

COMMENTARY

Is Japan the Right Partner for the U.S.?

The U.S. and Japan couldn't be more diametrically opposite in national character and personality.

By George Koo

Washington rolled out the red carpet for Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and Abe and President Obama made mutually cooing noises as if they were the best of buddies. While both protested that their mutual admiration has nothing to do with countering China's rise, their aim to the contrary was transparent to anyone paying any attention.

The question now is whether an alliance with Japan is in America's best interest. From every perspective, past, present or future, this alliance with Japan does not make sense, except as another foreign policy blunder added to Obama's legacy.

The Past

Despite Abe's pro forma "deep remorse" for American lives that were lost during the WWII, Abe typifies the worst kind of Japan's amnesia and denial. Their forefathers felt no guilt in slaughtering innocent civilians wherever they invaded and their descendants lack the backbone to face history honestly.

Abe can't tell the difference between organized rape ordered by the Japanese generals and spontaneous random assaults by soldiers acting on impulse. American soldiers may have been guilty of the isolated sexual assaults on Japanese civilians during their occupation of Japan but that cannot be equated to organized war crimes committed by Japanese military on a massive scale.



No other nation was as systematically brutal as the Japanese troops in Nanjing. There, Japanese troops went into schools to drag out young girls for gang rape and then used them for bayonet practice.

No other country made a contest out of a race to see who can take 100 civilian heads first. Two Japanese officers wielding their samurai swords did just that in Nanjing in front of cheering fellow soldiers.

No other country systematically and forcibly conscripted women from all over Asia to serve as sexual slaves in military "comfort stations" in the name of boosting morale.

No other country conducted live vivisection and biological experiments on human

beings as if the victims were no more than some laboratory rats. Throughout the war, Japan operated camp 731 in Harbin China in secret to that end.

According to the Potsdam and Cairo Declaration, the terms of Japan's unconditional surrender to end WWII included giving up all claims to any offshore islands outside of the four main islands of Japan. There should have been no grounds for Japan to claim ownership of any islands on East China Sea.

Yet thanks to the U.S. confusion (deliberate or not) in handing administrative control over to Japan, Abe and other leaders in Japan have found a way to vigorously defend their claims to territories Japan had given up when they surrendered.

Twenty-five years later when the U.S. handed control to Japan, neither governments of Republic of China in Taipei or Peoples' Republic of China in Beijing were invited to the conference.

Abe obviously would like to forget about the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and Japan's role as the aggressor, but what sort of confidence can U.S. place on an alliance with an ally that cannot face their past?

The Present

As for the present, America's most challenging problem outside of Middle East is how to denuclearize North Korea. The U.S. has two alternate partners in confronting North Korea. We can work with South Korea and Japan or we with South Korea can work with China.

Japan has no standing with North Korea, and South Korea, unlike we Americans, will not trust a leader who cannot admit to atrocities committed in Japan's past. Japan can add no value to any negotiations with North Korea.

On the other hand, China shares the same antipathy to Abe with South Korea. China is South Korea's biggest trading partner and China is the largest recipient for South Korean foreign

direct investments. They have and can work together.

Though limited, China also has more influence on North Korea than any of the other principals. If there is going to be any light at the end of the tunnel with North Korea, China will have to light the way.

The Future

Looking into the future, America's goal is to solidify our presence in Asia in the coming Asian century. We are counting on Japan to support American leadership, a doubtful proposition if there ever is one.

The U.S. and Japan couldn't be more diametrically opposite in national character and personality. Whereas we welcome immigrants from around the world, Japan couldn't be more xenophobic. Even their own nationals returning from overseas assignments are regarded as *gaijin*, i.e. outsiders, tainted by foreign values.

During the last trade dispute between the U.S. and Japan, the Japanese government even claimed that Japan could not import California rice because the Japanese intestines were not built to digest rice grown outside of Japan. Now for the sake of Trans Pacific Partnership, is Abe going to be able to convince the Japanese farmers that American rice is okay for Japanese gut?

Ostensibly the goal of TPP is to raise the standard of free trade and make China toe the rules more to America's liking. Whether China will want to apply for admission to the as yet undefined TPP remains to be seen. In the meantime, the TPP will need to struggle through the domestic politics of Washington and Tokyo; completion of this free trade agreement is not assured.

To varying degrees all Asian countries have suffered from Japan's brutality. They too cannot trust a Japan that will not own up to its past. The last time Japan proposed sharing co-prosperity with the rest of Asia, the local people only tasted soldiers' boots and bayonets.

In contrast with Japan's approach, China's recent Silk Road Initiative won the immediate acceptance of the countries that stand to benefit from the infrastructure projects. These countries may be wary but they respect China's policy of making mutually beneficial investments with win-win outcomes.

So the choice for America is clear. Do we really want to partner with a nation whose culture is to treat women as second class citizens, encouraging increasing numbers to remain single, and consequently leading to an ageing and shrinking population?

Or, should we partner instead with China? While they do not want to play strictly by our rules, they are busy going around the world, making friends with their accumulated resources. Does it not seem obvious that China is more likely to have the kind of worldwide influence that would complement our military strength in the mutual quest for stability and world order?

- See more at: <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/is-japan-the-right-partner-for-the-us/#sthash.hhH5ZUxZ.hKmHpMBz.dpuf>

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Dr. George Koo is a retired business consultant that used to visit Hong Kong and China regularly. He is also a former director of New America Media.