

Did Trump get a taste of “Dokdo” Shrimp?

TAKAI Susumu, President of the Security and Strategy Institute of Japan (February 9, 2018)

In early November, US President Donald Trump embarked on a tour of Asia, starting with Japan and followed by South Korea, China, and other nations, with the aim of revitalizing the US economy based on his “America First” policy. Meanwhile, his speech and action during the tour suggest that preventing North Korea from developing nuclear and missile capabilities is another issue at the forefront of the President’s agenda. During his visit to Japan, Trump, alongside his host Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, vowed to do whatever it takes to halt North Korea’s nuclear and missile development, while in South Korea, he warned that “the US stands prepared to defend itself and its allies using the full range of our unmatched military capabilities, if need be.”

Reports that South Korean President Moon Jae-in served President Trump “*Dokdo*” shrimp at the state banquet were viewed with disdain by discerning Japanese as rude and classless manner appeal to a state guest. Since his election, President Moon has pushed for a diplomatic resolution to North Korea’s nuclear and missile development, rejecting the option of using a US, Japanese, and South Korean alliance to apply pressure to the North. By serving “*Dokdo*” shrimp as a symbol of the Takeshima territorial dispute between Japan and South Korea to President Trump, President Moon likely intended to hint at his rejection of a three-nation alliance.

“*Dokdo*” shrimp is a name arbitrarily given to shrimp caught in the waters near Takeshima, a Japanese island in the East China Sea. South Korea suddenly seized this island from Japan in 1954 by force, and subsequently claimed this territory as its own. Korea, in the period of upheaval following the end of the Second World War, fabricated a fictional island “*Dokdo*” and imposed this name on the Japanese island of Takeshima, loudly proclaiming its ownership, and has continued illegal occupation to this day.

It is said that authoritarian regimes in China and Russia learned much from Korea’s seizure of Takeshima by force, an act which violated international legal order. Specifically, in 1974 China seized from Vietnam the entirety of the Paracel Islands, located in the South China Sea, and in 1988 six of the Spratly Islands, while in 1995 it seized Mischief Reef, also part of the Spratly Islands, from the Philippines by military force. Today, China has constructed artificial islands for military use on reefs located within the so-called nine-dash line in the South China Sea, and claims to hold possession of the entire South China Sea region. Meanwhile, in 2014 Russia used military force to annex the Crimean Peninsula from the Ukraine, which had transferred its nuclear weapons

developed during the Soviet era to Russian control in 1994.

Although European nations denounced the crisis in the Crimean Peninsula as a violation of international legal order and subsequently placed economic sanctions on Russia, they remain indifferent to unlawful territorial claims in Asia by countries such as South Korea and China. The US and the world must stand up and denounce any unjust attempt to stake territorial claims backed by force and in violation of international order.

Another face of South Korea has been its constant quest to curry favor with the powerful in international relations to the extent that, since the end of World War II, its diplomacy often resembled the proverbial bat in Aesop's fable, *The Bat, the Birds and the Beast*, as it relied on the US for security and on China for business. Although the previous South Korean government opted to respond to North Korea's nuclear and missile development by installing the latest THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense missile) land-to-air antiballistic missile system in March 2017, the move drew sharp rebuke from China, which responded by placing a stranglehold on the South Korean economy. South Korea's new leftist President Moon Jae-in, who pledged to shake hands with Kim Jong-Un if elected, is set to disband THAAD, and is believed to ultimately desire the unification of North Korea—a nuclear power—and South Korea.

President Trump, who met with the leaders of each nation during his tour of Asia, surely learned firsthand the intricate nature of Northeast Asian diplomatic and security issues. Then, on November 21, President Trump re-designated North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism. Meanwhile, South Korea's opportunist trade policies were dealt a further blow in November when the US International Trade Commission (ITC) recommended the imposition of emergency import restrictions (global safeguard) on South Korean household washing machines under Section 201 of the Trade Act, on the grounds that US manufacturers were damaged by dumped imports from Korea.

In 2015, previous president Barack Obama effectively announced that the US would no longer act as the world's policeman. Even if Trump's fundamental policy is "America First", the above situation suggests that he may have started to feel the US's obligation as the world's policeman in Northeast Asia, unlike his predecessor.

In addition, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), a policy advisory body to the US Congress, released its annual report in November 2017, in which it warned that China's military activities in the East China Sea were heightening Sino-Japanese tensions. Specifically, the report noted that China had repeatedly used a range of People's Liberation Army Air Force fighter jets, interceptors and bombers to conduct bombing drills and observatory flights in the East China Sea

airspace, frequently requiring Japan's Air Self Defense Force to scramble fighter jets in response and the US Air Force to conduct full-scale monitoring of the situation.

Furthermore, the report also introduced a view that China may be plotting a military takeover of the Senkaku Islands, and noted that China's large-scale military expansion and hostile statements and maneuvers are in turn further increasing the pushback from Japan, serving to increase Sino-Japanese tensions. It also stated that a military conflict between Japan and China in the Senkaku Islands could lead to military intervention by the US under the US-Japan Security Treaty, potentially serving as a trigger to war between the US and China.

As exemplified by North Korea's development of nuclear and missile technologies and the threat of China seizing the Senkaku Islands by military force, any further decline of US influence is likely to result in yet more destabilization of international order in Northeast Asia. If President Trump's efforts to contain North Korea fail and the country is allowed to achieve nuclear proliferation, the government of Japan, being surrounded by nuclear states, would undoubtedly be troubled by a surge in hawkish sentiment among its citizens calling for Japan to develop its own nuclear deterrence.

And if China were to mount a military takeover of the Senkaku Islands backed by the threat of its nuclear capabilities, unless the US, allied with Japan, can prevent this violation of international order, Japan, which has thus far relied on the extended nuclear deterrent power of the US, would potentially opt to keep a distance from the US and instead pursue an independent diplomatic and security policy. Whether Japan and the US can utilize the rule of law and their fundamental values to shape a regional order in the Asia-Pacific region, and whether the chaos in Northeast Asian diplomatic arena will deepen or not, will largely hinge on the decisions made by President Trump.