

The Japan-Korea Trade Dispute Debunks Anti-Chinese Narratives

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On July 1, [the Japanese government announced it would impose restrictions on the sale of special chemicals to the Republic of Korea \(ROK\)](#) that are required for use in its massive semiconductor industry. It took effect on July 4. It is claiming that this is due to some companies illegally re-exporting these materials to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in violation of international sanctions

Seoul, however, is convinced that it's in retaliation for its demand that Japanese companies pay restitution to the forced laborers that it abused during World War II. Observers all across the world are very worried that this dispute could further disrupt the global supply chain of high-tech products that has already been somewhat destabilized by the U.S.' trade war against China.



ROK activists hold a rally in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, ROK, July 11, 2019. /VCG Photo

What most commentators are missing, however, is that this event debunks many of the Western mainstream media's anti-Chinese narratives, especially the one regarding the scenario of China weaponizing its economic role in the world for political ends. Far from worrying about Beijing restricting the export of rare earth minerals to other countries to win

the trade war, nothing of the sort has yet to transpire. It's actually none other than the U.S.' top Asian ally, Japan, that's proven itself willing to start its own trade war for seemingly political reasons.

That might not be a coincidence either since the Pentagon's recently released "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report" proudly proclaims that "The U.S.-Japan Alliance is the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific." Although the document doesn't focus on economic security much, the implications of trade disputes on ordinary people can be wide-ranging. It shouldn't also be forgotten that Prime Minister Abe is a close friend of President Trump, with the two seeing eye-to-eye on most issues.

Bearing this in mind and against the background of the latest ROK-Japanese trade dispute, it certainly seems like Tokyo is applying Washington's trade war strategy against Seoul. Whether Japan is acting on its own initiative after misinterpreting American signals or if it's receiving tacit encouragement behind the scenes is inconsequential in the sense it doesn't change the fact that Tokyo is weaponizing economic instruments for perceived political ends just like Washington is.



Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono (L) holds a meeting with ROK Ambassador to Japan Nam Gwan-pyo (R) at his office in foreign ministry in Tokyo, Japan, July 19, 2019. /VCG Photo

China and ROK are therefore both victims of separate trade wars that might even possibly be connected to an uncertain degree. It puts them in the same position vis-a-vis their relationships with the U.S. and Japan respectively, and creates the conditions for both of them to possibly work closely together from here on out. Just like the U.S. wrongly thought that it would bring China to its knees with tariffs, so too did Japan wrongly think that it could do the same to ROK by restricting the sale of indispensable semi-conductor chemicals to it as well. It suggests that America's top Asian ally is following a similarly flawed strategy as its patron.

As has been the trend since President Trump first started waging his trade war, these sorts of aggressive unconventional campaigns have a tendency to backfire against their practitioners, as Japan will soon find out too. Both countries' international reputations have been marred by their unprovoked economic attacks against their two victims. The situation might also draw China and ROK even closer together. In addition, the rest of the world is now seeing that economic warfare isn't "natural," but is driven by political motives, whether ambitions of global leadership in the U.S.' case or avoiding its ethical post-war responsibilities in Japan's.

Most importantly, though, the world now knows that the Western mainstream media's fearmongering about China was based on nothing but falsehoods since the exact same scenarios that they said Beijing would end up pulling have actually been fulfilled by Washington, and now Tokyo. It's in the interests of everyone (except of course the U.S.) that Japan stops following in America's strategic footsteps and realizes that the future lays in non-politicized trade between nations along the lines of what China's Belt & Road Initiative is trying to achieve, not the wielding of economic instruments as weapons of political warfare against its former colony.

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