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PUSHING HARD FROM BACKSTAGE: AMERICAN INFLUENCE ON THE JAPANESE-KOREAN SETTLEMENT AND THE CONTEMPORARY TRIANGULAR ALLIANCE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Abstract

When on June 22, 1965 Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) signed the Treaty on Basic Relations between both countries, it could be supposed that from that day on both Asian democracies would strengthen their relations, act as equal partners, and be compelled to implement common policy in the region, based on their alliance with the United States. This paper provides a contextual analysis of American diplomatic correspondence in the period leading up to the Japanese-Korean settlement. The author claims that in the long-range perspective the US's "push hard" policy toward its Asian allies caused disputes between Japan and the ROK, and the existence of a "quasi alliance" in the region.

Keywords: Japan, United States, Republic of Korea, Treaty on Basic Relations, Vietnam War, foreign pressure.

INTRODUCTION

On June 22, 1965 Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) signed the Treaty on Basic Relations. The agreement officially established bilateral relations between Tokyo and Seoul but did not solve ongoing disputes between the partners. Although the treaty was agreed

upon only after several years of harsh debates, it was a significant step toward shaping relations in the region. However, the manner by which agreement on the treaty was reached, its implementation against the will of Korean society, and how it resolved fundamental disputes among the Asian democracies, can be seen as points of inflammation in relations between Japan and South Korea.

After World War II, both Japan and South Korea remained under the influence of the United States of America. Japan's alliance with the US commenced with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the simultaneous Security Treaty between the United States and Japan in 1951. The military alliance of South Korea and the US was established in 1953 after the end of the Korean War. Even though both Asian countries became important allies of the US, cooperation between the two was not reached until 1965.

Japan's and Korea's histories made becoming allies difficult. The period of Japanese occupation (1910-1945) was well remembered on the Korean Peninsula. Among other matters, territorial disputes concerning fisheries kept tempers aroused. The actions of the Japanese military toward Korean women were still vivid in memory. Therefore, even today, when political science analyses from the realist perspective may predict that Japan will remain in a strong alliance with the US and in a triangular alliance with the ROK and US, historical disputes overshadow this cooperation and make trilateral relations unstable.

Such a state of affairs is frequently described as a "patron commitment" (Cha 2000: 263) generated by each partner's—but especially South Korea's—fear of being abandoned (O'Neil 2013: 56). This kind of triangular alliance can be defined as a quasi alliance (Cha 2000: 263); it is based on the need to maintain the balance of power in the region and to secure the position of both American partners, namely Japan and South Korea.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the US's role in creating the situation of a quasi alliance in the contemporary Asia-Pacific region and indirectly contributing to the existence of historical disputes between Japan and South Korea. I claim that the American pressure to gain a prompt settlement between both Asian countries was the outcome of Cold War policy and the US's involvement in the Vietnam War. To achieve short-term objectives, the Americans pressured Japan, and especially South Korea, to reconcile. However, without taking into consideration the long-term objectives, the

process of reaching a settlement took the resolution of historical disputes, among other issues, out of the equation. Therefore, analysis of the process driving the Japanese-Korean settlement, and the consequence for trilateral relations of the American "push hard" policy, is key for this paper.

Hence, it is important to find out how US policy toward Japan and the ROK in the 1960s affected the rapprochement between the two Asian countries, then to analyze America's attitude toward Japan and toward South Korea, and finally, to recognize American involvement in the Japanese and Korean settlement and answer the question of how it affected domestic policy in South Korea.

My analysis is based on diplomatic correspondence between Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul in the 1960s, with special emphasis on the period directly prior to the signing of the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, and after June 22, 1965.

AMERICAN POLICY IN THE 1960s IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION AND THE NEED FOR A JAPANESE AND KOREAN SETTLEMENT

In the early 1960s, American involvement in the Vietnam War began to escalate. Washington was thus eager to stop providing South Korea with military and development aid, to move the burden of aid to Tokyo, and to use US funds instead on the ongoing Second Indochina War (Dudden 2008: 43). Moreover, the US government was seriously worried about Sino-Japanese economic ties. As Kil J. Yi (2002) claims, "Normalization of relations between Seoul and Tokyo would represent a stumbling block in Japan's path toward improving relations with the communist world, which considered South Korea both illegitimate and a pawn of U.S. imperialism."

Taking both issues into consideration, Americans decided to take serious steps to strengthen their position in Vietnam, as the South Vietnamese troops were weakening due to strong resistance from the North. Simultaneously, it was crucial to secure the democratic block, especially as Japan was strengthening its economic ties with communist China.

The "push hard" steps to complete the Japanese and Korean normalization were the result of American Cold War policy. The

Japanese and American security treaty[1] and the postwar status of the Country of the Rising Sun prevented Japan from participating in the military operations of its patron. To maintain the balance of power in the region, reconciliation between Japan and Korea seemed essential.

The decision was made in connection with the American Many Flags campaign, when President Lyndon Johnson called for the presence of US allies in the Vietnam War. While sending Korean soldiers to Vietnam, Park Chung-hee, the ROK's president, stated that Korea would repay the debts it owed to members of the Free World that had participated in the Korean War (Jung 2016: 36).

Korean assistance to Vietnam started along with the arrival of US troops there . Beginning with training South Vietnamese soldiers in the ROK, and then sending medical assistance, karate instructors in September, 1964, and a contingent trained in constructing roads and public buildings, the South Korean government finally sent combat troops to Vietnam in August, 1965, under the command of Major General Chae Myung-shin (Kim 1966: 28-29). The dates of signing the treaty with Japan and the decision to send troops to fight on foreign soil—for the first time in Korean history—were not accidental. The National Diet voted to send the troops to support the South Vietnamese army after agreeing on the normalization treaty, a day before signing the document. The opposition Masses Party (Minjungdang) walked out in protest over the Japanese and Korean Treaty on Basic Relations, and therefore did not participate in the vote on the bill to send the troops to Vietnam (Kim 1966: 32).

Though the opposition was calling for the Japanese to apologize for its colonial past, and to acknowledge that Dokto/Takeshima belonged to South Korea, Park decided that the pragmatic approach was the best solution to achieve economic advantages and political stability (Jung-Hoon Lee: Kindle Locations 6060-6062). Quick economic gain seemed more advantageous than a final Japanese and Korean settlement on history issues. Park's opponents did not take into consideration that proper apologies were beyond anyone's power in the 1960s and Park became the target at which "to vent their deep sense of frustration over what had happened in the past and how little could be done about it" (Jung-Hoon Lee: Kindle Locations 6085-6088).

[1] Revised in 1960, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the US and Japan.

South Korea is considered by scholars to have been a weak US partner in the 1960s, economically and militarily dependent, with no option but to meet its patron's demands (Jung: 37). Nonetheless, as Kil J. Yi claims, it was obvious that the US-Korean alliance in the Vietnam War had to be postponed until a settlement was reached between Japan and the ROK, and the Park government's position was strengthened (Yi 2002: 648). There was thus a need for the US's "push hard" policy, as well as for the process of negotiations that will be described in the next part of this paper.

AIMING AT A SETTLEMENT: AMERICAN ENGAGEMENT IN NEGOTIATING THE TREATY

When analyzing the process of American involvement in the Japanese-Korean negotiation on establishing basic relations, more factors should be taken into consideration than solely the international situation described above. Political involvement in the reconciliation process was important, but the attitude of the American government and certain politicians is also worth analysis.

In this part of the article, a contextual analysis of diplomatic correspondence will help to prove the hypothesis that the pro--Japanese attitude of the American government can be considered one of the conditions of contemporary Japanese and Korean relations and disputes, as well as of the shape of the triangular alliance, which is defined in this paper as a quasi alliance.

From official correspondence, which is available today in the Office of the Historian in the Bureau of Public Affairs at the Department of State, we can see that the US's great rush to promote a settlement between its Asian allies was the leading characteristic of negotiations for the 1965 normalization treaty. In a telegram dated January 3, 1964, Edwin O. Reischauer, the US ambassador in Tokyo, assured the State Department that the Japanese government was aware of the necessity and urgency of reaching a settlement with the ROK (Document 332). Delay in signing a treaty was not acceptable to the American side because of the Olympics, which had started to be the most important issue for Japanese politicians and society. The rush was because of this matter, and justified by American interests in East Asia.

On January 21, 1964 a meeting concerning the Korean and Japanese negotiations took place between representatives of the

ROK's embassy in the US: Ambassador Kim Chong-yul and others, American Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Leonard L. Bacon, the Acting Director for East Asian Affairs. The Korean ambassador read a statement in which he referred to his government's attitude on the necessity of establishing a settlement with Japan, but he called talks on this issue a domestic political issue, due to (1) the history of relations between Japan and Korea, which had created animosities between the two nations, as well as (2) the critical attitude of some opposition parties (Document 333). The question of fisheries and the guaranteed protection of the Korean fishing industry "from any adverse effects of Japanese fishing activities (Document 333)" was also important. Kim's statement showed the Korean side's awareness that the US was shifting its role as security guarantor to Japan, which was unacceptable to the ROK's government.

In this statement the "fear of being abandoned"[2] was clearly visible. The domestic issues mentioned by Kim pertained, in his opinion, to both Asian countries, but he referred only to the ROK's situation. The ambassador referred to a situation from the previous decade, when Korean society, including the political opposition, was willing for reconciliation to occur (Document 333). But in the middle of the 1960s the situation had reversed.

The fisheries problem was a major issue during the negotiations. The Korean side was afraid of a potential loss of fishing operations due to Japanese vessels. The export of fish to Japan was one of the main sources of income for Korean fishermen. Therefore, for the ROK's government, American involvement in supervising the problem seemed to be vital, in addition to the historical matters.

The American approach to the Japanese-Korean settlement can be defined as a "push hard" policy. The term "push hard" itself appeared for the first time in a memorandum from Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson on January 23, 1964. In this document, Komer stated that "we want to push hard to get the ROK/Japanese settlement" (Document 334). The main reason for such action in regard to Korea was economic, as the US government had been concerned about this aspect for a decade (Document 334). The prospect of a treaty being signed between the Asian allies was treated by Washington as "a nice foreign policy plus" (Document 334).

[2] The fear that the U.S. would withdraw its security and economic support from the ROK.

American policy was clearly to the advantage of the Japanese side. The propositions offered by the Japanese to the Koreans regarding a future agreement were considered by Americans to be "generous" (Document 336). The US government saw the leading Japanese politicians and Korea's President Park as supporters of the US plan to reconcile its Asian partners (Document 336). In February, in a telegram from the American embassy in Seoul to the State Department, the US Ambassador Samuel D. Berger once again stated that he would "approach governments and urge them to schedule" negotiations on the settlement, as well as urging Koreans "to move ahead regardless of internal political opposition" (Document 337). This kind of politics showed the priority of American policy on the regions: the region's domestic issues were not taken into consideration. The Japanese were encouraged to be "as magnanimous as possible" (Document 337).

The "push hard" policy and the general rush were caused not only by fear that the Japanese government would shift its priorities away from establishing basic relations with Korea to "Olympic fever," but also by American involvement in the Vietnam War. This urgency can be also considered an indirect factor in contemporary Japanese and Korean struggles, that is, over history. Without the time and opportunity to negotiate different issues of interest to both sides, prompt reconciliation due to the security priority during the Cold War period made these Asian nations postpone the settlement of troubling matters to the future—when the mainly postwar generation started to use them as a political tool. The aim of the American patron was only to "move forcibly to convince both governments" (Document 337).

On February 29, 1964 a meeting between the Japanese and American sides took place in Washington. The Japanese embassy was represented by Ryūji Takeuchi, Ambassador of Japan, and Masao Kanazawa, Political Counselor, while the US government was represented by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Robert W. Barnett, and Acting Deputy Director for East Asian Affairs Robert A. Fearey. During the conversation, the Japanese ambassador was asked to pass on to the Japanese minister of foreign affairs the importance of concluding the agreement with the ROK. In analyzing the following conversation we can see that the Japanese representatives also wanted to maintain the status quo provided by their American

patron, and were calling the Korean demands "unreasonable" while simultaneously assuring the US government that they would not agree to any Korean proposals on the fisheries issue (Document 338). Ambassador Takeuchi tried to convince the Americans that if the Koreans were allowed to discuss and negotiate the terms of the settlement, they would "boycott the technical negotiations and insist instead on political ones" (Document 338).

Student protests erupted while the negotiations were proceeding, in March 1964. Further diplomatic correspondence commenced on April 9. In a memorandum to President Johnson, Robert W. Komer openly showed his pro-Japanese stance, calling Yoshida "our favorite Prime Minister back in the '50s" (Document 340). A month later, a telegram was dispatched from the State Department to the US Embassy in Korea. It instructed the Embassy that "any sign of US 'interference'," was to be disguised, as it would be counter--productive (Document 341). Concern about the possibility of evoking Koreans' feeling of being "abandoned" was revealed in this message. In numerous studies on the alliance in the Asia-Pacific region, the "fear of being abandoned" is shown to be a main guarantee for the triangular relations between the US, Japan, and the ROK (O'Neil 2013: 81). Anxiety over the American government's withdrawal from the region is, especially for contemporary Korea, a main reason for accepting the activities of Japan (the US's main partner in the region) and for confining references to historical disputes mainly to the field of domestic politics. As is shown through an analysis of the diplomatic correspondence and as Koreans have known for decades, Japan is the country that is the most important partner for the US government.

This kind of degradation of the Korean side in the triangular alliance can also be confirmed by the phrases used regarding Korea in the messages exchanged between American politicians and diplomats. In July, 1964 the Korean nation was called the "unstable U.S. stepchild" (Document 345); elsewhere it was affirmed that the Japanese "don't need Korea that much" (Document 342). The phrases were the opposite to those used toward the Japanese (for example, the one used to describe PM Yoshida).

In the spring and summer of 1964, the American government described the Japanese-Korean settlement as a "top priority" in North East Asia (Document 342/ Document 345). Still, in August 1964, the Japanese visits and any attempts to reconcile with Korea

were considered as "good will" (Document 347). The administration in Washington wanted to make Koreans aware that "normalization is absolutely necessary for Korea" (Document 349).

Americans, by acting forcibly toward the Korean government, could see the end of the negotiations in the autumn of 1964. An educational campaign was introduced in Korea, although it had not yet gone into high gear (Document 350). The new Korean ambassador "had given the impression that the Koreans are now not only to start negotiations but to bring them to a successful conclusion in the near future" (Document 351). Subsequently, the Korean nation was characterized as one that "will use the weakness of their government to extract further concessions from Japan" (Document 351).

The Japanese were also confirming this state of affairs. In November 1964, in a telegram to the State Department, Reischauer reported that Korean-Japanese normalization seemed to be the biggest issue for the Japanese government (Document 353). Americans were aware that apologies from Japan to Korea for the colonial past should occur. Nevertheless, seen from a contemporary perspective, the Americans did not encourage Japan to make the "sincere" apologies demanded by the Korean side but only asked the Japanese government for "some sort of apology" (Document 353). The Japanese were perfectly aware that this kind of confession would "probably either arouse strong adverse reaction in Japan or else prove worse than unsatisfactory for Koreans" (Document 353). The terminology used by Edwin Reischauer in his telegram to the State Department became the key wording in future statements provided by Japanese politicians. Reischauer's proposal of a "forward looking statement about turning backs on past unhappy history and moving to the new period of friendly cooperation" (Document 353), can be found in similar expressions in Shinzō Abe's statements, for instance, "History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone," or "toward an Alliance of Hope."

While the atmosphere in Korea became tense in the autumn of 1964, the US Embassy started to consider whether an official visit to the US by President Park and other representatives of the ROK's government would be a good step and encourage the Korean nation to agree on a settlement (Document 354). On the last day of 1964, the State Department reported a serious concern about the "confusion and indecision within the ROK's government" on the

issue (Document 355). Japanese politicians perfectly understood the American attitude toward Korea, and during a meeting in Washington, Prime Minister Eisaku Satō called the Koreans "hard to understand" (Document 356). Americans also openly expressed their attitude toward the Korean situation, claiming that they "realize the benefits both countries have lost this past three years" and "can see how costly the delay has been" (Document 356).

Americans expressed their satisfaction with the visit of the Japanese minister of foreign affairs, Etsusaburō Shiina, to Korea in February 1965, claiming that he had come "as close as a Japanese can to apologizing for Japan's past sins, and everyone—including State—is thoroughly pleased" (Document 357). Shiina had followed the American recommendation perfectly. The statement did not name the responsible persons or nation, or say what were the events of the "unhappy" period. Little was said about the declaration in the Japanese press; Shiina's name was not mentioned and only information regarding the normalization treaty was provided (Lind 2010: 47).

When the representatives of the ROK and the US met in Washington on March 15, 1965, the preparation of the Japanese and Korean settlement was being discussed. The US's role in negotiating the normalization treaty was described as "behind the scenes" (Document 358). Though Shiina's apology calmed the mood of Japanese society, the questions of fisheries and of Korean residents in Japan, along with various economic and trade issues, were still unresolved. However, they were described as "minor issues" (Document 358). The Korean foreign minister reported to the US Secretary of State that he had informed Japan that Korea needed "not just normal relations with Japan but good relations"; but he also disclosed that the attitude of the Korean nation was "very emotional on the subject of Japan" (Document 358).

The determination of the Korean side became great, and Americans saw the time as a perfect opportunity to finalize the treaty. Being aware of the Korean government's fear of losing face, they were also attentive to the North Korean propaganda spreading in the South. Foreign Minister Lee Dong-Won denied the influence of North Korean propaganda on South Koreans, expressing only fear of the Japanese attitude (during a time of serious demonstrations by communists in Japan) (Document 358). Lee clearly separated the demonstrations occurring in Japan and Korea, saying that those in

his country had their sources in "the past humiliating experience with Japan" (Document 358). During the meeting in Washington, the Korean side expressed acceptance for Shiina's apology, saying that the Japanese foreign minister "said he was sorry and looked to a new and different future," and that he was "the first Japanese ever to say that, and his statement had had a most helpful effect" (Document 358).

The Korean government started to ask for Washington's support in establishing the treaty, and revealed a great determination and impatience to accelerate drafting. Since Korean public opinion was focused on Korean-American relations, the government kept asking the US to support the settlement—by guaranteeing the implementation of martial law if necessary, and asking for some kind of official confirmation from Washington, that is, a "simple letter of congratulations at time of signature as further evidence of U.S. interest and support" (Document 360).

Ambassador Kim Chong-yul told Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Robert W. Barnett that the wording of the phrase "sincere desire" (Document 362) revealed the Korean attitude toward the Japanese intent to establish relations with Korea. This can be given as the moment when the Korean side started to assess the sincerity of Japanese apologies and actions toward Korea. The spring of 1965 was also the moment when Americans confirmed their commitment to supporting Korea's security and economy, but stated that they would guarantee it only after the agreement was signed (Document 362).

One month before the ratification of the basic treaty, an important question appeared. Koreans wanted a wider discussion on the problem of the Takeshima/Dokto islands (Document 364). Nonetheless, the hurry to sign the agreement was so great that further claims were postponed and the treaty was finally signed on June 22, 1965. The treaty's conditions provided, among other things, the establishment of bilateral relations between Japan and the ROK and the abrogation of previous agreements between the Empire of Japan and the Empire of Korea (Japan and the Republic of Korea).

After the signing, on November 29, 1965, a meeting between Korean and American representatives took place in Washington. The Korean foreign minister was praised for his wisdom and courage in doing his best to reach the agreement with Japan (Document 367). The foreign minister emphasized the importance of relations

with Japan, claiming additionally that the "Korean people are very sensitive and there would be trouble if the Japanese were too selfish" (Document 367).

Ratification of the agreement took place half a year after its signing. The Treaty did not end Japanese-Korean struggles over the past, but gave the Japanese and Koreans the perspective from which to discuss them as equal partners, aiming to maintain their position in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

After American policy in Asia became harsher, and the US contribution to the war theater became stronger, additional military and financial support was needed. Postwar Japan used the American guarantee for its own security purposes. Being completely demilitarized and unable to undertake military actions in a foreign country, the only way for the Japanese to support the Americans was by providing land for their military bases (as guaranteed by the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the US and Japan) and to provide some manufacturing for the US army (besides weaponry), which indirectly helped build the Japanese economy.

Therefore, Americans were unable to get military help for Vietnam in Japan. Finding a new ally became crucial. South Korea, a country without any restrictions concerning sending their military troops to another country, seemed the perfect choice. Nonetheless, the guarantee of economic help and security for this country could have been a serious challenge for the American economy. Asking Japan for this support was the only solution. However, Japan and Korea still suffered from a lack of bilateral relations, due to the unsolved antagonisms resulting from their common past, namely, the colonial period of 1910-1945. Knowing that solving all the historical disputes between its two Asian allies would be impossible, the US government decided to implement a "push hard" policy, which resulted in the Basic Treaty between Japan and the ROK.

Forcing Japan and South Korea to reconcile was a step that ignored the social moods in both countries but guaranteed a perfect solution for the on-going problems of the US government. The "push hard" policy was primarily directed toward Japan, which was encouraged to make "some sort of apology"; at the same time, Japan

enjoyed the favor of its American patron. The years of American occupation had guaranteed the democratization of the Country of the Rising Sun and thus enabled the US to gain a solid ally. Japan was also the perfect partner because of its strategic location. Therefore, America's favoring of the Japanese side, its closest Asian partner, became a good option for obtaining support.

Consequently, the Korean government, which was perfectly aware of the Japanese-American alliance, had no option but to support the idea, out of fear that the US would withdraw from the Korean Peninsula. Support for the American "push hard" policy was guaranteed by Korea's appreciation of America as its security and economic guarantor, as well as by the Americans' support for Park's government.

The consecutive levels of normalization between Japan and South Korea are depicted in the following graph:

GRAPH

Although rapid normalization between the two Asian countries guaranteed desirable outcomes for the US government, the long-range effect was a lack of reconciliation between the countries, future disputes, and finally, the use of history as a political tool in the bilateral relations of these American allies. One outcome of such a policy is the contemporary quasi alliance in the region, and the not-that-good relations between the two Asian democracies. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, there were gains for South Korea's economic development, which was important for President Park, and in any case, proper reconciliation was not possible at that time for Japan and South Korea. The "lesser evil" and more easily reached goal were chosen. However, the accompanying unfairness and the preferential treatment of one side of the alliance resulted in historical disputes. These returned after half a century, as is clear in Shinzō Abe's statements on historical issues.

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