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JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

WHAT GOES UP, MUST COME DOWN

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Going into the final months of 2016, Seoul-Tokyo relations had been on a positive trajectory, creating that ill feeling that it was time for things to go awry. While the relatively calm period witnessed palpable results with the signing of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and solidarity against North Korea's provocations, the political chaos in South Korea that climaxed with the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye in December put the brakes on further developments. The scandals surrounding the abuse of power involving a shadowy confidante made it difficult to shake off the feeling that the administration's deals with Japan have become tainted. Now, South Korean presidential hopefuls are tapping into public discontent to undermine the "comfort women" deal reached in December 2015, and there is high skepticism in the media over the implementation of GSOMIA.

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GSOMIA and diversionary tactics?

Seoul and Tokyo shared parallels in the first weeks of September that suggested greater collaboration. For one, there was an [assessment](#) that US President-elect Donald Trump's plans to levy trade tariffs on China would negatively impact Japan and South Korea. There were also [calls](#) for Tokyo and Seoul to build nuclear weapons to create a less favorable geostrategic environment for China in dealing with North Korea. The sports ministers from the two countries in conjunction with China held talks in September to create an "[Olympic Legacy](#)" given that the three would host the next three Olympic Games – 2018 Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, and the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing. The momentum for collaboration was strong and there were results. The inking of the GSOMIA in particular deserves mention here.

Recall that in June 2012, the same bilateral agreement to share intelligence fell through at the last minute (see timeline below), prompting the question: what changed since then?

Table 1. Timeline of Key Events Surrounding GSOMIA

Date	Description
1989	South Korean government suggests GSOMIA
Jan. 10, 2011	Two governments agree to pursue GSOMIA at defense ministers meeting
June 26, 2012	GSOMIA agenda placed before South Korean Cabinet as an impromptu item without first holding vice-ministerial meeting
June 29, 2012	Roughly 50 minutes before scheduled signing of GSOMIA in Tokyo, South Korean government requests postponement
July 5, 2012	Kim Tae-hyo, South Korea's senior presidential secretary for national security resigns amidst controversy over the covert push to have GSOMIA signed
March 31,	Kim Kyou-hyun, South Korea's senior presidential secretary for

2016	foreign affairs and national security, asserts that South Korea's fundamental position on GSOMIA is that the right conditions will have to be met in order for its endorsement
Sept. 7, 2016	GSOMIA is raised during bilateral summit in Laos
Sept. 8, 2016	South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirms that GSOMIA was part of discussion during summit with Japan
Oct. 13, 2016	ROK Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se seeks greater consensus over GSOMIA during parliamentary inspection of government agencies by citing greater North Korean nuclear and missile threat
Oct. 27, 2016	South Korean government announces resumption of negotiations on GSOMIA
Nov. 1, 2016	First round of bilateral discussions on GSOMIA held in Tokyo
Nov. 9, 2016	Second round of bilateral discussions on GSOMIA held in Seoul
Nov. 4, 2016	The two countries provisionally sign GSOMIA
Nov. 15, 2016	South Korea's Office of Legislation approves GSOMIA
Nov. 17, 2016	GSOMIA endorsed during vice ministerial meeting in Korea
Nov. 22, 2016	GSOMIA endorsed during Cabinet meeting chaired by ROK Deputy Prime Minister Yoo Il-ho; agreement also ratified by President Park Geun-hye
Nov. 23, 2016	ROK Defense Minister Han Min-koo and Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine Yasumasa sign GSOMIA
Dec. 16, 2016	First case of sharing intelligence since November ratification

There was not much that had changed on the Japanese side. There were Upper House elections in July and the subsequent consolidation of power for Prime Minister Abe Shinzo as his ruling coalition gained a majority of seats, which certainly reinforced the legitimacy of (and confidence in) his leadership. But for the most part, Japan had been quite consistent in its support for the GSOMIA in the 2000s, mainly based on the increasing threat posed by North Korea. Japanese officials and the [Japanese media](#) (also in [Japanese](#)) have supported this framing by highlighting the increased threat of North Korean missile launches. In a [press conference](#) on Nov. 15, a day after the provisional signing of GSOMIA, Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio was clear that the implication of the GSOMIA for Japan was greater collaboration against the North Korean threat.

For its part, North Korea itself contributed to this narrative. It conducted its fifth nuclear test on Sept. 5, prompting the UN Security Council (UNSC) to release a [statement](#) condemning the North for its violation of international obligations. Subsequently, the UNSC unanimously adopted [Security Council Resolution 2321](#) on Nov. 30, which detailed additional sanctions directed against certain North Korean entities – something that was [welcomed](#) by Prime Minister Abe. The navies of Japan, South Korea, and the US had also conducted a joint search-and-rescue exercise (SAREX) and a maritime interdiction operation (MIO) off the southern coast of South Korea’s Jeju Island in late October, which reinforced solidarity against North Korea and the rationale for countering the threat.

Likewise, not much had changed since 2012 for the Korean side, especially regarding popular opinion of the GSOMIA). From the experience in 2012, it was expected that the main resistance would be from South Korea; in 2012, [several scholars](#) cited four challenges that had impeded the deal (procedural and legislative concerns, the burden of history, the China factor, and a polarized public), which very much remained in 2016. By November 2016, the opposition to GSOMIA from South Korea was based on the following five arguments:

- Japan cannot be trusted, and inking a deal with a country that has yet to apologize for its past history is equivalent to selling out Korea.
- GSOMIA will rationalize Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and allow its troops to be deployed to the Korean Peninsula without Korea’s prior consent.

- GSOMIA is testament to buckling under US pressure to facilitate the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral security framework.
- There is a lack of transparency regarding the procedure, and it is likely that the GSOMIA is simply a diversionary tactic to distract the public from the messy internal politics.
- South Korea has more to lose than gain from the deal.

Although the argument that the agreement would unnecessarily antagonize China could be added to the list, it is quickly rebuffed by the fact that the Korean government had already approached China with a [similar deal](#) only to have been met by silence.

Setting aside for a moment the argument that the only functional or instrumental critique of the agreement is point number five, which can be countered by pointing out that the GSOMIA is based on the principle of reciprocity, which means that a zero-sum logic is not an appropriate mindset. The other arguments are really getting at the context surrounding the agreement and the actors involved, rather than the substance of it. The first point conflates the goals of *security* with *diplomacy*. While the two are necessarily interrelated, the GSOMIA is not primarily intended to facilitate greater politico-diplomatic relations, and should not inhibit continued efforts by South Korea to obtain “historical closure” with Japan. The second point is moot, as it has been [made clear](#) that sending any Japanese troops to the Korean Peninsula in cases of contingency would require the consent of South Korea. The final argument seems to ignore that South Korea has been in a trilateral military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan and the US since December 2014, and ignores the larger trajectory in military intelligence sharing by South Korea: as of 2016, South Korea has completed similar agreements with 19 other countries ([Ministry of National Defense](#), in Korean) with additional “arrangements” with 13 other countries including Germany (Jan. 25, 1973), Malaysia (Sept. 22, 1992), and Vietnam (July 21, 2014). This is in contrast to the six for Japan, which includes the latest with Korea, with an impending deal with Italy potentially making it seven ([Ministry of Defense](#)). (See table 2 below.)

Table 2. List of countries with which Japan and Korea has Intelligence Sharing Agreements

	<i>With South Korea</i>		<i>With Japan</i>
United States	Sept. 24, 1987	United States	Aug. 10, 2007
Canada	July 5, 1999	NATO	June 25, 2010
France	March 6, 2000	France	Oct. 24, 2011
Russia	Feb. 26, 2001	Australia	May 17, 2012
Ukraine	April 11, 2003	United Kingdom	July 4, 2013
Spain	March 23, 2009	South Korea	Nov. 23, 2013
Australia	May 30, 2009		
United Kingdom	July 9, 2009		
Sweden	July 13, 2009		
Poland	Sept. 30, 2009		
Bulgaria	Oct. 27, 2009		
Uzbekistan	Sept. 20, 2012		
New Zealand	Nov. 29, 2012		
Greece	Dec. 3, 2013		
India	Jan. 16, 2014		
Romania	March 26, 2015		

Philippines	Sept. 14, 2015		
Hungary	Dec. 3, 2015		
Jordan	May 30, 2016		
Japan	Nov. 23, 2016		

The asymmetry is quite stark, and while one could criticize the diffuse nature of South Korea’s strategy with regard to intelligence sharing agreements, the subsequent logic that Korea should streamline its target countries and give priority to its immediate neighborhood would still include (not exclude) Japan. Points three and particularly four are harder to dismiss and may have severely undermined the public’s receptivity to the agreement. In some sense, the two issues are linked, as the extreme haste in which the agreement was concluded – just under a month from when negotiations began in earnest on Nov. 1 to when the deal was signed on Nov. 23 – created a large vacuum for suspicion to really creep in. (It also did not help that the South Korean Ministry of National Defense did not allow any photography by reporters at the signing ceremony, prompting one official to [claim](#) that “It’s as though President Park is deliberately trying to stir up conflict with foreign affairs and national security issues.”) *Timing* is almost always a key ingredient in negotiations, and it is unlikely that the GSOMIA would have been concluded without the all-consuming airtime devoted to the political scandal involving Park.

As for “US pressure,” the spokesperson for the ROK Ministry of National Defense was clear that the GSOMIA did not come up during the 48th Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) between US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter and Korea’s Defense Minister Han Min-koo on Oct. 20 at the Pentagon ([daily briefing](#) of Nov. 14). Nevertheless, this point of view gained traction, particularly since the July decision by the ROK to host the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD). What has not been established, however, is exactly *who* the US here refers to: the Obama administration only has a couple months left till the end of the presidency, and the incoming president has yet to start his term, making both the incentive to place pressure on Korea or the priority to do so, quite low. In the end, the backlash against the GSOMIA in South Korea was the result of

severe communication failure on the part of the Korean government with its own public, which seemed to have been a chronic weakness by the Park administration.

The “Choi effect”

As the Korean public was subjected to a daily dose of shock and awe from stories about President Park and others being involved in extortion, abuse of power, leaking of confidential documents, and bribery, the table had now turned and Kato Tatsuya was having the last laugh. Recall that Kato, the former Seoul bureau chief of Japan’s *Sankei Shimbun*, was finally acquitted in December 2015 after facing criminal charges for defaming the South Korean president in his online article that quoted rumors concerning Park’s whereabouts during the sinking of the Sewol ferry in April 2014. With the benefit of hindsight, it becomes a bit more obvious why the Park administration had been so sensitive about the piece, with prosecutors requesting an 18-month prison term for Kato. While Kato had pleaded innocent and declared that his article was in the public interest by questioning the activities of the president during a major disaster, the [media](#) had at the time claimed that the South Korean public did not really sympathize with Kato. Ironically, what he had asked has quickly become what the Koreans themselves are now asking.

Once bitten, but not twice shy, Kato has been writing about President Park again. His [editorial](#) (in Japanese) in the *Sankei Shimbun* detailed the turmoil in South Korea involving a presidency that has suffered from a lack of communication and extreme insularity, suggesting that such evasion of accountability may have worked during an authoritarian period of rule by her father, Park Chung-hee, but is unacceptable in contemporary Korea. He also participated in a [lecture](#) (in Japanese) in November in Hokkaido, where he warned of the potentially nullifying effects that an impeachment of the presidency would have on the GSOMIA. As suspected, the Korean media did not devote much space to publicizing Kato’s last laugh or what his initial indictment had meant within the context of what we all know now – a fair bit of dereliction of duty by President Park at the time of the disaster.

What could potentially be the most disconcerting news for the Japanese government in all this surfaced on Oct. 26, when the Korean media outlet *JTBC* [revealed](#) (in Korean) that it had collected certain diplomatic documents from Choi Soon-sil’s personal computer (Choi is a long-time confidante of President Park and on trial as of December 2016 for abuse of power and

corruption). Among those documents were scenarios and accompanying model responses for how Park should act as president-elect with Abe’s special envoy, Nukaga Fukushima, in January 2013. Since the meeting preceded the formal launch of her presidency, it marked an important foundational meeting for the two countries. The central problem is that the documents contained information on many sensitive bilateral issues including “comfort women,” and the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima – on the latter, the script had urged Park not to mention Dokdo and if it did come up during her talks with Nukaga, to mostly “smile” rather than to engage substantively. The uproar stemmed from the fact that not only had Choi had access to such confidential documents, but that she had the authority to make potential changes to the script on such sensitive national interests involving Japan.

Although the Japanese government did not directly react to this specific news story regarding Choi and her potential intervention in diplomacy vis-à-vis Japan, this was most likely due to the overwhelming and more general concern that the “Choi effect” would have on bilateral and also trilateral relations with China. A Dec. 10 *Yomiuri Shimbun* [article](#) detailed several items that would now likely be postponed indefinitely given the impeachment of President Park: a bilateral currency swap agreement and a bilateral summit on the sidelines of a trilateral meeting involving China as well as the trilateral summit itself. The article ended by citing concerns that the next administration in Korea may be “anti-Japanese,” quoting a senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official as saying that “There are no longer prospects for improving Japan-South Korea relations.” To some extent, it would have been difficult to entirely ignore the rhetoric of some of the key officials (and future presidential candidates) in Korea and their latest stance toward these bilateral issues. For instance, the mayor of Seoul, Park Won-soon, had been critical towards the GSOMIA even before the eventual signing, equating the agreement to a second coming of the 1905 Treaty (that stripped Korea of its diplomatic sovereignty), while Moon Jae-in, former leader of the progressive Minjoo Party has also called for a complete re-evaluation of the “comfort women” deal of December 2015 and the GSOMIA. Unfortunately, there was no silver lining to Korea’s domestic political crisis for bilateral Japan-Korea relations.

Economic fallout

There are additional economic costs of the “Choi effect” at the bilateral level that are worth noting. The most

immediate involves the postponement of the currency swap arrangement between Japan and South Korea. In February 2015, the two countries had agreed to let their 14-year-old \$10 billion currency swap arrangement expire (a currency swap is an accord to let the two countries exchange one currency with another at a specific exchange rate in order for the stronger currency to dampen market volatility). The decision to let the arrangement lapse in February was attributed to inhospitable diplomatic relations at the time, but with the momentum that had gathered from the signing of the “comfort women” deal and the GSOMIA in 2016, there were hopes that an arrangement might be within reach before the end of the year. With the impeachment of President Park, there was little chance of that happening. Even after South Korea’s Deputy Prime Minister Yoo Il-ho met Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine on Dec. 15 to discuss the expansion of trade and collaboration on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) involving ASEAN countries and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs with – it seemed likely that the relationship would be focused on crisis management rather than any new progress.

Another bilateral issue that became sidelined with the domestic political upheaval unfolding in South Korea involved negotiations over fisheries. Since the two countries had [failed](#) to reach a fisheries agreement back in June 2016 over annual fishing quotas in each other’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ), there has been a suspension of fishing activity in each other’s EEZ since July 1. South Korean vessels that seek cutlassfish in Japanese waters have been hardest hit from this suspension, with almost a third of all cutlassfish typically coming from Japan’s EEZ. Buried beneath all the articles about the post-Park impeachment environment, were a few alarming [news reports](#) (in Korean) about the significant decrease in total cutlassfish catch during the period of suspension. There was a decrease of 63.28 percent to 3,235 tons in August (from 8,810 tons during the same period in 2015) and a decrease of 43.26 percent to 4,008 tons in September (from 7,065 tons in 2015).

There was also a domestic development in Japan that has interesting economic implications for South Korea. On Dec. 2, the “Bill Promoting Implementation of Specified Integrated Resorts” that would legalize casino gambling in integrated resorts (such as hotels) in Japan – and has had the support of the Abe administration and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) – passed the Lower House Committee (though opposition parties

[condemned](#) the speed with which the bill was put to a vote and accused the ruling coalition of railroading the legislation). After some revisions to the bill by the Upper House Committee, the new version had to be voted on again in the Lower House, which extended proceedings until Dec. 15. Throughout the process, there was intense political wrangling, not only by members of LDP’s junior coalition partner Komeito, which has consistently viewed casinos as somewhat worrisome in light of the potential for gambling addiction and public safety, but also the Democratic Party, which made efforts to thwart the bill’s enactment – first through a censure motion in the Upper House, and then a no-confidence motion in the Lower House that was easily struck down by the ruling coalition. The bill has to be an immense win for Prime Minister Abe given the [long and tough history](#) of the bill; one has to wonder whether it would have been possible without the renewed legislative power from the July elections. Having said that, it is unlikely that these integrated resorts will be realized by the 2020 Olympics as further legislation is actually needed to establish and implement a gaming regulatory structure.

The implication for South Korea was hinted at in a [Forbes article](#) that was published on Nov. 17 prior to the enactment of this specific bill. The article detailed recent moves by Genting Singapore PLC, a Singapore-based company that operates resorts as well as casinos around the world. Genting Singapore had announced that it would sell its share of \$1.8 billion in [Resorts World Jeju](#) (slated to become one of South Korea’s largest integrated resorts) to focus on casino legalization in Japan. South Korea, too, has long had similar concerns about the social impacts of legalizing gambling, keeping mainly a foreigner-only access policy for casinos, except for one – Kangwon Land Resort – which is open to locals. The exception was made with economic interests such as invigorating tourism in mind, which has been a strong reason behind the push for the integrated resorts bill in Japan. Although this bill still faces many hurdles in Japan, it would be in South Korea’s interest to keep a close eye on its progress and the impending economic competition that Seoul may face from increased supply in the market.

Finally, there were more developments regarding the Lotte Group, which had been mentioned in a [previous issue](#) of *Comparative Connections* in the context of nationality and the identity that multinational companies carry. In October, the Seoul Central District Prosecutor’s Office indicted three individuals on corruption charges: Shin Dong-bin, Lotte Group’s

chairman, his elder brother, Shin Dong-joo (former vice chairman of Lotte Holdings in Japan), and Shin Kyuk-ho, the group's founder. Shin Dong-bin, who gained management control in 2015, had sought to combine some of its operations in Japan and South Korea, but with the three now facing lengthy trials ([some](#) speculating up to two years), the strategic plan will most likely be placed on hold. As messy as this family drama had been, it could not wrestle away much air time from the unfolding presidential saga.

Catch me if you can

The last four months of 2016 was a busy time for North Korea. It conducted a nuclear test on Sept. 9, and Japan's [NHK](#) confirmed on Dec. 15 that a US government official said that the US had confirmed that Pyongyang conducted a ground test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile earlier in the month. Meanwhile, Japan was active in solidifying the international opposition North Korea's provocations, including its human rights record particularly as it pertains to abductions of Japanese nationals.

Starting in November, the UN Security Council adopted [Resolution 2321](#), which expresses concerns against North Korea's nuclear testing and ballistic missiles activities and clarifies further sanctions against the regime. The North Korean diplomat at the UN responded by claiming that he was [unfazed](#) since North Korea had already been sanctioned. By December, the Japanese government had [announced](#) an expansion of sanctions against Pyongyang, which included more North Korean targets under its asset-freezing program, an increase in the number of North Korean officials banned from re-entry into Japan, and banning all Japan-registered ships that had made port calls to North Korea from entering Japanese ports.

The second front for Japan with North Korea concerned human rights. The UN was also actively engaged in reporting on the human rights situation in North Korea (see reports [here](#) and [here](#)) in the final months of the year. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution recommended by its Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) on the Situation of Human Rights in North Korea (co-sponsored by Japan and the European Union) on Dec. 19. Japan's consistent focus was the abduction issue. After the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2321 on Nov. 30, Ambassador Bessho Koro, Japan's permanent representative to the UN, made the following [statement](#): "We welcome stronger emphasis on the deplorable humanitarian conditions in North Korea, including the abductions issue, to which Japan

attaches utmost importance." In early December, Kato Katsunobu, the Japanese minister for the abduction issue, met UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in New York to discuss North Korea. The meeting led to a UNSC meeting on Dec. 9 at the request of Japan, to discuss human rights issues in the context of North Korea and once again gave Bessho the opportunity to highlight Japan's interests in the abduction issue by linking Pyongyang's violation of human rights with threats to international peace and security (see statement [here](#)). Toward the end of December, there were [reports](#) that the Japanese government had plans to increase its broadcasting of the radio program, "Furusato no Kaze" ("Wind from the Homeland"), (which is broadcast in Japanese and Korean) and includes more information on Japanese policy regarding North Korea and the abduction issue.

In usual fashion, the North Korean regime was consistent in its hurling invective – though the regime seemed to be in a particularly foul mood given the signing of the GSOMIA between Japan and South Korea. In fact, a lot of a Nov. 23 [commentary](#) in the *Rodong Sinmun* echoed the sentiments of the South Korean public against the GSOMIA noted earlier: "The main purpose sought by the puppet military gangsters in concluding the above-said agreement [GSOMIA] is to step up the formation of the triangular military alliance with the U.S. and Japan and realize the ambition for invading the north with the backing of their masters. It is also aimed to save traitor Park Geun Hye from the abyss of ruin in which she is now finding herself due to the hideous political scandal."

Meanwhile, Seoul and Tokyo were able to share classified information on North Korea nuclear weapons on Dec. 16, the first since the signing of the GSOMIA in November.

Months ahead

With President Park now impeached and the Constitutional Court considering the National Assembly's indictment, there is a power vacuum in South Korea. Yes, there is a president, but essentially most policy decisions are on hold barring a major crisis. But this has not stopped relations from moving forward – already a "Comfort Woman" statue has been re-installed in Busan across from the Japanese Consulate, and it is not clear that the agreement then-President Park signed in December 2015 will survive her downfall. With South Korea about to enter a period of political turmoil, a number of decisions are essentially on hold awaiting a new president: GSOMIA

implementation, THAAD deployment, “comfort woman” agreements, and North Korea policy. For Japan, Prime Minister Abe has clearly tried to enlist President-elect Trump in confronting China and supporting the US-Japan alliance. If Abe is successful, it could add further complexity to Korea-Japan relations because it is unlikely that the new South Korean president, no matter who is elected, will pursue a hardline policy towards China. Thus, as the world awaits a new president in the US and possibly a new president in South Korea, the first few months of 2017 promise to be eventful, to say the least.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2016

Sept. 7, 2016: Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo meets South Korean counterpart Park Geun-hye in Vientiane on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-related meetings.

Sept. 9, 2016: Prime Minister Abe releases a [statement](#) in response to the fifth nuclear test by North Korea.

Sept. 9, 2016: Japanese and South Korean parliamentarians meet in Tokyo for the executive committee meeting ahead of the scheduled General Assembly of Parliamentarians' Union in November.

Sept. 24-25, 2016: Japan-Korea Exchange Festival (*Nikkan Koryu Matsuri*) is held in Tokyo.

Oct. 2, 2016: Korea-Japan Exchange Festival (*Hanil Chukjae Hanmadang*) is held in Seoul.

Oct. 19, 2016: Three top figures of the Lotte Group are indicted by the Seoul Central District Prosecutor's Office on corruption charges.

Oct. 22-23, 2016: Navies of Japan, South Korea, and the US participate in a joint naval exercise off the southern coast of South Korea's Jeju Island.

Oct. 29, 2016: Kato Tatsuya, former Seoul bureau chief of Japan's *Sankei Shimbun*, publishes an editorial about the ongoing political turmoil surrounding South Korea's President Park Geun-hye.

Oct. 31, 2016: Governors of Japan's Kochi Prefecture and South Korea's South Jeolla Province sign a pact establishing a sister relationship between the two regions.

Nov. 1, 2016: First round of bilateral discussions on the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) take place in Tokyo.

Nov. 4, 2016: Japanese and South Korean parliamentarians meet in Seoul for the 39th annual General Assembly of the Parliamentarians' Union.

Nov. 9, 2016: Second round of bilateral discussions on GSOMIA take place in Seoul.

Nov. 15, 2016: Co-drafted resolution by Japan and the European Union condemning North Korea's human rights violations is approved by the UN General Assembly's Third Committee.

Nov. 22, 2016: [The Hankyoreh](#) reports that a scheduled South Korean military exercise on Nov. 24 to protect the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima is abruptly postponed in consideration of the GSOMIA with Japan, prompting criticism from the South Korean public.

Nov. 23, 2016: South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-koo and Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine Yasumasa sign the GSOMIA.

Nov. 24, 2016: [The Nikkei](#) reports that the Seoul Central District Court has ruled that Japanese company, Nachi-Fujikoshi Corp, must compensate five Korean women 100 million won (\$85,000) each for forced labor during World War II.

Nov. 30, 2016: UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2321, which expresses concerns against North Korea's nuclear testing and ballistic missiles activities and contains measures for further sanctions against the regime.

Dec. 2, 2016: UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon meets Kato Katsunobu, Japanese minister for the abduction issue, in New York, to discuss issues regarding North Korea.

Dec. 2, 2016: “Bill Promoting Implementation of Specified Integrated Resort” that would legalize casino gambling in integrated resorts in Japan passes the Lower House Committee.

Dec. 9, 2016: Japanese government announces it will expand sanctions against North Korea.

Dec. 9, 2016: At the request of the Japanese ambassador to the UN, UN Security Council convenes a meeting to discuss the human rights situation in North Korea.

Dec. 9, 2016: Motion to impeach President Park Geun-hye passes in the South Korean National Assembly. This makes Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn the acting president and gives a greater role for Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Strategy and Finance Yoo Il-ho, particularly in the context of South Korea’s interaction with Japan.

Dec. 11, 2016: [*The Japan Times*](#) reports that bilateral negotiations on the currency swap arrangement between Japan and South Korea will most likely stall, quoting Deputy Prime Minister Yoo Il-ho.

Dec. 12, 2016: Japan’s Minister for Disaster Management Matsumoto Jun and South Korean counterpart Park In-yong sign an agreement on cooperation on disaster control and safety.

Dec. 13, 2016: Nuclear envoys from Japan, South Korea, and the US meet in Seoul to discuss collaboration on new sanctions against North Korea.

Dec. 15, 2016: Moon Jae-in, former leader of the Minjoo Party (and potential presidential candidate) calls for a complete re-evaluation of the “comfort women” deal and GSOMIA.

Dec. 15, 2016: [*NHK*](#) confirms that US government believes Pyongyang conducted a ground test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile in early December.

Dec. 15, 2016: In a telephone call, South Korea’s Deputy Prime Minister Yoo Il-ho assures Japan’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Aso Taro of the continued stability in South Korea despite the ongoing political turmoil.

Dec. 15, 2016: Japan’s Upper House passes the “Bill Promoting Implementation of Specified Integrated Resort” in an extraordinary session of the Diet.

Dec. 16, 2016: Japan, South Korea, and US hold Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT) in Seoul.

Dec. 16, 2016: Japan and South Korea share their first piece of classified information on North Korea’s nuclear program and ballistic missiles since inking GSOMIA in November.

Dec. 19, 2016: UN General Assembly adopts a resolution recommended by its Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) on the Situation of Human Rights in North Korea.

Dec. 19, 2016: [*The Japan Times*](#) reports that the Japanese government will broadcast its radio program aimed at Japanese abductees in North Korea on more frequencies in the coming year.

Dec. 20, 2016: [*The Hankyoreh*](#) reports that prosecutors have requested a three-year jail sentence for Park Yu-ha – a Sejong University professor who is on trial on accounts of defamation of “comfort women.” Her sentence hearing is scheduled for Jan. 25, 2017.

Dec. 28, 2016: Japan’s Minister for Reconstruction Imamura Masahiro visits the Yasukuni Shrine, sparking protests from South Korea.

Dec. 29, 2016: Japan's Minister of Defense Inada Tomomi visits Yasukuni Shrine, prompting South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to summon Maruyama Kohei, a minister at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, and the Ministry of Defense to summon Takahashi Hideaki the Japanese military attaché to Korea.

Dec. 31, 2016: South Korean civic group unveils a "comfort women" statue in front of the Japanese Consulate in Busan, which raises concern with the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding potential implications for its ties with Japan.

