

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The United States and China are engaged in a strategic competition for dominance. The two nations have been jostling for power and influence in various arenas, including trade, technology, security, and regional influence. As such, the United States is pursuing strategies to maintain its hegemony, while China is using its growing economic and military power to challenge the United States-led order.¹ One of the key factors of a successful strategy is the existence of allies and the United States has been traditionally allied with Japan and South Korea in East Asia and maintain a good tie with the two countries, with both countries hosting the United States military presence in East Asia and engaging in other United States-led security partnership.² However, relationships between allies is as important in the larger picture of a cohesive alliance. For the United States, the history of diplomatic friction between South Korea and Japan does not equal to integral solidarity between allies that shared a common vision and motivation. When combined with factors of a functioning strategy, we may recognize that there is an active flaw within the partnership strategies that

¹ Goldstein, Avery.. *Rising to the Challenge : China's Grand Strategy and International Security*. Singapore: Nus Press.2008

² Tellis, Ashley J., Abraham Denmark, and Greg Chaffin. *U.S. Alliances and Partnerships at the Center of Global Power*. NBR, 2014.

could potentially damages all of its previous power-maintenance efforts in East Asia. Not to mention, the political atmosphere of East Asia is heating up as all relevant stakeholders increased their military presence in the region and increased the temporal urgency for this issue to be addressed post-haste.

Historically, Japan and South Korea's contentious relationship is rooted in Japan's imperialist past and its colonization of the Korean peninsula. Despite the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1965, tensions between the two have persisted.³ One major point of contention is Japan's handling of the issue of "comfort women" – women who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II as well as the issue of uncompensated forced labor of the military industry.⁴ South Korea continually accused Japan of failing to provide adequate reparations and an official apology to the surviving victims, and the issue has become a recurring source of tension between the two countries.⁵ In addition, there are disputes over historical interpretations,⁶ particularly from the side of Japanese conservatives and genocide deniers as well as territorial issues, such as the sovereignty of the Dokdo/Takeshima islands in the Sea of Japan. These disputes have led to

³ Cha, Victor D.. Alignment despite Antagonism. Studies of the East Asian Inst. 2000

⁴ Chunghee Sarah Soh. . The Comfort Women : Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press. 2009

⁵ Myungseop, Kim, and Soongbae, Kim. . “The Genesis and Metamorphosis of ‘Postwar Compensation’ Concept: Focusing on the Compensation Issue between South Korea and Japan.” Korea and World Politics 25, no. 3 (September): 33–63 2009. <https://doi.org/10.17331/kwp.2009.25.3.002>

⁶ Ku, Yangmo. . “Japanese History Textbook Controversies, 1995-2010: Transnational Activism versus Neo-Nationalist Movement.” Pacific Focus 29, no. 2 (August): 260–83.2+ 2014 <https://doi.org/10.1111/pafo.12030>.

protests and diplomatic spats, and the relationship between the two countries has been strained in recent years.⁷

The current status quo regarding the diplomatic friction between South Korea and Japan is complex. Yoon Suk-yeol became the President of South Korea in May 2022 and Fumio Kishida became the Prime Minister of Japan in October 2021. Both conservative-oriented leaders have expressed concerns about recent North Korean aggression and the need for continued cooperation between their countries and the United States to address these threats. Additionally, there is a sense that China's relative inaction against North Korea has "held back" progress on this issue. In fact Xi Jinping had promised to cooperate with other powers to facilitate pressure and considerations within North Korea, but in actuality they are not interested in a South-led unification of Korea and would prefer to keep the North as a buffer between them and the Korean peninsula.⁸ South Korea goes along with its THAAD Missile Defense purchase initiative that was initially protested by China in 2017 and resulting in South Korea not following through until 2022 where the problematic North had become too aggressive in its recent test to the point that they couldn't hope on China to rein the Kim's regime anymore.⁹ Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has fueled rising anti-Chinese sentiment in both countries, providing a common ground

⁷ Huth, Paul, Sunwoong Kim, and Terence Roehrig. *The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute*. BRILL. 2021

⁸ Glaser, Bonnie & Sun, Yun. *Chinese Attitudes toward Korean Unification*. 2015

⁹ "South Korea Faces Pressure from China on THAAD – DW – 08/25/2022." n.d. Dw.com. <https://www.dw.com/en/south-korea-confronts-chinese-pressure-over-anti-missile-weapons-system/a-62921470>.

and momentum to push back against China.¹⁰ However, despite these shared concerns of China and North Korea, the two countries are still limited by their history of diplomatic friction. Efforts to reconcile have historically failed before, and tensions remain high especially after their recent trade dispute that effectively worsened their diplomatic relationship to the point of an all-time-low since their normalization in 1965.¹¹ Nevertheless, both South Korea and Japan have recently taken steps to address the issue, such as the resumption of high-level talks between their foreign ministers. There are even hints of a new trilateral formation at a meeting hosted by President Joe Biden in Cambodia.¹² It remains to be ascertained whether these endeavors will be efficacious in remedying the root causes of the diplomatic friction between the two nations. Nevertheless, this study adopts a skeptical stance toward conferring exclusive agency of reconciliation to Japan and South Korea. As mentioned, previous attempts have been shown to be ineffective, given the rarity of successful initiatives since 1965, and their historical relations are fraught with a legacy of mistrust and reluctance to reconcile due to unaddressed factors that contribute to the propagation of diplomatic frictions continually. As we delve deeper into this topic, readers will discern how these failures persistently assert themselves, underscoring the inadvisability of pursuing strictly bilateral initiatives.

¹⁰ “Rising Anti-China Sentiment in South Korea Offers Opportunities to Strengthen US-ROK Relations.” n.d. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/rising-anti-china-sentiment-in-south-korea-offers-opportunities-to-strengthen-us-rok-relations/>.

¹¹ YUN, JI-WHAN. “Post-Democracy and Historicism: The Hidden Origin of the Korea-Japan Trade War.” *Issues & Studies* 57, no. 01 (2021): 2150003.

¹² Remarks by President Biden, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, and President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea before Trilateral Meeting.” The White House. The United States Government, November 13, 2022. Last modified November 13, 2022.

Considering the aforementioned factor, this thesis believes that it is probable and perhaps inevitable that current bilateral efforts will meet a similar fate. The achievement of diplomatic reconciliation between South Korea and Japan necessitates a positive exchange of intent as a majority view. While ongoing discussions regarding the resumption of economic cooperation and resolution of the longstanding issue of compensation are underway, a challenge arises in the form of the unilateral generation of recent initiatives to resolve the source of tension (compensation) by Yoon's administration. Despite Kishida's administration's positive endeavors towards repairing ties and active engagement in diplomatic talks and cooperation, there has been a lack of mandatory enforcement at the domestic level to encourage Japanese companies and the military that profited from the colonization and exploitation of Korea to engage in more concrete forms of reconciliation.¹³

Yoon's decision to assign the compensation responsibility to a Korean company was met with widespread disapproval among South Koreans, thereby endangering the support for the reconciliation process.¹⁴ Public opinion, once shifted, could negatively affect the momentum towards diplomatic recovery, which is crucial for ensuring peaceful coexistence and stability in East Asia, a common priority in International Security. The lack of diplomatic equilibrium can hinder reconciliation efforts, even if both parties have well-intentioned motives. This highlights the necessity of a

¹³ "Will Yoon's Risky Wager on Japan Pay Off?" East Asia Forum. Last modified April 7, 2023. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/04/06/will-yoons-risky-wager-on-japan-pay-off/>.

¹⁴ Ibid

trilateral mediator, rather than bilateral partners, to maintain balance and ensure that both parties derive maximal benefits. The United States, as a mutual strategic partner of both South Korea and Japan, is uniquely qualified to fill this role.

The United States' domestic political landscape has historically shown a discernible degree of apprehension regarding the negative relations of its two East Asian allies, thereby suggesting a noteworthy level of investment and urgency in this subject matter. The utilization of the term “recommended security strategy” in the title of this work suggests that it was chosen in response to internal deliberations within the United States regarding the necessity of supporting the reconciliation process and facilitating the diplomatic restoration of South Korea-Japan relations. Despite these concerns, however, little action was taken, as there was a prevailing belief that the onus for reconciliation lay solely with the allies themselves. The author posits that the inclination to have the United States function as a key mediator in this matter is more appropriate than a primarily bilateral approach, which has been demonstrated to be ineffective and inefficient. This study endeavors to demonstrate the superiority of a United States-led approach over the latter.

Additionally, given its historical involvement and presence in the region, the United States has the incentive and the capacity to facilitate dialogue and negotiations between the two countries. The thesis believes the United States can help to bridge the gap between these two important allies, fostering greater cooperation and collaboration. So, they can effectively

address the challenges posed by the military buildup and growing tensions in the East Asian region, while also safeguarding its own security interests.

Based on the claims within this section, a multitude of Burdens of Proof emerge, necessitating comprehensive responses to fortify its argument. Four primary themes of burden of proof come to the forefront. Firstly, upon recognizing the historical fracturing of Japan and South Korea, despite their status as United States allies, it becomes imperative to inquire and address the factors that contribute to their diplomatic friction. What sustains this friction, and in what manifestations does it persist? Secondly, why does the United States assume a pivotal role in this context? What attributes make them a suitable partner? Do they possess existing guidelines or strategies to manage diplomatic friction among their allies? Are their efforts in alignment with these guidelines? Thirdly, the burden of proof arises from the title itself. The utilization of “recommended” implies multifaceted considerations, pressures, interests, and shifting opinions from the United States. What underlies these interests and motivations, and how does this mediation ultimately align with the United States Security Strategy? Fourth, what qualifies mediation as a strategy, and how does it surpass other potential alternatives while illustrating the shortcomings of those alternatives?

All of these facets converge to formulate the direction the thesis will take and what will be discussed, eventually leading to the main thesis statement, which seeks to prove the validity of Mediation of South Korea

and Japan Diplomatic Friction as a Recommended United States Security Strategy.

1.2 Research Question

In light of earlier identification, the initial identification of four themes that necessitated examination has undergone meticulous deliberation, leading to a consolidation into two overarching research questions. This condensation is predicated on the conviction that endeavoring to address one question inherently entails the resolution of the others in the process. As such, the four themes are effectively simplified into the following inquiries:

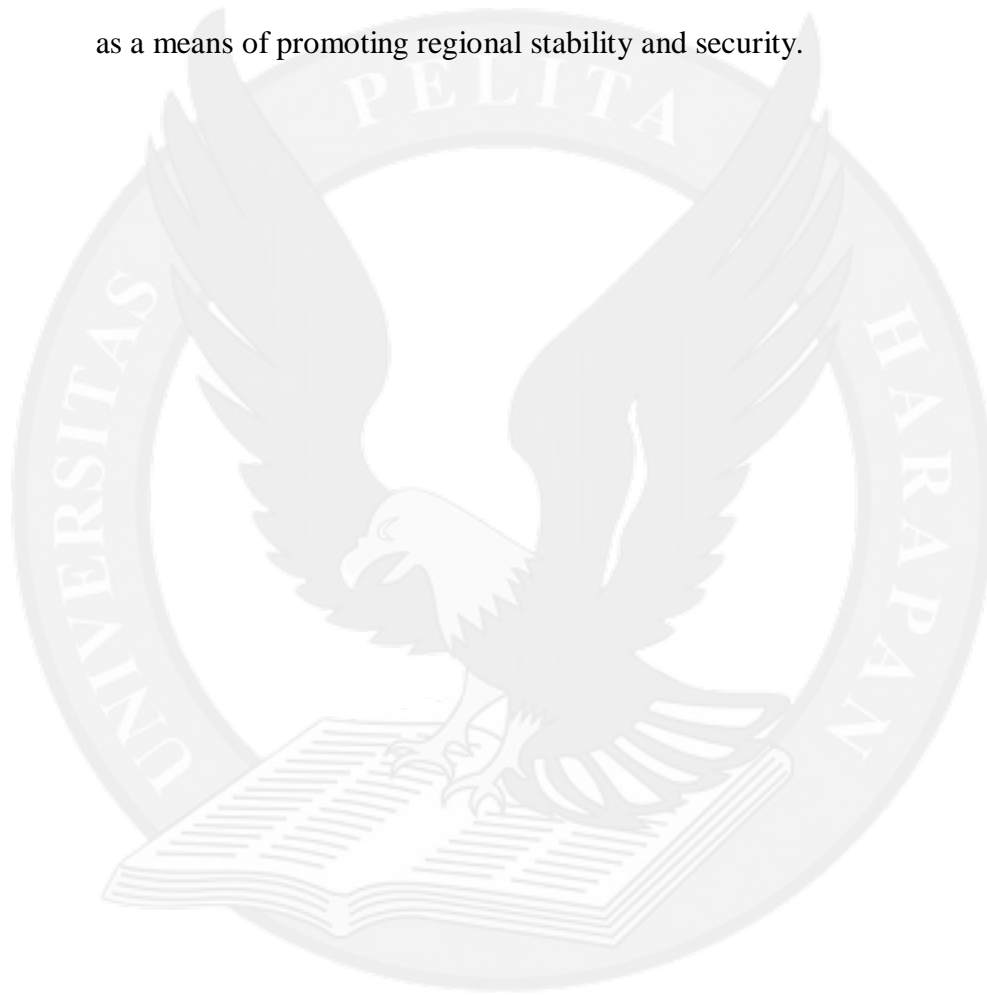
1. How does the diplomatic friction between South Korea and Japan threaten the United States Security Strategy?
2. How would the diplomatic reconciliation of Japan and South Korea become part of the United States Security Strategy?

1.3 Research Objective

1. To analyze the factors of the diplomatic friction between South Korea and Japan, and how their impact becomes a United States concern in the security environment in East Asia.
2. To analyze on the extent of United States involvements and interest in the diplomatic reconciliation of Japan and South Korea and how it fulfilled the criteria of a United States Security Strategy.

1.4 Research Significance

1. This research will contribute to the understanding of the complex security environment in East Asia and the implications of diplomatic tension between two of the United States' key strategic partners in the region.
2. The findings of this research can provide insight into the role of mediation in international relations and the potential for collaborative security policies as a means of promoting regional stability and security.



1.5 Structure of Thesis

This Thesis will contain several theme and topics that is categorized and arranged into:

- **Chapter I Introduction** containing the Background, Research Question, Objective, Significance and the overall structure of the thesis. The Background provide context, status quo, urgency and thesis statement and the reason behind the selection of topic. Research Question provides a problem/concern and a direction that the Thesis would mainly discuss in Chapter IV and how would this Thesis answer it. The objectives determine a path to process and stated which would be the most optimal achievable explanation and the significance lines out the contribution this Thesis would provide to the academic community.
- **Chapter II Theoretical Framework** will contain Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations. Literature Review delves into existing literature of a total of 3 categories of discussion that relates to or previously discussed aspects in these topics to help form prior understanding and further reading that correlates and support the framework of discussion as well as pointing out where previous literature may have lacked. Theoretical Foundation will delve into the relevant theory of International Relations that not only relate but also guide discussion in Chapter IV of this Thesis.
- **Chapter III Research Methodology** is a chapter dedicated to elaborating the method in which this particular research is approached and the form of Research, method that is used to collect data and method used to analyze said data to provided support the statement and analysis of this Thesis.

- **Chapter IV Analysis** the main section of this Thesis, is chapter dedicated to the process of interpreting raw data collected using the aforementioned research methodology and correlating them with a hypothesis to answer the research question asked in Chapter I and prove the Thesis Statement. Chapter IV of a thesis typically focuses on the analysis of data gathered during the research process. This chapter is crucial in presenting the findings of the study and interpreting their significance. Inside Chapter IV, there will be detailed description of the data analysis methods used and explains how they were applied to the collected data. But the greatest focus remained in answering the research question, which in turn derived by the statement and the title of this Thesis.
- **Chapter V Conclusion** contained two sections, Conclusion which is the “answer” of all the research, data, factors, variables, theory and problem elaborated thus far and Suggestion which is a form of recommendations for future studies and direction that future studies could take in the aftermath of this thesis, which direction should future studies take and what questions that still require further answering as form of encouraging further contributions in the academic community. Suggestions also include encouragement of implementation of any possible policy recommendations or other form of recommendations that this Thesis had determined as the best conclusion and this must be a specific conclusion usually based on the title, research statement and research questions.