US, South Korea, and Japan is present, however political willingness and aptitude for such cooperation is declining, given the recent tensions between South Korea and Japan.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Park emphasizes the diverging regional strategies between Korea and Japan that have accounted as a barrier towards security cooperation. What is most important to note however in his article is the effect of the United States towards South Korea-Japan conflict. He asserts that the ambiguous or indecisive position of the United States can aggravate bilateral conflict.⁴⁶ He further argues, United State intervene occurred due to the fact that deteriorating ties between South Korea and Japan did not serve US strategic interests and thus hampered trilateral security cooperation.⁴⁷ In considering Park's argument, the author provides a basis in which to understand what conditions may account for US intervention, one being assuring that strategic interests are met. Thus, in considering his arguments, this paper will set to better understand when the US is willing to take heavier

⁴⁵ Park, Cheol Hee. "Strategic Estrangement between South Korea and Japan as a Barrier to Trilateral Cooperation." Atlantic Council, December 3, 2019. 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 8.

risks in light of what could be considered volatile situations between Korea and Japan.

In addition to Park Cheol Hee, scholar Lee Seong-hyon makes the argument that the strategic cooperation between South Korea and Japan is likely to remain disjointed due to bilateral mistrust and China. The author further emphasizes despite being bound together by geographical proximity and shared values, the two countries are progressively losing common interests.⁴⁸ Overall, what is important to acknowledge is that Lee argues that the United States needs to employ more strength and political leadership in helping to bring the two smaller democracies together that would include more behind-the-scenes prodding from the US as that has led to the coming of the comfort women agreement and GSOMIA in 2016.⁴⁹ Lee further asserts that the Trump administrations carelessness towards alliance coordination and management is problematic as it weakens the US standing in the world and could also reflect a decline in US leadership on the world stage. Finally, Lee argues that a constructive intervention by the United States is critical in managing the regional relationship and promoting dialogue. Thus, there is a need to intervene “visibly” to convey an clear signal that friendly South Korea-Japan relations correlates with the strategic interests of the United

⁴⁸ Lee Seong-hyon (2019) Where Is Washington? The Missing Mediator between Seoul and Tokyo, *The Washington Quarterly*, 42:1, 89-110.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 102.

States.⁵⁰ Lee offers a critical analysis of what the US role should be in contemporary conflict management between Korea and Japan. This therefore is an important factor to aid in assessing what specific factors encourage US intervention into this bilateral conflict. As the benefits are clear for US strategic interests, Lee's argument on the need for stronger US leadership is an important element towards solving the empirical puzzle of inconsistency in US mediation towards Korea-Japan conflict.

2-3. Agency and Leadership: The Trump Administration

Aside of dynamics of post-Cold War alliances and dynamics of US intervention, another factor to consider is how leadership agency plays into decisions of intervention into South Korea-Japan bilateral conflict. That is to say, in terms of the current Trump Administration, much of the previous literature to address the reluctance of the US to intervene in bilateral relations of other nations such as that of South Korea and Japan is a consequence of President Trump's 'America First' agenda. The 'America First' lens espouses the idea that America will take a step back from multilateral agreements and policies and instead prioritize American interests first and foremost. Moreover, as mentioned by authors like Tsuruoka, the reason for these changes towards ensuring strong trilateral relationships emerged due to

⁵⁰ Ibid. 106

President Trumps desire to formulate bilateral-transactional relationships rather one that encompass multiple countries at a time.⁵¹ Another argument that has been presented is under an analytical framework that utilizes the variable to agency to understand the actions taken under the current Trump Administration.

Michael Green, for example, makes the argument that one of the key issues attributing in the change of attitude is Trump's agency that encompass his worldview and leadership style. He further argues that Trump has exhibited this through three clear actions. Trump has made the argument that both Japan and Korea have been exploiting the United States by sustaining large trade surpluses while expecting that the US military will defend their countries.⁵² In response to this, most economists would reason that trade deficits are a result of macroeconomic factors and not indicators of economic competitiveness. Yet, President Trump believes that international trade is analogous to lending money to governments who in turn do not pay for security services rendered. This, according to Green accounts for decisions made by him such as rejecting the Trans-Pacific Partnership as well as renegotiating multiple FTA's such as that of NAFTA and KORUS. This has

⁵¹ Tsuruoka, Michito. Report. Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), 2018. Accessed June 19, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17536.

⁵² Green, Michael J. "The Asan Forum." Trump and Asia: Continuity, Change, and Disruption | The Asan Forum, April 18, 2019. <http://www.theasanforum.org/trump-and-asia-continuity-change-and-disruption/>.

created an environment where countries are lacking confidence in the U.S. commitment to alliances. Green has also argued that Trump has characterized US relations with other countries constructed on his own perceived personal relationships with the leaders, rather than considering other factors such as shared values, established treaties and commitments that have outlined previous presidents' approaches.⁵³ Last, Trump under his "America First" label has created a worldview that is destructive towards American engagement in Asia as well as an adversarial approach to multilateral institutions. Thus, in relation to conflict intervention in South Korea-Japan relations, it can be inferred that under this concept of Trump's individual agency, it was his worldview and leadership style that attributes to the decision whether or not the U.S. intervenes in conflicts that hinder South Korea-Japan relations.

However, what is important to note in the aforementioned is that while Green is valid in that much of Trump's agency can explain the change in attitudes toward alliance cooperation with South Korea, this explanation fails to account for US national security strategy and other domestic and international actors as well as international dynamics that intertwine and collectively and effect the decision-making power of the U.S. to intervene in conflict that hinders South Korea-Japan bilateral relations.

⁵³ Ibid.

III. Research Methodology

This paper will be presented as a comparative study on US foreign policy towards intervention or non-intervention in Korea-Japan bilateral conflicts from the Obama Administration to the Trump Administration. To better understand what specific conditions must be met that would encourage US mediation into the aforementioned bilateral conflicts, this paper will set to examine three specific cases where tensions were high in the South Korea-Japan bilateral relationship and furthermore, whether or not the United States decided to intervene in the conflict or not, and finally what were the key conditions that were made to spur intervention or non-intervention. To further examine these cases and the actions of the US, this thesis will analyze these case studies through Professor Park Cheol Hee's alternative strategic options of intervention available for the US dependent on certain conditions being met.

3-1. Fence Sitting

In considering what factors are key in the decision-making process of whether the U.S. will intervene in conflict with its alliance partners, it is important to understand what are the key elements that are characteristic of

post-Cold War US intervention strategy. That is to say, in the case of the US, as noted by Bundy, most intervention has a national interest justification.⁵⁴

To continue, one key strategy the U.S could pursue in relation towards South Korea-Japan conflict is that of being a fence-sitter. To expand, this refers to the U.S. playing the role of a sitter quietly and patiently without interfering in the conflict between Korea and Japan. This method, being more hands off, is a way to wait for Korea and Japan to resolve their problems on their own and return to their original cooperation level.⁵⁵ In the case of the United States, this strategy may be considered the lowest risk as it does not put the U.S. at a bias on any side. This would be a strategic option under the condition that assertive intervention would be strategically disadvantageous for the US.

3-2. Assertive Intervention

Moving forward, another strategy the US may implement in terms of handling Korea-Japan conflict would be one of assertive intervention. Under this strategy, the US would play a more active role and aggressively intervene in the Korea-Japan conflict to present alternatives and solve the problem in a

⁵⁴ Bundy, McGeorge, and J. Peter Scoblic. "Nation Building: Historical Precedent and the Basis for US Intervention." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 2, no. 1 (1994): 33-44. Accessed April 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24595449.

⁵⁵ 박철희. “미국의 동맹 네트워크와 한일갈등: 미국은 방관자로 남을 수 있는가” *한국국가전략*. (2020) 5 권 1 호. pp. 55-84.

rapid manner.⁵⁶ This strategy can be effective in that the United States could intervene preemptively before it exacerbates and solve the conflict it in its early stages. However, it is important to note, for this strategy to be successful, both South Korea and Japan must acknowledge the authority of the United States and furthermore there must be a sense of trust in that the US offensive intervention should be beneficial towards the interests of South Korea and Japan.⁵⁷

3-3. Asymmetrical Engagement

Rather than taking a more offensive intervention strategy between both countries, another method could be that of asymmetrical engagement. That is to say, where the United States would play a more active role in one country, where the other country realizes that it is at a disadvantage to itself and activates homeostasis to restore it in a short period of time.⁵⁸ Therefore, if this strategy of developing a fear of abandonment works, it could encourage South Korea and Japan to find concessions and restore more friendly ties. This strategy could also be valid if both Korea and Japan agree to take an attitude of promoting to restore relations to the United States after detecting the unexpected cost of non-dynamic engagement by the United States.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 72.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 73.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 74.

3-4. Gradual Finality

The last strategy, as noted by Victor Cha in his doctoral thesis that may work towards Korea-Japan conflict would be that of gradual finality. To elucidate, because Korea and Japan are heavily reliant on the US for security, they have a great fear of abandonment as allies. Thus, if the US suggests a possible exit or withdrawal from East Asia in the long run, it might curb Korea and Japans and rather force them to concede and ameliorate their conflicts with each other.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Cha, Victor. *Alignment Despite Antagonism*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). pp. 199-232.

IV. The Obama Administration and “The Comfort Women Issue”

4.1. “The Comfort Women Issue” and the Role of the US

To preface, to promote a stable bilateral relationship between South Korea and Japan, it can be argued that historical dispute settlement has been one of the leading issues that have hindered friendly relations, particularly that on “comfort women.” Since the end of World War II, both nations have faced numerous trials in the pursuit of reconciliation. The signing of the 1965 Normalization Treaty was meant to be the first step towards reconciliation however the treaty failed to address a key issue that continues to hinder settlement: “comfort women.” To illustrate, this term refers to women who were coerced by the Japanese Imperial Army into a system of sexual slavery. This issue has repeatedly obstructed reconciliation rhetoric between the two countries.

To begin with, the signing of the 1965 Normalization Treaty between Japan and South Korea, while meant to normalize relations, rather resulted in vague historical dispute settlement that failed to address many issues such as that of “comfort women.” The first spark on the issue of “comfort women” ensued in 1991 when Korean victim, Kim Hak-Sun, made her story public at

a press conference about “Japanese Comfort Stations.”⁶⁰ In response, the Japanese government denied all allegations and refused any form of investigations. The government went further to assert that the running of these brothels or “stations” were facilitated solely by private contractors.⁶¹ In 1992, however, historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki uncovered official government records that proved the Imperial government had direct involvement in managing the “comfort women” stations. With these evidences coming to light, the government issued a statement in 1993 which read:

Undeniably...with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women. The Government of Japan would like...to extend its sincere apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place...who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.⁶²

In addition to the aforementioned Kono Statement, Japan established the Asian Women’s Fund in 1995 as a means to “extend atonement from the Japanese people to former ‘comfort women’.”⁶³ Despite reparations provided,

60 Chang, Mina. "The Politics of an Apology: Japan and Resolving the "Comfort Women" Issue." *Harvard International Review* 31, no. 3 (2009): 34.
<http://www.jstor.org.proxygwa.wrlc.org/stable/42763319>.

61 Chang, Mina. "The Politics of an Apology: Japan and Resolving the "Comfort Women" Issue." *Harvard International Review* 31, no. 3 (2009): 35.
<http://www.jstor.org.proxygwa.wrlc.org/stable/42763319>.

62 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei ICono on the result of the study on the issue of 'comfort women'," 4 August 1993,
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html>.

63 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama on the occasion of the establishment of the 'Asian Women's Fund'," July 1995,
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9507.html>.

as they were not directly linked to the government, this venture was unsuccessful.⁶⁴ Reluctance from the Japanese government to take legal responsibility, along with South Korea's unwillingness to stay quiet led to the conflict rising in volatility. Thus, to ameliorate the conflict, as both countries are important allies to maintain security in the region, the U.S. felt that it was necessary to intervene.

With this in mind, beginning in 2011, the Obama Administration made an active effort to "Pivot to Asia" where the United States aimed to play a more dynamic role in its alliance partnerships; especially that of Korea and Japan.⁶⁵ Between 2014-2015 however, as the conflict continued to escalate, the United States, despite alluding to the importance of trilateral cooperation took a more hands off sideline stance, wherein while remaining visible, the level of engagement lessened greatly. To explain further, from 2011-2013 and 2014-2015 there was a shift in Secretary of State from Hillary Clinton to John Kerry. In that, where Secretary Clinton saw this issue was a women's right issue, Secretary Kerry viewed it as a diplomatic issue. Thus, with the rationale of describing the issue as "the trafficking of women for sexual purposes," thus create a more neutral rhetoric, it could be seen that rather than that of

⁶⁴ Chang, Mina. "The Politics of an Apology: Japan and Resolving the "Comfort Women" Issue." *Harvard International Review* 31, no. 3 (2009): 36.

⁶⁵Liu, Chien. "Obama's Pivot to Asia and its Failed Japan-South Korea Historical Reconciliation." *East Asia : An International Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (12, 2018): 293.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12140-018-9304-7>.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2159025931?accountid=6802>.

human rights or women's empowerment, Kerry focus more on it as a security issue in East Asia.

Along these lines, during the trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit in the Hague, Obama played an active role in mediating tensions between the two countries with the hope that they can come to an agreement of cooperation for the sake of banding against North Korea Nuclear Proliferation.⁶⁶ What is interesting to note then that, despite Obamas consistent references towards the importance of addressing humanitarian issues, his emphasis was not on the humanitarian issue, but rather one of diplomatic relations that urging that their shared values and the future generation's should be able to benefit from the possibility of peace a prosperity; thus a more future-orientated approach.⁶⁷

Ultimately, through the steady push from the Obama Administration, the "2015 Comfort Women Agreement," signed under the Park Geun-Hye and Shinzo Abe Administrations. As noted by Foreign Minister Kishida of Japan, he expresses that the issue of "comfort women" was a "grave affront" and that Japan is "painfully aware of responsibilities."⁶⁸ Foreign Minister

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of State
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2014/03/223197.htm#JAPAN2>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Announcement of Foreign Minister of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion", December 28th, 2015 https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000364.html

Yun of South Korea similarly confirms that the issue is “resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement.”

To expand further, the resolution included Japan’s official acknowledgement towards the creation and facilitation of the comfort women system, as well as a public apology on behalf of Japan by Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio. PM Abe on the same date also recognized Japan’s responsibility and expressed his apology.⁶⁹ Foreign Minister Kishida also make a formal statement denouncing the comfort women system and the indignities that it had dealt its victims on behalf of the Prime Minister. While the December 28 statement did not have any mention towards the responsibility to the Emperor of Japan, Kishida did note “involvement of the Japanese military authorities at that time.” He added that “the government of Japan is painfully aware of responsibilities from this perspective” and specified that Prime Minister Abe wished to express “his most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.”⁷⁰ What is most important to note however is that the comfort women agreement stated that the Japanese government would give one billion yen to compensate former victims of sexual slavery and in

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion,” December 28, 2015, http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000364.html.

return, the South Korean government will consider the issue “irreversibly” resolved (See Appendix 1).⁷¹

Despite coming to such as settlement, tensions rose again not even one year later. That is to say, once the United States took a more active stance in the historical dispute, it was forced to tackle its own past and offer its acknowledgement of the atrocious human cost of dropping two atomic bombs on Japan. With this in mind, in May 2016, President Obama became first US president to visit Hiroshima to formally recognize the sorrow caused by the US atomic bomb attacks.⁷²

However, the reconciliation component of the comfort women agreement ultimately failed only one year after said agreement was announced. That is to say, in late December of the same year, Prime Minister Abe, accompanied by Defense Minister Tomomi Inada, visited Pearl Harbor in an effort for reconciliation. On December 28th, after returning from Pearl Harbor, Inada visited the Yaskuni Shrine.⁷³ The visit drew strong disapproval from both the governments of South Korea and China as well as severe outrage from the South Korean public. Thus, in retaliation, on December 30th, a statue of comfort women was set up near the Japanese Consulate in Busan,

⁷¹ Hein, Patrick. (2016). Unresolved Comfort Women Issue. *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, 14(3), 455.

⁷²Liu, Chien. "Obama's Pivot to Asia and its Failed Japan-South Korea Historical Reconciliation." *East Asia : An International Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (12, 2018): 293. <http://lps3.search.proquest.com.libproxy.snu.ac.kr/docview/2159025931?accountid=6802>.

⁷³ Ibid. 307.

known to be the second largest city in Korea. Nevertheless, as the agreement was meant to be final and “irreversible,” the Japanese government began attacking the girl statue in front of the Japanese consulate in Busan since late 2016. In a lawsuit filed by Minbyun, a group of lawyers for a democratic society, the Seoul Administrative Court ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to disclose the records of negotiations reaching the above agreement in January 2017, calling them "a very historical and social issue. The debate on the statues further halted talks on other joint reconciliatory efforts.⁷⁴

Consequently, on January 6, 2017 the Japanese government withdrew its ambassador to South Korea and the consulate general in Busan in disapproval against the new statue.⁷⁵ Ultimately, in that same month. During a meeting Washington that was meant to discuss the North Korean threat and other security issues, Japan’s Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs lodged a formal complaint with the South Korean counterpart; however, in protest South Korea sternly protested Inada’s visit to the Yaskuni Shrine.

4-2. The Obama Administration Response

⁷⁴ Sol Han and James Griffiths, CNN. 2017. "Why This Statue Of A Young Girl Caused A Diplomatic Incident". *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/05/asia/south-korea-comfort-women-statue/index.html>.

⁷⁵ Choe, SH and M. Rich (2017). Japan recalls ambassador to South Korea to protest ‘comfort woman’ statue.[^]. *The New York Times*, 6 January, p. A5.

Obama's Policies

As noted in section 5.1 in order to understand the circumstances of U.S. intervention and ultimately failed intervention into this case it is important to understand the foreign policy of the U.S. towards the Asian region. As mentioned briefly in the aforementioned section, coined under the term "Pivot to Asia," this foreign policy strategy aimed to discourage China from challenging the current power balance and further making a bid for hegemony in the region, thereby ensuring Americas position as hegemon. In the case of maintaining security alliance structures with South Korea and Japan, external balancing was one of the key actions taken with the hopes of forming a solid trilateral alliance among the three countries.⁷⁶

With his Pivot to Asia, President Obama attempted to transform the hub-spokes security structure among the United States, Japan and South Korea and establish a trilateral partnership to balance externally against China's rise. However, the key challenge for Obama, the unresolved historical disputes between Japan and Korea, have made it very difficult to promote such cooperation. Thus, Obama had a heavy burden in managing Korea-Japan dispute settlement. To illustrate further, President Obama had to deal with a

⁷⁶ Liu, Chien. "Obama's Pivot to Asia and its Failed Japan-South Korea Historical Reconciliation." *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (12, 2018): 293. <http://lps3.search.proquest.com.libproxy.snu.ac.kr/docview/2159025931?accountid=6802>.

Prime Minister Abe's revisionist actions on war remembrances along with President Park's contrary stance on the "comfort women" issue.

To better understand decisions made, it is also important to note the core values of President Obama during his time in office. As seen in the beginning of his administration, President Obama consistently emphasized engagement as the main centerpiece of his foreign policy that espoused values of freedom, democracy and human rights. Moreover, some of his key policies and actions have emphasized taking steps to ending modern slavery. That is to say, on September 25, 2012, Obama announced unprecedented government actions to combat one of the worst contemporary human rights abuses: human trafficking.⁷⁷ To combat this issue, in 2013, he signed a Presidential Memorandum that ensured that promoting the rights of women and girls remains a key component towards US diplomacy and further issued the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2013.⁷⁸ These active measures taken to combat human trafficking highlights the humanitarian side of President Obama's agenda and how that could be a lingering motive to involve himself in the comfort women. However, as seen in the ultimate comfort women deal, he ended up taking a more diplomatic route than that of it being humanitarian. That is to say, President Obama spoke on the comfort

⁷⁷ The White House <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/19/fact-sheet-obama-administration-s-comprehensive-efforts-promote-gender-e>

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/>

women issue while he made his visit to South Korea. He counseled Japan to settle the issue and publicly called on South Korea and Japan to work in tandem to resolve historical tensions and to move forward for mutual beneficial interests. However, his emphasis was not really humanitarian in nature, but rather more on the diplomatic relations.

As he noted on April 25, 2014 at the “Press Conference with President Obama and President Park of the Republic of Korea”:

*“With respect to the historical tensions between South Korea and Japan, I think that any of us who look back on the history of what happened to the comfort women here in South Korea, for example, have to recognize that this was **a terrible, egregious violation of human rights**. Those women were violated in ways that, even in the midst of war, was shocking. And they deserve to be heard; they deserve to be respected; and there should be an accurate and clear account of what happened. I think Prime Minister Abe recognizes, and certainly the Japanese people recognize, that the past is something that has to be recognized honestly and fairly. But I also think that it is in the interest of both Japan and the Korean **people to look forward** as well as backwards and to find ways in which the heartache and the pain of the past can be resolved, because, as has been said before, the interests today of the Korean and Japanese people so clearly converge.”⁷⁹*

79 “The President’s News Conference with President Park Geun-hye of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea,” April 25, 2014. Accessed: May 19 2020/
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/25/press-conference-president-obama-and-president-park-republic-korea>

Using language such as this, it can be seen that Obama himself wanted to take a more future orientated approach and looked for a quick solution to combat tensions between the two countries.

Consequently, despite the emergence of the comfort women agreement, it ultimately failed due to the fact, as noted in the aforementioned section it failed to fully account for reconciliation and was not received well. Thus, it can be seen that the failure can be attributed to the United States taking strategic considerations and security as priority over the issue of equity or justice. With this in mind, it can be seen that the agreement was more of a political expediency rather than a sincere attempt in solving the dispute as it ultimately failed to resolve historical controversies, which the victims and civic interests' groups sought as early as the 1990s.⁸⁰

Role of the US Government

To preface, as U.S. foreign politics are quite complex in nature, it is of no surprise that there were many domestic and international actors involved in the comfort women issue. Despite the fact that the executive branch makes the decisions in American foreign policy, oftentimes it is the

⁸⁰ Liu, Chien. "Obama's Pivot to Asia and its Failed Japan-South Korea Historical Reconciliation." *East Asia : An International Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (12, 2018): 293. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.snu.ac.kr/10.1007/s12140-018-9304-7>.
<http://lps3.search.proquest.com.libproxy.snu.ac.kr/docview/2159025931?accountid=6802>.

Congress that has the great leverage.⁸¹ That is to say, the Congress has much legislative power over the President such as that getting approval for certain appointments such as that of ambassadors. Therefore, in looking at US motivations for intervention, it is integral to look at what role the domestic apparatus played in either encouraging or hindering intervention into the “comfort women issue.”

That is to say, one of the lead politicians campaigning for justice for these women was that of Congressman Mike Honda. It came to such a point that on January 15, 2007 the US House of Representatives passed a bill with an attached document strongly urging the Secretary of State to encourage the Japanese government to tackle the issues contained in the Houses “comfort women resolution.” Ultimately, on July 30th, 2007 House Resolution 121 was passed in the House of Representatives that called for the Government of Japan to “formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces’ coercion of young women in sexual slavery...have this official and public apology presented by the Prime Minister of Japan.”⁸²

⁸¹ Yoo, John. 2015. “Mechanisms for making Foreign Policies in the U.S.” at Seoul National University.

⁸² Note: H. Res 121. See Appendix 2

In addition, towards key speakers in the House of Representatives, it is important to assess how the Secretary of States during the administration influenced decisions undertaken by the United States. That is to say, from 2011-2013, under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, “the comfort women issue was treated primarily as a humanitarian issue or that of human rights as it lines up with Hillary Clinton’s own personal beliefs. One of the key ways this was seen was the forceful terminology used by Secretary Clinton referring to the “comfort women” as “enforced sex slaves.”

Moreover, it was well known that Secretary Clinton was “interested in the issue and considers the treatment of the victims a serious human rights violation.”⁸³

In addition to Secretary Clintons push for serious intervention into this dispute, high level U.S. delegation urged key allies Japan and South Korea to mend strained ties. These included both Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and Assistant Secretary of Defense Mark Lippert making visits to both Seoul and Tokyo on January 15, 2013.⁸⁴

83 Randall, Eric. “Hillary Clinton and Japan Are in a Tiff Over 'Sex Slaves' and 'Comfort Women'.” The Atlantic. The Atlantic, October 30, 2013. <http://www.thewire.com/global/2012/07/hillary-clinton-and-japan-are-tiff-over-sexslaves-and-comfort-women/54502/>.

84 이은영. "The Role of the United States in the Comfort Women Controversy between South Korea and Japan." 2015. 48. <http://space.snu.ac.kr/bitstream/10371/126347/1/000000067086.pdf>

However, under Secretary of State John Kerry the attitude towards the “comfort women issue” changed greatly. That is to say, known to be a pragmatic realist who has different values from Secretary Clinton, Secretary Kerry consistently tried to steer the issue as one of diplomatic in nature rather than that of it being humanitarian. When he visited South Korea in 2013 for example, he alluded to both states to take a sideline on history and focus on security in the region and combatting the North Korean nuclear threat. Therefore, unlike Secretary Clinton, Secretary Kerry treated the issue as being that of a foreign affairs or diplomatic issue in which, as it was an issue between two individual countries where the United States held no direct involvement, he felt that it was not appropriate for U.S. engagement and rather aimed to avoid involvement in the issue.

Thus, with the change in leadership, so did the U.S. foreign policy on the “comfort women issue” change as well. That is to say, unlike the visible and active engagement that the United States had shown under Secretary of State Clinton, under Secretary of State Kerry, the visible and active engagement changed to a United States that was visible, but with a lagging level of engagement.⁸⁵ Additionally, the way in which the two secretaries define the term ‘comfort women’ also demonstrates their views, where

85 이은영. "The Role of the United States in the Comfort Women Controversy between South Korea and Japan." 2015. 59. <http://space.snu.ac.kr/bitstream/10371/126347/1/000000067086.pdf>

Clinton referred to them as “enforced sex slaves,” or the purpose of promoting “healing and reconciliation” took on the term mentioned by Prime Minister Abe “the trafficking of women for sexual purposes by the Japanese military.”⁸⁶

Aside of the change in terminology the most telling even that showed US taking a more fence sitting position with solely providing “lip-service” to both conflicting nations would be at a trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague on March 25, 2014 which was held before Obama’s trip to Asia. To explain further, the purpose of this meeting was a means to ease tensions between two crucial allies in the northeast Asia part with the hopes to form a united front against North Korea and further discuss the country’s augmenting nuclear program.

Additionally, it is important to consider key response to the “Comfort Women Agreement.” National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice for example notes the following:

*“The United States congratulates the Governments of Japan and the Republic of Korea on reaching an agreement, which they have made clear **‘finally and irreversibly’** addresses the tragic treatment of ‘comfort women’ during World War II. We support this agreement and its full implementation, and believe this comprehensive resolution is an important gesture of healing and reconciliation that should be welcomed by the international community.”*

⁸⁶ Ibid. 59

*“The United States applauds the leaders of the ROK and Japan, two of our most important allies, for having the courage and vision to forge a lasting settlement to this difficult issue. We look forward to deepening our work with both nations on a wide range of regional and global issues, on the basis of mutual interests and shared values, as well as to **advancing trilateral security cooperation.**”⁸⁷*

In considering the aforementioned statement, seeing as it comes from the advisor of national security, it can be seen that ultimately, despite the failure of the agreement, the United States ultimately pushed for the agreement as a means to promote national security by easing tensions between two key alliance partners in Northeast Asia.

International Society

In considering the motivations behind the Obama Administrations decision to intervene in the “comfort women issue” it is integral to understand the international environment at the time. To preface, this issue was initially seen as one of human rights in the International Society starting in the 1990s. To illustrate further, on February 25, 1990, the Korean Council for Women

⁸⁷ The White House. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/28/statement-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice-republic-korea-japan>

Draft for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (정대협) raised the comfort women issue at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.⁸⁸

Moreover, the politicization and internationalization of the issue put pressure on not only the UNHCR to act but also for the Obama Administration to act as well. The South Korean government took great efforts to attract international opinion. In a keynote address at the UN Human Rights Council on March 5, 2014, for example, Korean Foreign Minister Yun brought this dispute forward to the United Nations for the first time. Calling this wartime institutionalized system of sexual enslavement, a “universal human rights issue.”⁸⁹

Thus, the politicization of the issue of “comfort women” put a lot of international pressure on Japan to act or suffer more from international society. Furthermore, in the case of the US the need for a stable security environment was key in Northeast Asia to combat concerns of North Korean nuclear proliferation and the rise of China.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 21.

⁸⁹ 이은영. "The Role of the United States in the Comfort Women Controversy between South Korea and Japan." 2015. 59. <http://space.snu.ac.kr/bitstream/10371/126347/1/000000067086.pdf>

Analysis

Based on the aforementioned sections, there are a few important inferences that can be made. First of all, in the case of the “comfort women issue” it was seen that ultimately intervention by the US was assertive in nature with the goal of coming up with a solution that would speed up reconciliation and ensure strategic interests in the region were met. The Obama Administration, while originally treating this situation as one that is humanitarian in nature under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, ultimately made it diplomatic in nature by pushing for an agreement that did not address the reconciliation rhetoric needed to solve the historical tension between both South Korea and Japan. Thus, under the Obama Administration, while the Executive Branch first engaged actively under Clinton, it gradually disengaged itself under Secretary of State Kerry, while the legislative branch was fairly consistent in condemning Japan for a violation of human rights. Thus, the ultimate decision to intervene in such an abrupt manner is due to different values and interests of the two leaders of America’s foreign affairs department, despite being under the same liberal Democrat president.⁹⁰

Ultimately, this case shows that, despite President Obama’s humanitarian beliefs and passions, under Secretary of State Kerry, intervention occurred as a means to ensure national security interests were

⁹⁰ 이은영. "The Role of the United States in the Comfort Women Controversy between South Korea and Japan." 2015.

met. An expediated solution was what was ideal for the US to ensure that the lynchpin of their Northeast Asian security infrastructure remained stable. However, as asserted earlier, the agreement ultimately backfired for the US as the Obama Administration, despite aiding in the creation of the “Comfort Women Deal,” failed as the agreement was not seen favorably by the Moon Administration and was not received well by the general public. What is crucial then to note is that, US intervention aligns with success in ensuring US strategic interest are met. The desire to for alliance management and sustainability to combat tensions in the Northeast Asian was clear desire for the Obama Administration and thus the condition was met that led to the Obama Administration enacting the mode of assertive intervention. The next chapter will present a study on actions or lack thereof actions undertaken by the Trump Administration during the “forced labor issue” conflict between both nations.

V. The Trump Administration and the Forced Labor Issue

5-1. “The Forced Labor Issue” – U.S Non-Intervention

On October 30th, 2018 the Supreme Court of South Korea made the decision that Japanese companies should compensate forced labor victims on the premise that said victims have the right to claim damages incurred during the Japanese colonial occupation. To preface, in late October, it was decided that Nippon Steel should pay \$89,000 to each victim under colonial forced labor. Additionally, the Supreme Court followed up with two similar judgements in November again towards Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.⁹¹ Yet, despite these demands made, Japan denies the need for compensation claiming that all reparations and repayments were made within the 1965 Normalization Treaty that served the purpose of normalizing relations between Korea and Japan. Such contrasting views led to a blooming conflict that hindered friendly relations between both countries.

Before delving into the case study at hand, it is important to briefly illustrate the historical background that led to the creation of this forced labor issue. That is to say, the victims of this issue are those who, from 1942 until

⁹¹ Sang-hun, Choe, and Motoko Rich. “The \$89,000 Verdict Tearing Japan and South Korea Apart.” The New York Times. The New York Times, February 13, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/13/world/asia/south-korea-slave-forced-labor-japan-world-war-two.html>. Accessed: 30 September 2019.

1945, were forced to work at the Kamaishi and Yamata steelworks in Japan. At the time, after the passing of the Nation Mobilization Law in 1938, this gave the Japanese government the ability to control its citizens without the permission of the Diet (Japanese Parliament).⁹² The workers had to spend 12 hours per day melting metal in blast furnaces. At the end of World War II, Japan began the negotiations towards the “Treaty of Peace with Japan” that set to formally create peace between Japan and the Allied Powers, but also set to settle all claims and reparations demanded from the winning parties of the war.

In relation to the issue of forced labor, it is imperative to examine the innerworkings of *Article 4* and *Article 14* of the Treaty of Peace (San Francisco Treaty).

Article 4

(a) Subject to the provisions of paragraph (b) of this Article, the disposition of property of Japan and of its nationals in the areas referred to in Article 2, and their claims, including debts, against the authorities presently administering such areas and the residents (including juridical persons) thereof, and the disposition in Japan of property of such authorities and residents, and of claims, including debts, of such authorities and residents against Japan and its nationals, shall be the subject of special arrangements between Japan and such authorities. The property of any of the Allied Powers or its nationals in the areas referred to in Article 2 shall, in so far as this has not already been done, be returned by the administering authority in the condition in which it now exists. (The term nationals whenever used in the present Treaty includes juridical persons.)

*Article 4 San Francisco Treaty*⁹³

⁹² Kokka sōdōin hō [Nation Mobilization Law], Law No. 55 of 1938

⁹³ Treaty of Peace with Japan, supra note 79, art. 4(a), (b).

Thus, agreements on reparations (or the waiving thereof) were left up to creating bilateral treaties with and each individual country. Moreover, in consideration to *Article 14* of the San Francisco Treaty, while it failed to directly address Korea as it only referred to the Allied Powers during World War II, it can be considered an ideal model for the Normalization Treaty that would eventually come to be late in 1965. The article mentioned “it is recognized that Japan should pay reparations to the Allied Powers for the damage and suffering caused by it during the war...Japan will promptly enter into negotiations...whose present territories were occupied by Japanese forces and damaged by Japan, with a view to assisting to compensate those countries for the cost of repairing the damage done.”⁹⁴ The sentiment behind this offered an ideal means to open bilateral negotiations between Korea and Japan.

While the San Francisco Treaty was the beginning, what followed was 14 grueling years of continuous negotiations with the hope of normalizing relations between Korea and Japan and create a new economic bilateral relationship. Moreover, in the haste to ratify and finalize the treaty to normalize basic relations, the talk of atrocities committed during Japanese colonial occupation was left off the table. These exclusions included issues

⁹⁴ “Treaty of Peace with Japan.” Registered by the United States of America August 21, 1952. *United Nations Treaty Series Online*, registration no. 1832.

on territorial disputes, the “comfort women issue” and of course the forced labor issue. Eventually, after several grueling sessions the treaty was finalized and put into action in 1965.

However, in taking a closer look at the Normalization Treaty of 1965, it can be seen that the wording of *Article 14* didn’t seem to transfer along. That is to say, the main issue of contention came from a mixed interpretation of *Article 1(a)* of the 1965 Normalization Treaty that claimed “Japan shall: supply the products of Japan and the services of the Japanese people , the total value...equivalent to three hundred million United States dollars...in grants within the period of ten years from the date of entry into force of the present Agreement.”⁹⁵ Under this article, it was interpreted by Korea that the funding given in grants and loans were for the purpose of economic cooperation and growth. Japan on the other hand, interpreted this article as a means to settle any issues remaining and are part of the agreement on the settlement of problems concerning property and claims.

Furthermore, in addition to the grants, the treaty also stated in *Article 2*:

⁹⁵ “Japan and Republic of Korea, Agreement on the settlement of problems concerning property and claims and on economic co-operation.” Registered by Japan December 15, 1966. *United Nations Treaty Series Online*, registration no. 8473.

Article II

1. The Contracting Parties confirm that [the] problem concerning property, rights and interests of the two Contracting Parties and their nationals (including juridical persons) and concerning claims between the Contracting Parties and their nationals, including those provided for in Article IV, paragraph (a) of the Treaty of Peace with Japan signed at the city of San Francisco on September 8, 1951, is settled completely and finally.

*Article 2 of 1965 Normalization Treaty*⁹⁶

Thus, keeping both these ambiguous treaty articles in mind, it is can be inferred that Japan believes that all claims of individual victims have been settle since 1951 under the San Francisco Treaty and was in turn reaffirmed in the Normalization Treaty of 1965. Therefore, despite Korea's Supreme Court decision that individual victims have the right to claim reparations for damage, Japan believes that all claims have been settled with the signing of the 1965 bilateral treaty between Korea and Japan. Conversely, as seen in current dialogue, the lack of clarity within these articles has brought debate on the interpretation of the treaty where Korea believes that the monetary compensation, rather as a means of settlement, was given as a source of good faith to promote economic cooperation and an economic normalization of relations.

Moreover, this issue escalated even worse when Japan restricted exports of high-tech materials to South Korea. These export curbs could result in hurting global technology companies, including the operations of South Korean tech giant Samsung. Furthermore, was important to note for the case

⁹⁶ Ibid.

of the US is that Japan's decision to restrict exports of specialized materials that were prerequisites for producing semiconductors and computer displays and would also hurt US tech companies like Apple and Dell.⁹⁷

With this impasse and mixed interpretation of the aforementioned articles, it is of no surprise that this issue continues to be one of contention even in the 21st century.

However, what is important to note is the role of or rather the lack thereof role of the United States during this conflict. Despite the fact that this conflict incited much anger between two of United States key alliances security alliance partners, the United States ultimately decided not to intervene in the conflict. Take a more fence sitting strategy, the United States did not deem it necessary to intervene as the conflict was historical of nature and did not correlate with what could be considered a national security threat. The next section will expand further on the response of the Trump Administration in relation to the three levels of analysis.

⁹⁷ Goto, Shihoko. "US Intervention Can't Break the Japan-Korea Impasse." – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, July 23, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/us-intervention-cant-break-the-japan-korea-impasse/>.

5-2. The Trump Administrations Response

As noted in section 5-1 the Trump Administration barely involved themselves in this conflict at all and rather took an outside stance during the blooming of this conflict.

Trump's Personal Beliefs

To preface, in contrast to Obama who took a more active engagement in Asian politics, Trump has taken a much more critical and assertive stance. His strategy towards handling conflicts rest largely on his own personal beliefs and practical accomplishments, rather than one is considered normative legitimacy or international acceptance. With this in mind, it brings to question the lack of involvement of the Trump Administration towards the “forced labor issue” despite it causing severe conflict and tension with two key alliance partners that bolster regional security in Northeast Asia. One of the key reasons in a lack of push from Trump can be attributed to his own foreign policy rhetoric. To elucidate further, based on key actions taken during his administration, it can be argued that Trump's foreign policy encompasses elements of isolationism with cost-benefit bilateralism wherein he is attempting, in his mind, to pursue actions that will maximize American interests and benefits.

To expand, cost-benefit bilateralism refers to a bilateralism that discards a transformational foreign policy motivated by concepts of human rights or democracy and rather pursues one that is transactional in nature and exhibits skepticism towards regimes that are perceived as obstructive towards American interests and goals.⁹⁸ Furthermore, this type of bilateralism prefers to handle other powers individually based on cost-benefit calculations as to how each relationship works in favor of America's perceived interests.⁹⁹ Thus, rather than being viewed as part of a 'global community' the international system is instead seen to be an environment where different actors compete for advantages. A few examples that highlight this is Trump's withdrawal from multilateral trade agreements and renegotiating NAFTA and KORUS (US-Korea FTA). During the renegotiation of KORUS for example, the Trump administration consistently indicated its dissatisfaction with the trade deficit in the automobile and steel categories of the FTA.¹⁰⁰ Thus, to combat the issue, in the renegotiation of KORUS, Korea agreed to limit its exports to 70 percent of its steel exports over the last three years.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Stokes, Doug. (2018). Trump, American hegemony and the future of the liberal international order. *International Affairs*. 94. 137. 10.1093/ia/iix238.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Kim, Sung-hwan, and Gye-hwan Cho. "South Korea and US to Discuss Renegotiation of the KORUS FTA This Week." *South Korea and US to Discuss Renegotiation of the KORUS FTA This Week: Business: News: The Hankyoreh*. Accessed June 10, 2019. http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_business/807483.html.

¹⁰¹ Stangarone, Troy. "KORUS FTA Doesn't Protect South Korea From Section 232 Investigations." *The Diplomat*. August 09, 2018. Accessed June 10, 2019.

Aside of the emphasis on cost-benefit bilateralism, Trump has also displayed elements of isolationism under his ‘America First’ policy. Under this policy, Trump has moved away from America’s grand strategic tradition of retrenchment that traditionally sought to rebalance US’s global commitments and rather went towards a strategy where America should forego any objectives that are not directly correlated towards immediate national strategic interests.¹⁰² What is important to note is that the core of this policy posits the skepticism towards institutionalized global regimes. Essentially, Trump believes that America is not maximizing its benefits within the current international system and seeks to rectifying it in a way that will prioritize American interests.

To expand upon further, one example highlighting this policy was his attitude towards NATO. Claiming back in 2017 that it was ‘obsolete,’ Trump has often questioned the utility of this security alliance, especially as America spends the most for its maintenance.¹⁰³ He has been quite vague towards the US commitment towards NATO’s Article 5 on collective security guarantee as seen at the alliances May 2017 summit meeting.¹⁰⁴ Further, in his inaugural address he asserted, “we’ve made other countries rich, while the wealth,

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/korus-fta-doesnt-protect-south-korea-from-section-232-investigations/>.

¹⁰² Stokes, Doug. (2018). Trump, American hegemony and the future of the liberal international order. *International Affairs*. 94. 135. 10.1093/ia/iix238.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

strength and confidence of our country has dissipated over the horizon.”¹⁰⁵ With this statement, it can be seen that Trump believes in a very cost-benefit world-view where America has been contributing too much and not receiving ample benefits for their hard work.

Finally, in examining Trump’s foreign policy strategy, it is important to consider the impact of domestic politics towards his foreign policy decisions. As mentioned before, Trump has consistently stressed the importance of pursuing actions that will not undermine American interests. Much of his ‘America First’ rhetoric as well as his more transactional bilateralism has been a result of appeasing a support base that has suffered from a more globalized world. To elaborate, at the time of Trump’s campaigning for the presidential election, he greatly appealed to states that were at risk from outsourcing and an augmentation global manufacturing, utilizing their economic insecurity and their wishes to reverse globalization.¹⁰⁶ With this sort of domestic support base, it is foreseeable that Trump’s foreign policy has isolationist elements within it to cater towards this particular audience. Particularly, his decisions to withdraw from multilateral trade agreements and his increase of tariffs towards multiple industries highlights this.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Trump inauguration: transcript of Donald Trump speech’, Time, 20 Jan. 2017, <http://time.com/4640707/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript/>.

¹⁰⁶ Joel Kotkin, ‘The improbable demographics behind Donald Trump’s shocking presidential victory’, Forbes Magazine, 9 Nov. 2016

Thus, in looking at his transactional mentality it is of no surprise, that as an individual, he did not push for intervention into the “forced labor issue” between South Korea and Japan, as through his foreign policy perceptions, it was not relevant to his agenda or what he perceives as American national security or strategic interests. Furthermore, the lack of action from President Trump can also be attributed to the Trump Administration’s handling of bilateral alliance partners in general. That is to say, since the beginning his administration the Trump Administration took a hands-off approach between the ROK and Japan. This aloof posture has made it such that conflict continues to fester between South Korea (ROK) and Japan as the US is not taking on their traditional role of assertive intervention.

Thus, although the United States has played the role of facilitator in the past, President Trump’s consistent diatribes against both nations amidst antagonistic negotiations over trade and burden-sharing issues has reduced U.S. leverage in both countries and can account for a lack of intervention at the individual level into the “forced labor issue.”

US Government Response: Fence-Sitting

In considering the decision to not assertively intervene in this conflict, it is integral to examine what the domestic apparatus was at the time. First of all, similar to Trump’s own individual foreign policy agenda, there was no

heavy pressure from the (Washington) domestic government to intervene in the conflict as they did not feel as if the issue of concern to the United States national security interests. Furthermore, unlike the “comfort women issue” that was politicized and given attention both from the Congress and the media in the US, the issue was not looked at from that lens and not given the attention that was given to the “comfort women issue.” In fact, similar to the “lip-service” strategy given under Secretary of State John Kerry, the US similarly said they were “looking into” the situation but refrained and did not actively intervene in the conflict at hand.

What is important to note however is that although there was not an active role played by the United States to ameliorate tensions between the two countries, eventually the dispute began to threaten global supplies of memory chips and smartphones. In July 2019, David Stilwell, the top US diplomat for East Asian affairs visited South Korea for three days with the hopes to resolve the dispute as he claimed that the United States places a “great priority on strengthening” its relations with South Korea and Japan.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Kim, Hyung-Jin. “US wants role in efforts to settle South Korea-Japan dispute” July 17 2019. <https://apnews.com/c47d4005580543fe962d8c3d7a9fea41>

Korea-Japan Inter-Alliance Dynamics

As mentioned earlier, President Trump's repeated broadsides against both nations amidst negotiations over trade and burden-sharing issues has reduced Washington's bargaining power and influence towards both countries.¹⁰⁸

At this time, what is crucial to note is the brand of zero-sum nationalism in opposition to the other nation that has spiked exponentially during this conflict. Mentioned briefly in the previous section, much of the current historical dispute discord has been exacerbated by President Moon's progressive government that is eager to either dismantle or revisit the conservative policies made under the previous Park Geun Hye Administration, which includes the 2015 Comfort Women Agreement. Additionally, Prime Minister Abe's reliance on a nationalist political base and efforts to revise Japan's peace constitution has also caused unrest. This has put the US in a difficult position as their own national security interests in the region could be threatened by unrest between two alliance partners that are meant to be the lynchpin of their security arrangement in Northeast Asia.¹⁰⁹

108 Buchan, Patrick Gerard, and Benjamin Rimland. "Only the United States Can Pull Japan and Korea Back from the Brink." Only the United States Can Pull Japan and Korea Back from the Brink | Center for Strategic and International Studies. Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 1, 2020.

109 Jannuzi, Frank. "Out of Tune: Japan-ROK Tension and U.S. Interests in Northeast Asia." NBR Congressional Outreach. The National Bureau of Asian Research, October 2019. <https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/jannuzi-brief-100919.pdf>.

As noted earlier, much of Korea-Japan cooperation has been built upon US commitment towards both countries under the lens of a mutual defense treaty. Furthermore, it can be noted that their bilateral security relationship has transformed in the post-Cold War period. That is to say, as argued by Kim Ji Young, the flow of security cooperation between Japan and South Korea post-Cold War may be more heavily reliant on identity factors rather than external strategic factors.¹¹⁰ Examining the dynamics of their relationship through the identity lens, the author argued that the national identities of Japan and South Korea, formed through conflictual interactions throughout history, has negatively affected their security relations creating bilateral mistrust.¹¹¹ As noted previously in the literature review, democratization and the end of the Cold War brought a huge transformation in South Korea where public opinion become an integral factor in considering foreign policy decisions. Along this vein, conflict heightens when civil organizations stage public protests, followed by band-wagoning behavior of South Korea politicians that will ultimately pressure the government to take harder line policies toward Japan. Moreover, this will lead the South Korean government to take more aggressive policies toward Japan wherein if Japan is seen bringing a conflict

¹¹⁰ Kim, Ji Young. "Rethinking the role of identity factors: the history problem and the Japan–South Korea security relationship in the post-Cold War period." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Volume 15, Issue 3. September 2015.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 484.

that is related to identity between the two, South Korea actually brings the conflict into the arena of security policy.¹¹²

Thus, in considering this argument, it can be applied to the forced labor issue in that South Korea's strong civil society has raised the issue and brought it enough distress, that it has in turn put pressure on the South Korean government to be supportive in demanding reparations despite the strategic consequences that such actions could have. Especially in the case of the forced labor issue, there is a huge dissonance between President Moon and PM Abe where we see a huge divergence in agendas. Therefore, in considering the lack of US intervention, it can also be attributed to the difficulty of both South Korea and Japan's inability to overcome identity factors and South Korea bringing such conflicts into the arena of security cooperation.

Analysis

In considering the aforementioned parameters, it can be noted that in the case of the "forced labor issues" conditions for US intervention were not met. That is to say, as noted earlier, under the Trump Administration economic security and welfare was a key strategic interest of the United States. Moreover, unlike the Obama Administration that emphasized the importance of alliance

¹¹² *Ibid.* 485.

management, the Trump Administration conversely did not see that at a strategic interest and thus did not see the merit in involving themselves in historical dispute settlement. Ultimately, the mode of intervention was that of a fence-sitter, taking a back-seat in the conflict and passively disengaging in the happenings between South Korea and Japan. This case study illustrates that when conditions for intervention are not met, the US will enact a more passive strategic option to maximize their own individual agenda.

VI. The Trump Administration and “GSOMIA” November 22, 2019

6-1. GSOMIA

To preface, signed November 23rd, 2016, GSOMIA or “General Security of Military Information Agreement refers to the military pact between South Korea and Japan to share information about North Korean nuclear activities directly with each other. Despite domestic opposition the agreement was ultimately signed. In considering the lens of South Korea’s national defense for example, sharing military intelligence with Japan’s Self-Defense force makes sense. That is to say, at the time as North Korea threatens South Korea by rapidly mounting its nuclear arsenal and submarine-launches ballistic missile, Japanese advanced intelligence and anti-submarine warfare capabilities would allow for South Korea to detect North Korea’s provocations in a prompt manner, and directly share military intelligence with Japan, rather than having to go through the United States as a middle party. Furthermore, in the case of the US this agreement also made it easier to expedite the US sharing intelligence more effectively with South Korea and Japan.¹¹³ Additionally, in the case of the U.S., GSOMIA can be considered a

¹¹³ Park, Sangbo. “Implications of the General Security of Military Information Agreement for South Korea • Stimson Center.” Stimson Center, February 11, 2020. <https://www.stimson.org/2016/implications-general-security-military-information-agreement-south-korea/>

key aspect to cement the US alliance structure in Northeast Asia by putting in place a mechanism such as this that would moreover promote defense cooperation, thus ultimately providing the US the means to stabilize the security environment in Northeast Asia.

In creating GSOMIA there were both pros and cons that made the process quite tedious. In the case of pros: it would increase bilateral cooperation against North Korea's nuclear and missile programs—as well as China's military rise, it would strengthen relations among ROK, Japan and the US and promote heavier trilateral cooperation, Japan's technological advantage with its radio, surveillance aircraft and military satellites would offer warnings earlier where action can be taken quickly, and finally Korea's advantage with HUMINT or human and intelligence. At the same time, it was important to consider some cons with GSOMIA as well. First of all was the forceful initiation of it in the past and possible protests from public, the disclosing of sensitive military intelligence against North Korea, in some ways the agreement benefits Japan more instead of Korea in that Korea has what Japan wants, and finally that it could intensify the conflict between China and ROK-Japan-us trilateral relationship.

However, despite the merits for all parties through this agreement, it was announced in late August 2019, the Moon Administration was considering permanently expiring GSOMIA. This understandably so, created much protest from the U.S. who saw many merits of this agreement towards

their own national security interests. That is to say, the decision to possibly expire the military pact went against the regional security situation of the time.

Before, the final decision was made, the Trump Administration had been pressuring President Moon to remain in the agreement, instilling that it was an important as a means to monitor the missile and nuclear weapons activities of North Korea. ¹¹⁴ Washington consistently supported the agreements seeing it as a pillar of stability in the region as the agreement, as noted earlier, offers intelligence sharing about North Korea missiles as well as actions by China, which the United States considers as one of the key threats against it remaining the superior source of power in the Asian region.

Table 1: Chronology of Major Events Leading to Postponement of GSOMIA Decision

August 22, 2019	South Korea makes the decision not to extend GSOMIA, citing a “grave change” in security cooperation conditions
September 11, 2019	South Korea filed a complaint with WTO over Japan’s export restrictions
September 20, 2019	Japan agreed to bilateral talks with South Korea to deal with WTO complaint
October 11, 2019	South Korea and Japan hold inaugural talks in Geneva over

¹¹⁴ Motoko Rich and Edward Wong, “Under U.S. Pressure, South Korea Stays in Intelligence Pact With Japan,” The New York Times (The New York Times, November 22, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/22/world/asia/japan-south-korea-intelligence.html?auth=link-dismiss-google1tap>

	Seoul's complaint = two sides fail to find a common ground
November 17, 2019	Defense chiefs of South Korea and Japan hold talks in Bangkok but fail to compromise on differences over intelligence-sharing pact
November 19, 2019	South Korea and Japan hold a second round in Geneva under the WTO dispute settlement process. No compromise made.
November 22, 2019	South Korea announces to postpone the termination of GSOMIA, hours before its scheduled expiration the next day. South Korea suspends the WTO complaint process against Japan's export restrictions.

Source: *Yonhap News* <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20191121011700325>

Ultimately, despite rising tensions and heavy reluctance from the South Korea side, with the continuous pressure from the United States, on November 22, 2019 the Moon Administration made the decision to “suspend the expiration” under the condition that GSOMIA could be terminated at any moment, to which the Japanese government showed its understanding.¹¹⁵ This was a major policy reversal, as the announcement occurred a mere six hours before the agreement was meant to expire.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵*Yonhap News*

¹¹⁶ Kim, Tong-hyung. “South Korea Will Keep Its Military Intelligence pact With Japan – For Now.” *The Diplomat*. Published: November 23, 2019. Date Accessed: July 5, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/south-korea-will-keeps-its-military-intelligence-pact-with-japan-for-now/>

6-2. The Trump Administrations Response (Assertive Engagement)

Individual: Trump's Muted Response

To preface, unlike the Obama Administration that made more active actions from the beginning, the Trump Administration and Trump himself was oftentimes reluctant to intervene in affairs of bilateral conflict between South Korea and Japan. That is to say, despite Washington's (the domestic government) blatant dissatisfaction with the decision to end GSOMIA, Trump himself what quite muted on his opinion on the decision made. President Trump has shown time and time again that he does not prioritize alliances and does not see the value in them. When asked about the South Korean's government's decision to terminate an intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan, President Trump just stated, "We're going to see what happens." Furthermore, even as the G7 summit in France, in response to the possible withdrawal from GSOMIA by South Korea, President Trump again just stated that "well, we're going to see what happens."¹¹⁷ What is interesting to note is that his remarks contrast great with the dissatisfaction the US

¹¹⁷"Trump gives muted response on S. Korea's withdrawal from GSOMIA" *Hankyoreh*
http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/907159.html

government expressed with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo explicitly voicing his disappointment along with the Defense Department. Trump on the other hand, had refrained from aggravating the situation by openly condoning or condemning either side of the dispute.

US Government: Selective but Assertive Intervention

As noted by Waltz, the state or domestic apparatus can bring about better understanding as to why actions are taken or not taken at the international level. In considering the U.S. decision to intervene to prevent the termination of GSOMIA, it is important to consider not only the leader himself, but the key domestic actors that pushed for this military agreement to continue. As the benefits account under GSOMIA are vast in terms of U.S. national security interests, it is of no surprise that there were many actors in the domestic apparatus that played a more active role in ensuring the continuity of this agreement. Unlike President Trump, who was rather quiet on the issue, there were many other actors within the US government who were very much against the decision to expire the agreement. To note, regarding GSOMIA as a key element in its Indo-Pacific strategy, and furthermore as a symbol of trilateral cooperation, the US was consistent about

asking Seoul not to end the agreement. Much of the rhetoric at the time of the decision-making process clearly illustrates this sentiment.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for example notes:

“We’re disappointed to see the decision that the South Koreans made about that information sharing agreement. We were urging each of the two countries to continue to engage, to continue to have dialogue. She was with the Japanese Foreign Minister yesterday, I believe our time. They were working to put this back together.”

“And there is no doubt that the shared interests of Japan and South Korea are important. And they’re important to the United States of America. And we hope each of those two countries can begin to put that relationship back in exactly the right place.”¹¹⁸

The State Department Spokesman’s Office Official similarly:

“Made it clear to the Moon administration that this decision would have a negative effect on U.S. security interests and those of our allies and reflects

118 U.S. Department of State. “Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland At A Press Availability”
<https://www.state.gov/secretary-of-state-michael-r-pompeo-and-canadian-foreign-minister-chrystia-freeland-at-a-press-availability/>

*a serious misapprehension on the part of the Moon Administration regarding the serious security challenge we face in Northeast Asia.”*¹¹⁹

Asahi News – quoting Victor Cha, reported:

“U.S. side pressured South Korea claiming that U.S. ROK alliance will be in danger if South Korea terminate GSOMIA”

Ambassador Harry Harris noted that:

*“Korea elevated it into the security realm and that security realm affects us. So, now it affects the U.S. and our ability to defend Korea and puts our troops at risk...so that is why we reacted quickly and strongly in expressing disappointment at Seoul’s decision”*¹²⁰

Eliot Engel, Chairman of the House of Foreign Affairs Committee in a statement asserted:

“I am deeply concerned by President Moon Jae-in’s decision to terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement #GSOMIA”

119 이혜아 . “(5th LD) U.S. Expresses 'Strong Concern,' 'Disappointment' at Termination of Seoul-Tokyo Intel Pact.” Yonhap News Agency. 이혜아, August 22, 2019. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20190822012755325>

120 송상호 . “(LEAD) (Yonhap Interview) Amb. Harris Says Seoul Elevated History Issue into Security Realm with GSOMIA Decision.” Yonhap News Agency. 송상호, November 18, 2019. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20191119008851325>.

*“a hard-sought and important agreement that **contributes to a shared understanding of regional security threats** between US allies.”¹²¹*

U.S. Defense Minister Mark Esper (11.15.2019)

*“[The agreement] is an **effective tool** for the United States, Korea and Japan to **share timely information**, particularly in times of war, Esper said. Expiration of GSOMIA would have an impact on our effectiveness, so we have **urged all sides to sit down to work out their differences**. The only ones who benefit from the expiration of GSOMIA and continued friction between Seoul and Tokyo are Pyongyang and Beijing.” It is in the interest of North Korea and China to drive a wedge between Japan and South Korea, the defense secretary said, and “that reasons alone should be powerful enough for us all to sit down and work together to deal with our common challenges.”¹²²*

In considering the aforementioned statements it can be seen the key words that stand out are “effective tool,” “shared understanding of regional security threats,” “negative effects on US security interests,” and “shared

121 Kim, Sarah. “Decision to Leave Gsomia Is Blasted in Washington.” Korea JoongAng Daily. Accessed May 24, 2020.

<https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3067278>

122 Garamone, Jim. “U.S., South Korean Defense Leaders Talk Military Exercises.” U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, November 15, 2019.

<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2017615/us-south-korean-defense-leaders-talk-military-exercises/>.

interests.” The language in these statements towards Seoul’s decision on GSOMIA clearly demonstrated that the US domestic government apparatus were heavily reluctant for the agreement to expire and pushed heavily for it to remain standing. Thus, unlike the “forced labor issue” that had much vaguer language that of GSOMIA, ultimately the domestic government understood the sheer necessity of the continuation of this pact for US national security interests in the Northeast Asian region and thus took a much more assertive stance in ensuring that the pact would not expire on November 22, 2019.

Analysis

Overall in examining the specific emergency actions that were taken to ensure the continuation of GSOMIA, it can be seen that the key reasons for stronger intervention by the US can be attributed to the key actors from the state (government) level that put heavy pressure on South Korea to reverse their decision. That is to say, GSOMIA was viewed as a concern over threats against US strategic interests. As noted earlier, the US was also heavily involved in the creation of this program and further benefitted from the military intelligence sharing pact as South Korea and Japan. Therefore, unlike the case of the “forced labor issue” the US played a much stronger role by putting active pressure on South Korea to ensure that GSOMIA does not expire ultimately leading to the decision on November 22, 2019 for it to be

continued. Despite, the oftentimes unclear language from President Trump and his noncommittal stance during the height of the conflict, ultimately key domestic actors intervened to ensure that the military agreement continued to persist. The case of GSOMIA once again highlights that when conditions that threaten US strategic interests, which in this case was important military intelligence, are met, the US will enact a selective but assertive intervention to ensure that the results are advantageous for US strategic interests. Having a strong military pact like that of GSOMIA not only offers key information to the United States on the happenings of North Korea and their missile program but furthermore displays a tangible symbol of a strong trilateral alliance and security cooperation in the Northeast Asian region and further gives a united front against any forms of instability in the region.

VII. Conclusion

Unlike the past where there was a set mode of intervention or “strategic flexibility” where the US prioritized evading entanglement into conflict, the analysis of the three aforementioned case studies illustrate that intervention is conditional in that certain circumstances must be met for the US to enact a certain active mode of intervention where the results correlate and maximize US strategic interests. In considering actions taken under the Obama Administration, it can be seen from both the President himself and the government under key domestic actors such as Secretary of State John Kerry and House Representative Mike Honda, much of conflict intervention into the “comfort women issue” occurred to ensure US strategic interests which for the Obama Administration was alliance management and sustainability.

Initially, the decision to intervene in the “comfort women issue” could be seen as one that is humanitarian motivated in nature, however in examining the language and actions taken by both President Obama and the Administration as whole, the abrupt creation of the failed “comfort women agreement” showed that ultimately the haste to look at a more “future-orientated approach” had in fact backfired in solving the conflict and ultimately US national security interests were the key priority in abrupt and assertive intervention. Treating the issue as one that is diplomatic in nature

rather than humanitarian showcased that assertive engagement from the US only occurs when strategic interests are compromised, and a rapid solution is desired. Thus, as noted in the 2015 National Security Strategy highlighting how the Obama Administration valued multilateral agreements and strong alliances, it can be seen that if the condition for intervention into South Korea-Japan conflicts are met, the US will enact an active mode of intervention: assertive intervention.

Moving forward, in the case of the “forced labor issue” that occurred under the current Trump Administration, it can be seen that intervention did not occur due to the belief that the conflict did not meet the conditions that would encourage US intervention. That is to say, as noted in the 2017 National Security Strategy, the Trump Administration saw national security in line with economic security. Moreover, President Trump’s transactional nature of foreign policy seeing alliances through means of a cost-benefit lens also made it such that he did not take an active stance in intervention into the “forced labor issue” as it did not line up with his perceptions of national security interests or strategic interests of the US. Additionally, lack of action from the domestic government that only provided lip-service played a large role a lack of action being taken place. The situation has a whole again demonstrates that fact that the US has become cautious in its intervention in South Korea-Japan conflict and will do so only when it lines up the strategic

interests of the Trump Administration (economic welfare and American interests).

Finally, the last case study GSOMIA offers some telling evidence of this argument. As GSOMIA not only signal a strong security cooperation in Northeast Asia, the information gained under the military pact is heavily significant for US national security interests. For the US in particular, GSOMIA offers a wealth of information on North Korean nuclear capabilities and is directly in correlation with US national security interest. Unlike the “forced labor issue,” the issue of GSOMIA had a much more active presence from the US domestic government with key figures like Secretary of State Pompeo and Ambassador Harry Harris calling on South Korea and Japan to come to an agreement to continue the agreement despite South Korea consistently insisting on the expiration of the agreement. This case study asserts that under a state where US strategic interests seem to be threatened, the US will assertively intervene into South Korea-Japan conflict and will ensure that the outcome will ultimately benefit US strategic interests the most.

Thus, through the view of these three cases studies it can be seen that for the United States, US strategic interests [conditions] must be met for the US to actively intervene in Korea-Japan conflict. In considering both administrations, it can be seen that the Obama Administration key condition was threats against alliance sustainability whereas in the case of the Trump Administration, strategic interests were primarily related to economic

concerns and maximizing American national interest. In doing so, the nature of US intervention post-Cold War is more situational in nature where interference into conflict is not altruistic but rather to maximize the strategic interests of each administration. As the geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia continues to change, it is crucial that the US takes a more active stance in resolving conflicts and rather than focus on just maximizing their strategic interests in the region, they should focus more on the benefits of a strong trilateral security cooperation network.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

“Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion”

From Minister Kishida: “The Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Korea (ROK) have intensively discussed the issue of comfort women between Japan and the ROK at bilateral meetings including the Director-General consultations. Based on the result of such discussions, I, on behalf of the Government of Japan, state the following:

(1) The issue of comfort women, with an involvement of the Japanese military authorities at that time, was a grave affront to the honor and dignity of large numbers of women, and the Government of Japan is painfully aware of responsibilities from this perspective. As Prime Minister of Japan, Prime Minister Abe expresses anew his most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.

(2) The Government of Japan has been sincerely dealing with this issue. Building on such experience, the Government of Japan will now take measures to heal psychological wounds of all former comfort women through its budget. To be more specific, it has been decided that the Government of the ROK establish a foundation for the purpose of providing support for the former comfort women, that its funds be contributed by the Government of Japan as a one-time contribution through its budget, and that projects for recovering the honor and dignity and healing the psychological wounds of all former comfort women be carried out under the cooperation between the Government of Japan and the Government of the ROK.

(3) While stating the above, the Government of Japan confirms that this issue is resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement, on the premise that the Government will steadily implement the measures specified in (2) above. In addition, together with the Government of the ROK, the Government of Japan will refrain from accusing or criticizing each other regarding this issue in the international community, including at the United Nations.”¹²³

¹²³“Announcement of Foreign Minister of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion”, December 28th, 2015

https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000364.html

From Foreign Minister Yun

“The Government of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Government of Japan have intensively discussed the issue of comfort women between the ROK and Japan at bilateral meetings including the Director-General consultations. Based on the result of such discussions, I, on behalf of the Government of the ROK, state the following:

(1) The Government of the ROK values the GOJ’s announcement and efforts made by the Government of Japan in the lead-up to the issuance of the announcement and confirms, together with the GOJ, that the issue is resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement, on the premise that the Government of Japan will steadily implement the measures specified in 1. (2) above. The Government of the ROK will cooperate in the implementation of the Government of Japan’s measures.

(2) The Government of the ROK acknowledges the fact that the Government of Japan is concerned about the statue built in front of the Embassy of Japan in Seoul from the viewpoint of preventing any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity and will strive to solve this issue in an appropriate manner through taking measures such as consulting with related organizations about possible ways of addressing this issue.

(3) The Government of the ROK, together with the Government of Japan, will refrain from accusing or criticizing each other regarding this issue in the international community, including at the United Nations, on the premise that the Government of Japan will steadily implement the measures it announced.”¹²⁴

Appendix 2

House Resolution 121: “110 Congress (2007-2008) Expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that the government of Japan should: (1) formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility for its Imperial Armed Force's coercion of young women into sexual slavery (comfort women) during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II; (2) have this official and public apology presented by the Prime Minister of Japan; (3) refute any claims that the sexual enslavement and trafficking of the comfort women never occurred; and (4) educate current and future

¹²⁴ Ibid.

generations about this crime while following the international community's recommendations with respect to the comfort women.”

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