



Japan Seeks to Restore Its National Sovereignty. Japan-Russia Relations

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While the new resident of the White House has been acquiring a taste for [military adventures overseas](#), the prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, visited Moscow last Thursday for his [17th talk with Vladimir Putin](#). But of course their normal economic agenda, intended to hammer out the final details of some [painful bilateral issues](#), was powerfully affected by events in North Korea. So what's the real political equation in the Eurasian Far East these days?

The memorable dinner hosted by Pres. Trump for Chairman Xi and served up with the added flourish of [a missile strike on a Syrian air base](#) was hardly a diplomatic success for the new administration. The Chinese leader has apparently turned a deaf ear to the president's demands to revalue the yuan and thus financially offset the enormous US trade deficit with its biggest economic partner. But one of the few advantages of having a businessman in the Oval Office is that he always has a non-business argument when trapped in any sort of business quagmire. Teasing a *limitrophe* that is loyal to your adversary is the first-choice option in such cases.



Graphic by Cho Sang-won

Nearly 63 years after the end of the Korean War, during which the United States Air Force [dropped more conventional and napalm bombs](#) onto North Korea than did all the Allies onto Germany during the WWII, Washington is still officially in a state of war with Pyongyang. And it is precisely this powerful factor of ambiguity that [drives the awkward nuclear ambitions](#) of a small and stalemated nation. A safe and manageable bogey-state offers a convenient pretext for the US to stretch a vengeful hand toward the

coastline of a key economic “partner” whenever the time is right - which is almost a dream come true for US strategists. So far, this most recent “North Korean escalation” has had a single tangible result - the US THAAD anti-missile systems that monitor eastbound Chinese rockets are being deployed in South Korea and will reportedly “[be operational within days.](#)”

The only problem is that this game is not being played in a geopolitical vacuum. A symptomatic WP commentator - [periodically venting his spleen](#) against the “hermit kingdom” of North Korea - lets slip one notable point:

If the crisis deepens, the possibility arises of South Korea and, more importantly, Japan going nuclear themselves.

The best way to label the prevailing mood among Japanese foreign-policy officials at the dawn of the Trump era would be that of “ill-concealed anxiety.” Tokyo is justifiably concerned that it might be dragged into an unpredictable, hot regional military conflict (the American bases on Okinawa are the highest-priority targets for the North Korean missiles) or that Washington and Beijing might reach a long-term consensus at the expense of the interests of the neighboring countries. In both scenarios Japan would be the weakest chain in the regional string.



The first problem is the burden of history. At one time or another all its neighbors have been the victims of [horrific war crimes](#) at the hands of the Japanese military, with some suffering on multiple occasions. Most nations in the region share the common denominator of anti-Japanese prejudices that are unconscious for the most part, yet still potent. What makes matters worse is that Japan alone is denied the right to its own army.

The second problem is that despite impressive economic and technological breakthroughs, Japan, like Germany, is still stuck in the position of a crypto-colony of the United States, unable to make sovereign military and foreign-policy decisions. This situation is made worse by the acute shortage of mineral resources on their islands.

Is Japan eager to escape this vicious circle and reclaim its full sovereignty? Without question. This is why PM Abe visits Pres. Putin.



PM Abe and Pres.Putin giving press-conference after talks in Moscow, April 27, 2017

Of course Mr. Abe's rise to the peak of Japan's political Olympus was not serendipitous. His maternal grandfather, [the former prime minister Nobusuke Kishi](#), was a close associate of the top commanders in the Kwantung army and in October 1941 became a member of the militaristic government cabinet in Tokyo. After the capitulation of Japan he was arrested by the Allies and held as a war criminal for three years. Once he adopted America's visions and demands for post-war Japan, he was released and eventually became the prime minister of a pro-American Japanese government. Although Kishi held no trump cards in his hands, he did everything in his power to strengthen and re-militarize Japan.

His grandson aspires to the same goal - to rid his home of an unwelcome guest. He understands that he must overcome the military restrictions of the capitulation act and obtain independent access to sufficient natural resources. But unlike his grandpa, he holds some trump cards. Agreeing to abandon the futile dispute over the "northern territories" in exchange for a broad partnership with Russia might be the only way for Japan to emerge from this troubled time with some long-sought benefits.

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