



**Japan-Korea Relations:
“Groundhog Day” in Foreign Policy**

**David Kang, University of Southern California
Jiun Bang, University of Southern California**

In the movie “Groundhog Day,” Bill Murray is fated to repeat one day of his life over and over – and such a description is quite apt for relations between Korea and Japan. North Korea’s histrionics yet again dominated media headlines and managed to overshadow the inauguration of Park Geun-hye in February 2013, even while South Korea and Japan under-reacted to the bluster. With Park’s inauguration, new leaders have taken office in every country in Northeast Asia, including North Korea and China, over the past 18 months. Despite new leadership, the issues remain very much the same: North Korean threats, increased South Korea-Japan economic interactions despite continued squabbling over historical and territorial issues, and a reminder that the US remains deeply intertwined in regional issues.

Stirred, but not shaken

Despite the barrage of threats promising war and the like from Pyongyang, both South Korea and Japan remained “surprisingly” collected (“Amid Another North Korea Storm, Look Who’s Calm,” April 1, 2013, *The Christian Science Monitor*), even prompting the South Korean media to observe that “Americans appear more nervous than South Koreans since the North explicitly threatened the US,” (“S. Koreans Unruffled by N. Korean Threats,” *Chosun Ilbo*, April 8, 2013). Although it could be premature to conclude that the North’s most geographically proximate neighbors have thoroughly mastered the distinction between living *with* fear and living *in* fear, Pyongyang’s rhetoric had neither the effect of bringing Seoul and Tokyo closer together, nor driving them that much farther apart.

By now, it is common to hear that the dynamics surrounding North Korea are somewhat cyclical and repetitive, but the same may go for the Seoul-Tokyo bilateral ties. Almost four decades ago, one saw similar verbiage that captures a disconnect between mutual antipathy despite growing economic interdependence: a *Washington Post* article from 1973 starts by referencing a *Chosun Ilbo* poll that reported 66 percent of South Korean university students view Japan with hostility despite the lack of first-hand experience with Japanese colonialism (Selig S. Harrison, “Japan Yen Buys Little Love in Korea: Koreans Have No Love for Japan Despite Aid, Trade,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, Feb. 27, 1973). These sentiments are echoed in a poll regarding bilateral relations released on April 5, 2013 by *Hankook Ilbo*, noting that 79.4 percent of the Korean respondents did not feel any friendly feelings toward Japan, while 78 percent replied that they viewed current bilateral relations to be headed in a negative direction.

As a parallel to the dynamics captured in the 1973 article, economic relations between Korea-Japan relations during the first few months of 2013 were not severely hampered by external

vulnerabilities. Noteworthy events included Samsung Electronics agreeing to take an equity stake in Sharp, representing the first capital tie-up between notable consumer electronic brands of South Korea and Japan. According to the *Financial Times*, the investment of ¥10.4 billion by Samsung (a 3 percent stake) will make it the fifth-largest shareholder in Sharp. Another example of cooperation was the joint arrangement announced in January by Korean and Japanese banks and export credit agencies to provide financing and guarantees for the construction of a power plant in Jordan, scheduled for completion in 2014. On the Korean side, the Export-Import Bank of Korea (Kexim) committed a total of \$320 million in loans and \$107 million in guarantees, while Japanese banks BTMU, Mizuho Corporate Bank, and SMBC promised \$181 million. Moreover, a consortium of Korean and Japanese firms such as Lotte Engineering and Mitsubishi will be involved with the construction as well as the provision of equipment. Finally, in mid-February, South Korea's POSCO announced that it will build its first steel pipe plant in Japan with a production capacity of 10,000 tons per year, which would be aimed at supplying the Japanese automakers with the relevant material for parts.

An exception was the announcement by several civic groups in front of Tapgol Park – the epicenter of the March 1 independence movement of 1919 – to boycott Japanese products over the ongoing territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima. The coverage by *Yonhap News* (Feb. 25, 2013) stated that this would mark the largest anti-Japan boycott in history. This came in the wake of the Feb. 22 Takeshima Day celebrations in Shimane Prefecture of Japan, which drew much media buzz due to the presence of Ms. Shimajiri Aiko, a parliamentary secretary with the Japanese Cabinet Office. It was the first time a Cabinet member attended the ceremony, thus adding a quasi-governmental sheen or endorsement to the event. The backlash from South Korea may have been heightened due to reports in late January that the invitation extended to Prime Minister Abe (a first since the event began in 2005) had been politely declined, as well as plans for any Cabinet members to attend the ceremony, out of fears of provoking Seoul.

Despite the more common response to view the territorial dispute between Seoul and Tokyo as counterproductive only within the context of broader relations, the situation involving Thailand and Cambodia over sovereignty surrounding the temple of Preah Vihear may be instructive here. On April 15, 2013, a court hearing began in The Hague, Netherlands, with Cambodia accusing Thailand of having failed to withdraw its military troops from the vicinity of the temple as well as warning that unfortunate consequences may result from Thailand's actions. In 1962, Thailand had already lost the case to Cambodia at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), with the main rationale being that when the map of the demarcations had been drawn up in 1908, Thailand had failed to reject the map. Thus, according to the legal principle of estoppel, the failure by Thailand to make its complaints explicit despite opportunities to do so was interpreted as tacit consent or acquiescence. It may be far-fetched to believe that a cessation of appeals to territorial sovereignty by either South Korea or Japan over Dokdo/Takeshima may be considered an immediate renunciation of claims, but under international law there is logic to being loud rather than quiet.

When in doubt, appeal to your own masses

Regardless of the external turbulence, the approval rating of Japan's Cabinet according to *Yomiuri Shimbun* rose to 74 percent in April – making Prime Minister Abe the first leader in the survey's 35-year history with a linear rise in popularity for four consecutive months after taking

office. Conversely, by March, South Korea's President Park Geun-hye showed an approval rating of 44 percent according to Gallup, not only a decrease from the mid-50s recorded immediately after the election, but also the lowest approval rating of any incoming president in the democratic era (as comparison, Presidents Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung were at roughly 71 percent, while Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Myung-bak enjoyed 60 and 52 percent, respectively). To be fair, the context in which Park took office required great adaptability and vision, which is not an easy task for any leader to achieve.

However one wishes to interpret public opinion polls and approval ratings, in the end, appealing to the masses may have outweighed the benefits of cultivating a working political relationship as high-level meetings between Seoul and Tokyo sputtered and stalled in the first months of 2013. The first post-inauguration phone call between President Park and Prime Minister Abe did not occur until March. Instead, many meetings occurred almost by proxy: Park met Japanese Special Envoy Nukaga Fukushima in Seoul on Jan. 4; Abe met a close aide to President Park, Hwang Woo Yea, in Tokyo on Jan. 9; Park met former Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei on Feb. 14 and Japan's Deputy Prime Minister Aso Taro in late February.

A few meetings were also cancelled or postponed. In April, the *Mainichi Shimbun* reported that the trilateral summit scheduled for May, which would bring together President Park, Prime Minister Abe, and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang for the first time since each took office, was postponed due to China's discontent with Japan over the East China Sea dispute. The foreign ministers' meeting that typically precedes the trilateral summit by roughly a month was scrapped outright by South Korea on April 22 as a protest against the visit by Japanese officials to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine the day before (a record high attendance by 168 Diet members – a detail that was not lost on the media). In unfortunate timing, a trip to China scheduled for May by a group of Japanese lawmakers led by Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Vice President Komura Masahiko was also cancelled. Subsequently, even 'generic' meetings were hard to come by during the first months of 2013.

The upshot of provocations

The one immediate outcome of North Korea's aggressive and sustained resort to threats was that the resultant flutter of activity in the defense realm by neighboring countries did not incur nearly the same amount of wrath or suspicion than in times of relative tranquility. Thus, the cumulative effect was to dampen the squeamishness that typically accompanies such defense posturing. For instance, *Asahi Shimbun* reported that Japan had dispatched two Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) destroyers (*Kongo* and *Kirishima*) to the Sea of Japan/East Sea by April 9, the US Navy had deployed an *Aegis* destroyer to the eastern coast of the Shimokita Peninsula, while the *USS Shiloh* – a guided-missile cruiser with advanced interceptor missile capability – departed from Yokosuka Naval Base on April 8. Moreover, Bessho Koro, Japan's ambassador to Seoul, also expressed Japan's wishes to forge the military intelligence pact with South Korea (that fell through last July) to counter North Korea's increasingly bellicose behavior. According to the *Chosun Ilbo*, South Korea announced in early April that it will likely purchase European long-range air-to-surface cruise missiles (or "bunker busters") by 2014, which if successfully acquired, would become the first strategic weapon imported through Europe rather than the US.

There were reports in late March that the US was interested in boosting defense exercises with both South Korea and Japan, along the lines of the *Rim of Pacific (RIMPAC)* exercises held in 2012. A more interesting development during the first months of 2013, however, was outreach by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to both Seoul and Tokyo. In mid-April, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen met President Park Geun-hye along with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Yun Byung-se and Minister of Defense Kim Kwan-jin to discuss NATO's Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme, thus becoming the first NATO secretary general to visit South Korea. In his remarks at the press conference held at the National Press Club in Seoul, he emphasized that "NATO's global perspective does not mean that we seek a presence in the Asia-Pacific region. What it does mean is that we seek to engage with the Asia-Pacific region. And the Republic of Korea is a key partner in this endeavor." Regardless of the conceptual difference between seeking a presence and engaging in a region, the visit was an important one in terms of forging closer ties with NATO. After visiting Korea, Rasmussen also stopped in Japan and met Prime Minister Abe, which culminated in the signing of the NATO-Japan Joint Political Declaration for a Stronger Partnership – the first joint declaration between NATO and Japan. Again, Rasmussen claimed that "while NATO has no ambition to take on a permanent role in Asia, we see very clearly the advantage of working with like-minded partners like Japan," and adding that "the signing of the declaration also reflected Abe's personal commitment to a strong relationship with NATO." It is too early to predict the implications of these ties.

Sanctions galore! Or, how Tokyo tightened the screws on Pyongyang

Back in 1950, the Soviet Union boycotted the all-important United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting on UN intervention in the Korean War in protest against representation of China by the Kuomintang, the government of the Republic of China (ROC) at the time. In its absence (and thus, absence of a veto) the US and other countries successfully passed the UNSC resolution authorizing military intervention in Korea. The lesson from that incident was that it is better at times to be present to voice your opinions than to try and utilize your absence as a demonstration of discontent. Although history was not repeated in its entirety, there were some parallels in the recent decision reached by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) to step up investigations into the alleged human-rights abuses such as food deprivation and labor camps in North Korea. On March 21, the UN HRC voted unanimously on the resolution sponsored by the European Union and Japan to create a three-person commission to look into allegations concerning North Korea. Since the current 47-member council contains no Chinese or Russian vote (member countries are elected by the UN General Assembly and serve for a period of three years with no more than two consecutive terms at a time), there was no one to come to Pyongyang's defense.

Japan's was also quite active in smacking sanctions on North Korea. As a result of a UNSC resolution that was adopted unanimously on Jan. 22 after the rocket launch conducted by Pyongyang in December 2012, Japan proceeded to freeze the assets of six organizations and four individuals with alleged involvement in the launch. In February, Tokyo announced that it would widen sanctions by banning the re-entry of senior officials of the General Association of Korean Residents (or Chongryon) in retaliation for North Korea's nuclear test on Feb. 12. In response, a commentary in the *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* claimed that the Japanese were unjustly intensifying persecution against Koreans, and that this situation "must be referred to the

International Court of Justice.” Then, in March, during the visit by David Cohen, the US Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, Tokyo announced its plans to ban financial institutions from engaging in business with North Korea’s Foreign Trade Bank, thereby increasing collaboration with the US on sanctions against Pyongyang. A month later, in April, Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide stated that Tokyo had decided to extend sanctions regarding trade and port calls (which would have expired on April 13) against North Korea for two more years. During Secretary of State John Kerry’s visit to Japan on April 15, Prime Minister Abe once again underscored the importance of coordinating closely with the US on sanctions against the North Korean regime. Whether the sanctions will actually have an impact on (or the desired response from) Pyongyang remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it is clear that Japan is not going to remain passive in voicing views toward North Korea and its behavior.

The months ahead

The summer of 2013 promises to be busy: North Korea will be a major issue confronting both Japan and Korea, but South Korea-Japan political relations are limping along. With the annual Aug. 15 celebration of Korean independence, all will be watching how President Park handles herself and the delicate diplomatic sensitivities that day raises. Japan will hold an election for the Upper House of the Diet in July, and if the LDP and Prime Minister Abe win a majority to go along with the LDP’s majority in the Lower House, he may feel emboldened to pursue – or continue to pursue – a foreign policy that South Koreans perceive as unduly muscular and unapologetic, which could lead to further diplomatic tensions between the two nations.

Chronology of Japan-Korea Relations January- April 2013

Jan. 3, 2013: South Korean court sides with China in the competing requests for extradition between Beijing and Tokyo over the custody of Liu Qiang, the Chinese man accused of arson of the Yasukuni Shrine as well as for hurling gasoline bombs at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Liu told South Korean authorities that his late grandmother was forced into sexual slavery by Japan’s Imperial Army during World War II.

Jan. 4, 2013: Before meeting Japanese Special Envoy and former Japanese Finance Minister Nukaga Fukushima, South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan describes relations with Tokyo as a “big challenge” for Seoul in 2013.

Jan. 4, 2013: South Korean President-elect Park Geun-hye meets Special Envoy Nukaga and receives the letter he delivers from newly elected Prime Minister Abe Shinzo.

Jan. 8-11, 2013: Delegation of senior lawmakers from the ruling Saenuri Party and the main opposition Democratic United Party visits Japan in their capacity as members of the South Korea-Japan Parliamentarians’ Union. The visit was arranged by the Korean Residents Union in Japan, in hopes of furthering Seoul-Tokyo bilateral relations.

Jan. 9, 2013: Prime Minister Abe meets Hwang Woo Yea, a close aide to President-elect Park and the chairman of the ruling Saenuri Party.

Jan. 10, 2013: ROK Vice Foreign Minister Ahn Ho-Young meets Japanese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kawai Chikao to improve relations and discuss North Korea's rocket launch.

Jan. 15, 2013: According to the *Korea Times*, newly appointed Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Bessho Koro gave his first address titled "Future of Japan and Korea Relations" in a lecture series hosted by the Asia Society Korea Center in Seoul.

Jan. 18, 2013: Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI) announce its plans to provide Overseas Untied Loan Insurance for the joint Korea-Japan project to construct a diesel power plant in Jordan. The Export-Import Bank of Korea (KEXIM) is also financing the project with a \$320 million loan and \$107 million in guarantees.

Jan. 20, 2013: Regional secretary generals of the ASEAN-Korea (Chung Hae-moon), ASEAN-Japan (Ohnishi Yoshikuni), and ASEAN-China Center (Ma Mingqiang) meet on the sidelines of the ASEAN forum in Laos. The meeting marks the first of its kind between the ASEAN center heads of the three nations. The focus is on advancing ASEAN + 3 cooperation.

Jan. 22, 2013: In line with the unanimous adoption of the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2087 condemning North Korea's rocket launch of Dec. 12, 2012, Japan freezes assets of six organizations and four individuals with alleged involvement in the rocket launch.

Jan. 27, 2013: Japan launches two spy satellites to collect information for its defense and intelligence agencies concerning North Korea's military activities. The first such satellite was launched in 2003.

Feb. 5, 2013: *The Hankyoreh* reacts to the Japanese government's decision to build the Territorial and Sovereign Issues Planning and Coordination Office, which will serve as the central policy planning organ regarding Dokdo/Takeshima, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and the Kuril Islands, saying it is "an indication that the Japanese central government will be directly claiming Dokdo as Japanese territory, which up until this point has been spearheaded by Shimane Prefecture."

Feb. 12, 2013: North Korea conducts its third nuclear test in defiance of UN resolutions, with *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* announcing that it used a "miniaturized" and lighter nuclear device than the previous two attempts.

Feb. 12, 2013: In response to North Korea's nuclear test, Japan decides to levy new bans on senior officials of the General Association of Korean Residents (Chongryon).

Feb. 13, 2013: Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and outgoing President Lee Myung-bak have a 20-minute telephone meeting after the latest nuclear test by Pyongyang, the first such discussion since Abe took office in December.

Feb. 14, 2013: President-elect Park meets former Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei to discuss issues regarding history, Pyongyang's recent nuclear test, and ways to push South Korea-Japan bilateral relations forward.

Feb. 15, 2013: According to the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the latest Gallup Poll shows that the Japanese view China as the bigger military threat than North Korea, with 79 percent of respondents identifying China and 77 percent for North Korea. Moreover, 37 percent view South Korea as a military threat, which is an increase from 23 percent from the same survey in 2012.

Feb. 18, 2013: *KCNA* expresses anger at Japan's latest bans against Chongryon, claiming that the organization is a "legal organization representing interests of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Japan."

Feb. 19, 2013: Seoul government urges Japan to cancel the scheduled Takeshima Day celebrations in Shimane Prefecture.

Feb. 22, 2013: Senior Japanese official attend ceremony to commemorate Takeshima Day in Shimane Prefecture. South Korean protestors gather outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul and demand that Seoul lodge a formal complaint.

Feb. 25, 2013: Park Geun-hye is sworn in as the 11th president of South Korea. She meets Deputy Prime Minister Aso Taro amidst heightened tensions over the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute.

Feb. 25, 2013: *Yonhap News* reports that major civic groups have decided to boycott Japanese products in protest over Japan's claims to Dokdo/Takeshima.

Feb. 28, 2013: South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson denounces remarks made by Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio concerning Japan's claims to Dokdo/Takeshima.

March 2, 2013: In an interview with *Monthly Chosun*, Prime Minister Abe says that he aims to issue a new statement on Japan's understanding of World War II in 2015. He also adds that the issue of the 'comfort women' should be "left in the hands of experts and historians."

March 6, 2013: President Park and Prime Minister Abe agree to cooperate on implementing further sanctions against North Korea – the first telephone call since Park's inauguration.

March 7, 2013: *Financial Times* reports that Samsung Electronics has agreed to take an equity stake in Sharp, marking the first capital tie-up between major consumer electronics brands of South Korea and Japan.

March 14, 2013: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) releases findings from its *Military Balance 2013*, which describes Asia's overall defense spending as having overtaken that of Europe for the first time in 2012.

March 17, 2013: KCNA releases a statement from the Foreign Ministry denouncing Japan's sanctions against North Korea and warning that Japan would also face consequences if it continues to 'collude' with the US.

March 18-22, 2013: US Treasury Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen visits both South Korea and Japan in an effort to gain greater support for sanctions against North Korea.

March 19, 2013: *Japan Times* article states that the Tokyo government will levy further sanctions against North Korea's Foreign Trade Bank in retaliation for its continued development of nuclear weapons.

March 21, 2013: United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) approves a framework to establish a "Commission of Inquiry" into alleged human-rights abuses in North Korea.

March 21, 2013: North Korea threatens to strike US bases in Japan as a response to the use of B-52 bombers by the US that are capable of carrying nuclear cruise missiles.

March 25, 2013: *Yonhap News* states that the US is pushing for more trilateral US-South Korea-Japan military exercises, much like that of the *Rim of Pacific (RIMPAC)* exercise of 2012.

March 26, 2013: Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology releases the screening results of textbooks to be adopted from April 2014 for high school sophomores, which devote more space to the Dokdo/Takeshima and Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Park Joon-yong, chief of the South Korean Foreign Ministry's Northeast Asian Affairs Bureau, summons Kurai Takashi, deputy chief of mission at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, to lodge a protest against the textbook approval.

March 26, 2013: A Buddhist temple in Kagoshima Prefecture in Japan wins bid to take control of a building that served as the headquarters for the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan ('Chongryon'). The building was initially seized due to unpaid debts.

March 26, 2013: South Korea, Japan, and China meet for the first round of negotiations on the trilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA), in Seoul.

March 29, 2013: Daegu chapter of the Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union and the Hiroshima Prefecture branch of Japan's Teacher's Union announce that they have finished work on a joint historical textbook after seven years of collaborative work and discussions.

April 1, 2013: President Park appoints Lee Byung-kee as the new ambassador to Japan.

April 5, 2013: Japan announces its decision to extend the life of the sanctions levied on North Korea by two more years, which were set to expire on April 13, 2013.

April 5, 2013: *Hankook Ilbo* reports the latest public opinion in which 62.4 percent of the South Koreans viewed the new Abe administration in a negative light, while the level of trust that the Japanese harbors toward South Koreans fell from 31.6 percent in 2010 to 13.4 percent.

April 5, 2013: *Kyodo News* reports a statement by the Foreign Ministry that “We [South Korea] strongly protest against Japan’s Diplomatic Bluebook that contains its unjust territorial claim over Dokdo, which is an integral part of our territory.” The publication in question continues to refer to Dokdo/Takeshima as Japan’s “inherent territory.”

April 8, 2013: *Asahi Shimbun* reports that Japan has dispatched two Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) destroyers to the Sea of Japan/East Sea, while the *USS Shiloh*, a guided missile cruiser with advanced interceptor missile capability has departed from Yokosuka Naval Base.

April 8, 2013: *Yomiuri Shimbun* article claims that the Machida City Board of Education in western Tokyo has reversed its initial decision to exclude a school with connections to North Korea from its safety alarm program for students. A city board official apologized, adding that “We regret that we reacted in response to the social circumstances (surrounding North Korea).”

April 12, 2013: Japanese government states that it will erect a permanent missile defense system in Okinawa Prefecture. *Mainichi Shimbun* quotes Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori as saying that the Japanese Self-Defense Forces will locate the *Patriot Advanced Capability-3* interceptor missiles at two of its bases “as soon as possible within April.”

April 12-15, 2013: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen visits South Korea, becoming the first in his capacity to visit the country.

April 15, 2013: Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide says that a prerequisite for restarting dialogues with North Korea will be for the North to move toward denuclearization.

April 15-17, 2013: Prime Minister Abe and NATO Secretary General Rasmussen sign NATO-Japan Political Declaration for a Stronger Partnership.

April 18, 2013: Trilateral South Korea, Japan, and China summit is postponed, with speculation that the territorial dispute between Japan and China is the cause.

April 19, 2013: South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries releases plans to establish a maritime police station on Ulleung Island in the Sea of Japan/East Sea (an island west of Dokdo/Takeshima) in order to strengthen security of the easternmost islets.

April 19, 2013: South Korea’s Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae meets Ambassador Bessho to discuss further cooperation in dealing with continuing threats from North Korea.

April 21-23, 2013: Japanese officials, including the Deputy Prime Minister Aso Taro visit Yasukuni Shrine despite strong protests from both South Korea and China.

April 21, 2013: South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se cancels scheduled trip to Japan in response to the recent Yasukuni Shrine visits by Japanese cabinet members.

April 23, 2013: Shimane Prefecture in Japan decides to extend fishing rights in waters around Dokdo/Takeshima islets for another 10 years, despite the fact that no such fishing operations have taken place since June 1954.

April 24, 2013: *Kyodo News* quotes Prime Minister Abe's remarks during a parliamentary session, responding to criticism from South Korea and China on the Yasukuni Shrine visits by claiming that "My ministers will not yield to any kind of intimidation."

April 25, 2013: Seoul calls in Ambassador Bessho to lodge an official protest against Prime Minister Abe's remarks defending officials' visits to Yasukuni Shrine.

April 25, 2013: South Korea states that it plans to open a Japanese version of the website for Dokdo/Takeshima by Aug. 31, along with versions in six other foreign languages including English and Chinese, in a bid to step up its claims to sovereignty of the disputed territory.

April 28, 2013: Japanese State Minister for Administrative Reforms and Public Servant Systems Reforms, Inada Tomomi visits Yasukuni Shrine, garnering protests from both Seoul and Beijing.

April 29, 2013: South Korean National Assembly passes a resolution (238 votes in favor, with one abstaining) denouncing Japan's latest actions regarding Yasukuni Shrine as well as its perceptions of history.