

# Abe's "Total Settlement of Japan's Post-War Diplomacy" and its Dilemma

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**A** "total settlement of post-war diplomacy" is Japan's guiding foreign policy proposed by the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, with different horizons and strategic relevance compared with earlier policies. It focuses on the conclusion of a peace treaty with Russia, historical and present issues of the Korean Peninsula, and the adjustment of Japan's China policy. Abe wishes to revise the "post-war arrangements" and reconstruct the regional order centered on Northeast Asia. This wish has not been fulfilled yet and faces many challenges. However, the policy orientation featuring historical revisionism deserves high attention.

## Proposal of "Total Settlement of Japan's Post-War Diplomacy"

The first time Abe publicly proposed to sum up Japan's post-war diplomacy was in August 2018, when he was delivering a campaign speech to be re-elected as President of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in his hometown Yamaguchi Prefecture. He claimed that "the time to sum up Japan's post-war diplomacy has come" with focuses on three issues, namely striving for a meeting with leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Kim Jong Un to resolve the abductions issue, advancing negotiations with Russia on the "Northern Territories," and adjusting Japan's China policy.<sup>1</sup> At

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1 "Abe to Submit LDP's Constitutional Amendment Proposal to the Next Diet Session," *Kyodo News*, August 13, 2018, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2018/08/ffc5dfc1df3d.html>.

that time, some Japanese analysts believed that it was only Abe's campaign slogan with no real substance. However, Abe has repeatedly emphasized this policy on important occasions, especially in the policy speeches to the Diet during the past three years, aiming to "open up new horizons for Japan's diplomacy"<sup>2</sup> and "build Japan's diplomacy for the new era."<sup>3</sup>

Although Abe's words are not exactly the same when talking about "total settlement of post-war diplomacy," the core focus is always on the conclusion of historical issues with relevant countries. From Japan's perspective, consensus has been achieved between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) on the wartime "comfort women" issue. Meanwhile, Abe is trying to change the asymmetry of the US-Japan alliance since World War II by amending laws related to the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, so it could also defend the US from attack.<sup>4</sup> This is not only for getting the United States' tacit agreement on Japan's future policies and practices of constitutional amendment to get rid of the "post-war arrangements," but also the first step of "historical settlement" with the US. In Japan's view, US President Barack Obama's visit to the site of the Hiroshima atomic bombing during the G7 summit hosted by Japan and Abe's subsequent visit to Pearl Harbor mean that the US and Japan have reached consensus on historical reconciliation. Therefore, Abe believes that Japan has resolved historical issues with the ROK and the US, but has yet to resolve those with the DPRK, Russia and China. The Basic Policy issued by the Abe cabinet on October 2, 2018 clearly explained the "total settlement of post-war diplomacy," which is "to resolve the abductions, nuclear and missile issues, settle the historical issues and normalize relations with the DPRK; to resolve the territorial issue and conclude a peace treaty with Russia; and to raise Japan-China relations

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2 "Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 198th Session of the Diet," Prime Minister's Office of Japan, January 28, 2019, [http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98\\_abe/statement/20190128siseihousin.html](http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/statement/20190128siseihousin.html).

3 "Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 201st Session of the Diet," Prime Minister's Office of Japan, January 20, 2020, [http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98\\_abe/statement/2020/0120shiseihoushin.html](http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/statement/2020/0120shiseihoushin.html).

4 Lyu Yaodong, "Japan's Foreign Strategy: Strategic Mechanisms and Policy Orientation from the Perspective of National Interests," *Japanese Studies*, No.5, 2018, p 26.

to a new stage.”<sup>5</sup> Abe believes that Japan hasn’t walked out of the World War II shadows, as the San Francisco Peace Treaty only resolved the post-war issues between Japan and the so-called “democratic world.” However, the issues with Russia (Soviet Union), the DPRK and China were left unsolved. Only by resolving all post-war and Cold War legacies in Japan’s foreign relations, can Japan normalize relations with the DPRK, settle the territorial issue with Russia, and promote future-oriented relations with China.

Abe is the successor and promoter of Japanese conservatism. He visited the Yasukuni Shrine soon after being reelected, delivered the highly historical-revisionist “August 14 speech” before the 70th anniversary of Japan’s World War II surrender in 2015, and announced the “settlement” and “end of infinite apologies” to victim countries like China, the ROK and the DPRK. The “total settlement of post-war diplomacy” advocated by Abe is actually the 21st century version of former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone’s diplomatic concept of “total settlement of post-war politics.”<sup>6</sup> Although the time and focus may vary, Abe has inherited Nakasone’s historical revisionism to get rid of the “post-war system.” In 2019, in his eulogy to Nakasone, Abe said that “he (Nakasone) raised the banner of ‘settlement of post-war politics,’ cooperated closely with President Reagan to strengthen US-Japan alliance, developed relations with neighboring countries in Asia, and took Japan’s responsibility to maintain the global peace and economic

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5 “The Government’s Basic Policy,” Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, October 2, 2018, <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/kakugikettei/2018/1002kihonhousin.html>.

6 In the 1980s, Nakasone rethought the “Yoshida Doctrine” and raised the concept of “total settlement of postwar politics,” attempting to review Japan’s domestic and foreign policy after WWII that “emphasized more on economy rather than military” and realize an all-round transformation of Japan’s political, economic, social and cultural strategies based on neo-conservatism. Nakasone believed that using words like “militarism,” “fascism” and keiretsu (loose conglomeration of firms sharing one or more common denominators) in the 1980s to describe the past was lagging behind the times. It was necessary to shake off the shackles of the past, re-evaluate the history of the “Greater East Asia War” and the Tokyo Trial, especially from the perspective of the world history. See Liu Jianguyong and Wang Xinsheng, *Sino-Japanese Relations and Japanese Political Ideological Trend Since 1945*, People’s Publishing House, 2013, p.157; Yasuhiro Nakasone, *The New Conservative Theory*, translated by Jin Sucheng and Zhang Heping, World Affairs Press, 1984, p.93.

order as a member of the international community, all of which greatly raised Japan's profile."<sup>7</sup> Abe's conservative views are more radical than Nakasone's. He is keener to amend the constitution, more eager to get rid of the "post-war system" and become a "political power," and spares no effort to apply the LDP's conservative governance principles into Japan's diplomatic practices.

## **Attempts of "Total Settlement of Japan's Post-War Diplomacy"**

As Abe believes that "historical issues" with the US and the ROK have been resolved, he has prioritized the normalization of diplomatic relations with the DPRK, the negotiations on the territorial issue with Russia, and the adjustment of Japan's China policy as breakthroughs to settle Japan's post-war diplomacy.

### **Pursuing normalization of diplomatic relations with the DPRK**

To normalize diplomatic relations with the DPRK is a major difficulty for Abe's "total settlement of post-war diplomacy," the key of which is to tackle the historical problems between the two countries. With easing tensions on the Korean Peninsula in 2018, Abe once said that he wouldn't "miss any single opportunity" and would meet face-to-face with Kim Jong Un, leader of the DPRK. He would "break the barriers of mutual distrust, resolve the abductions, nuclear and missile issues, settle the unfortunate past and normalize relations with the DPRK."<sup>8</sup> Abe saw the opportunity for Japan to ease relations with the DPRK as the US policy toward the country witnessed changes, and therefore he has strived to resolve the abductions issue while achieving denuclearization of

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7 "The Prime Minister's Comments on the Passing Away of Former Prime Minister Nakasone," Prime Minister's Office of Japan, November 29, 2019, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98\\_abe/discourse/20191129comment.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/discourse/20191129comment.html).

8 "Abe Affirms Broad Consensus on Constitutional Revision in Policy Speech," *Kyodo News*, October 24, 2018, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2018/10/5d5396c9813c--.html>.

the Korean Peninsula.<sup>9</sup> He put the nuclear and abductions issues, as well as the settlement of the past, as preconditions of the negotiations over normalizing diplomatic relations between Japan and the DPRK. As Abe envisioned, Japan could completely get rid of the historical burden of colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula through a bilateral “settlement of Japan’s post-war diplomacy.”

Abe knew it was hard to avoid the historical burden, so he used the abductions issue as a bargaining chip for the normalization of Japan-DPRK relations. In 2018, the Diplomatic Bluebook of Japan specifically positioned the resolution of the abductions issue as the most important priority, reiterating that the normalization of Japan’s relations with the DPRK is impossible without resolving the issue. However, the DPRK claimed that the abductions issue had been resolved, emphasizing the settlement of colonial rule as a prerequisite for negotiating normalization of bilateral relations. Abe turned to the US, asking it to pressure the DPRK into concessions on the abductions issue, but the US hoped Abe would hold the Japan-DPRK summit unconditionally, stating that this may greatly contribute to the DPRK’s abandonment of its nuclear program and resolution of the abductions issue.<sup>10</sup> Trump mentioned the abductions issue during the US-DPRK summit in 2018, fulfilling his promise to Japan. Thus, Abe also changed his original position which had put the progress on the abductions issue as a condition for the Japan-DPRK summit, to keep pace with the US policy toward the DPRK.<sup>11</sup>

During Trump’s visit to Japan in May 2019, Abe expressed his hope to hold talks with Kim Jong Un unconditionally with the United States’ assistance. Japan tentatively proposed to formulate a new Japan-DPRK

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9 The so-called “abductions issue” is Japan accusing the DPRK of “abducting” 11 Japanese citizens who disappeared since the 1970s. Japan insists that the resolution of the issue is a prerequisite for establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. The DPRK has denied Japan’s allegations and accuses Japan of deliberately using the issue as a shield against attacks related to the historical issue.

10 “High-Level US Official Supports Japan-DPRK Summit,” *Kyodo News*, May 25, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/05/78d4e9d1369f.html>.

11 “Trump Pushes Abe to Change His North Korea Policy,” *Kyodo News*, May 26, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/05/04d1e5133458--.html>.

declaration based on the Pyongyang Declaration in 2002, which would include the resolution of the abductions issue.<sup>12</sup> In order to facilitate the resolution, Abe tried to “internationalize” the issue, stressing during the G7 summit in August 2019 that Japan would pay close attention to the abductions issue, together with the US and the international community. In fact, Japan intended to interpret the issue as an international human rights violation, so as to minimize the negative impacts of its colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula in future negotiations.

When Song Il Ho, the DPRK’s ambassador for talks to normalize relations with Japan, met the Japanese delegation to the DPRK headed by Shingo Kanemaru in September 2019, he indicated that Abe’s so-called unconditional meeting with Chairman Kim Jong Un was “contradictory,” which in fact was still tied to the position on the so-called abductions issue. Song regarded the issue as resolved, and reiterated the position that put the settlement of Japanese colonial rule as precondition for the summit.<sup>13</sup> This was a heavy blow to Abe’s “total settlement of post-war diplomacy” with the DPRK. However, in the policy speech to the Diet in 2020, Abe still declared that “in working towards the resolution of the abductions issue, the most important issue, I am determined to meet Chairman Kim Jong Un myself, without attaching any conditions.”<sup>14</sup>

Besides the abductions issue, the nuclear issue is another important bargaining chip for Abe. He actively added the nuclear issue in the negotiations of Japan-DPRK relations, saying that the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula must be promoted and the DPRK should take specific actions to achieve the goal. Given that Trump and Kim Jong Un had held several talks, the Japanese government hoped to resume the denuclearization negotiation. In Japan’s view, the progress made in the

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12 “Japan Once Tested the DPRK’s Intention to Sign a New Pyongyang Declaration,” *Kyodo News*, February 17, 2020, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2020/02/a65757af26d6--.html>.

13 “DPRK Ambassador Refutes Japan’s Proposal of Unconditional Meeting with Kim as Contradictory,” *Kyodo News*, September 19, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/09/c09530fd6bd9.html>.

14 “Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 201st Session of the Diet,” Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, January 20, 2020.

denuclearization negotiations could help realize a direct dialogue between Abe and Kim. Japan even believed that if the US-DPRK summit failed, the DPRK might approach Japan as a channel to communicate with the US. Although Abe showed his flexibility and proposed to hold the Japan-DPRK summit unconditionally in June 2019, the DPRK insisted on settling the issue of the colonial rule and repeatedly criticized Japan.<sup>15</sup> In November 2019, Song Il Ho slammed Japan in a speech, expressing dissatisfaction that Japan saw the DPRK's "super-large rocket launchers" as ballistic missiles.<sup>16</sup> All these facts show that the DPRK hasn't accepted Abe's position to link the nuclear issue with the negotiations on normalizing diplomatic relations between the two countries.

### **Seeking to resolve territorial issue with Russia**

To resolve the issue of the "Northern Territories" and conclude a peace treaty with Russia is also a main purpose for Abe to settle Japan's post-war diplomacy, so as to "open a new era in the Japan-Russia relations."<sup>17</sup> In November 2018, Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to accelerate negotiations on a peace treaty on the basis of the 1956 Japan-Soviet Union Joint Declaration, which seemed to be a "breakthrough" for enhancing the bilateral relationship. Abe hoped to narrow differences with Putin and discussed feasibility of the negotiations. However, Japan still claimed sovereignty over the four northern islands and made it a prerequisite for signing a peace treaty.

Due to historical reasons and the territorial issue after World War II, Japan and Russia have different views on signing the peace treaty. Japan demands the return of the four northern islands as a prerequisite while Russia argues that the "Southern Kuril Islands," namely the four northern

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15 "Japan Looks to Formally Restart Denuclearization Negotiations," *Kyodo News*, June 30, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/06/0a171030db7c.html>.

16 "DPRK Ambassador Slams Abe in His Speech," *Kyodo News*, November 7, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/11/436d8b96dbfe.html>.

17 "Abe Launches 'Total Settlement of Post-War Diplomacy' to Open New Era in Japan-Russia and Japan-China Relations," *Kyodo News*, October 24, 2018, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2018/10/f7943d6e53b4--.html>.

islands claimed by Japan, had been incorporated into the Soviet Union's territory after World War II, and Russia has indisputable sovereignty over them.<sup>18</sup> This has caused a deadlock, resulting in repeated delays of the Japan-Russia peace treaty negotiations. In 2018, Abe showed a positive attitude and belief in advancing the negotiations and resolving the bilateral territorial issue, once saying that "it's abnormal that after 72 years of the war, there is still no peace treaty yet. We must try to break the situation."<sup>19</sup> In this regard, Putin has proposed Russia and Japan discuss signing the peace treaty without any preconditions, and the two sides set a common goal to accelerate the peace treaty negotiations based on the 1956 Joint Declaration. However, Russia demands Japan recognize the Russian sovereignty over the "Southern Kuril Islands" as a result of World War II, which it indicates as a prerequisite for negotiating a peace treaty. This has made it almost impossible for leaders of the two countries to bridge their differences while in office.<sup>20</sup>

Abe wants the Russian side to recognize Japan's sovereignty over the four northern islands, making it a starting point for changing the "post-war arrangements" and getting rid of the "post-war system." Japan emphasizes the Soviet Union's occupation of the four northern islands at the end of World War II and incorporation of the islands into the Soviet territory in 1946, but is always reluctant to mention the issue's historical background, which is Japan's launch of a militarist war of aggression and the result of being defeated.<sup>21</sup> Even if Japan and Russia agree on negotiating a peace treaty based on the 1956 Joint Declaration, the troubles caused by the territorial issue still exist. In July 2019, the Russian side made it clear that Russia and

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18 "Negotiation with Japan Needs Consideration of Soviet Demands to Withdraw US Troops in Japan," *Sputnik*, December 13, 2018, <http://sputniknews.cn/politics/201812131027102795>.

19 "Abe Shows Determination to Conclude Peace Treaty with Russia," *Kyodo News*, February 7, 2018, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2018/02/4c6b486a605b.html>.

20 "Russia's Proposal to Return Two Islands to Japan Falls Through," *Kyodo News*, July 2, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/07/1d39bc583b2a--.html>.

21 "What Is the Northern Territories Issue?" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/hoppo/hoppo.html>.

Japan were negotiating on a peace treaty, not the transfer of islands.<sup>22</sup> In a statement issued in February 2020, Putin supported domestic proposals to prohibit the transfer of Russian territory in constitutional amendment.<sup>23</sup> The territorial issue presents not only a huge obstacle to the negotiation of a peace treaty, but also the different historical views of the two countries regarding the “post-war arrangements.”

The sovereignty claim over the four northern islands is the focus of Abe’s “total settlement of post-war diplomacy” with Russia. Regarding the “Northern Territories” issue originated from World War II, Abe believes that the improvement of Japan-Russia relations is in favor of Japan’s territorial demands and is of special significance for Japan to get rid of the “post-war system.” To this end, Abe planned to humble himself and attend the military parade marking the 75th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War at Moscow’s Red Square on May 8, 2020, in order to win Putin’s agreement to negotiate on the “Northern Territories” issue. Abe even planned to start talks on the “two-island solution,” in which Russia would transfer just two of the four islands to Japan.<sup>24</sup> The strategy Abe described is to hold multiple rounds of direct talks with the powerful Putin and prompted him to make the vital decision. By attending a major celebration showing Russia’s national prestige, Abe intended to deepen the trust between Putin and himself.<sup>25</sup> However, when learning the parade might be rescheduled to the Victory Day of World War II on September 3, 2020, Abe believed that it was hinting at Japan’s signing of the Instrument of Surrender on September 2, 1945. He thus declared that he wouldn’t attend the ceremony.<sup>26</sup> As it shows, both the active promotion of improving Japan-Russia relations and negotiations

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22 “Russia and Japan Are Discussing the Peace Treaty, Not the Transfer of Islands,” *Sputnik*, July 18, 2019, <http://sputniknews.cn/politics/201907181029036896/>.

23 “Putin Supports Proposals to Prohibit Transfer of Russian Territory in Constitutional Amendment,” *Sputnik*, February 13, 2020, <http://sputniknews.cn/politics/202002131030650374/>.

24 “Abe Vows to Promote Negotiations with Russia,” *Kyodo News*, February 7, 2020, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2020/02/e31a122d9c35.html>.

25 “Abe Plans to Visit Russia and Attend the 75th Anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War in May,” *Kyodo News*, February 7, 2020, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2020/02/167890a23fca-5.html>.

26 “Abe Will Not Attend Red Square Parade if It Rescheduled to September 3,” *Sputnik*, April 28, 2020, <http://sputniknews.cn/75-victory-news/202004281031299669>.

over the “Northern Territories” issue are Japan’s ways to settle its post-war diplomacy. Nevertheless, it’s still hard to meet the established purpose of changing Japan’s image as a defeated country.

### **Adjusting the China policy to improve China-Japan relations**

Under the general framework of a “total settlement of post-war diplomacy,” the Abe administration proposes a new China policy to transform competition into coordination and ease bilateral relations. This new China policy is not only to adapt to the new situation at home and abroad, but also to re-position China-Japan relations as “future-oriented.”

First, Abe facilitated the resumption of high-level exchanges between the two countries as an initial step to build mutual trust. Taking the 40th anniversary of the China-Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship as an opportunity, Japan, as host of the 2018 China-Japan-ROK summit, invited Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to visit Japan. This is a crucial step to build bilateral trust and safeguard the common interests of Northeast Asia. When he visited China in October of the same year, Abe said that “together with China, Japan is willing to intensify high-level exchanges and exchanges at all levels to lay the social foundation for improving bilateral ties, manage differences properly, promote development of mutually beneficial strategic relations, and make joint efforts to maintain regional stability and prosperity.”<sup>27</sup> During the G20 Osaka summit in June 2019, the leaders of China and Japan held talks and agreed that joint efforts were needed to build bilateral relations that fit the needs of the new era.

Second, Abe has focused on economic and trade cooperation with China. During his visit to China in October 2018, China and Japan reached a consensus on cooperation in investing in third-country infrastructure development, and agreed to resume a currency swap agreement and establish an innovative mechanism for cooperation in the areas of innovation and intellectual property rights. At the 8th China-

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27 “Xi Jinping Meets with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, October 26, 2018, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/gjldrhd\\_674881/t1607459.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/gjldrhd_674881/t1607459.shtml).

Japan-ROK trilateral summit in December 2019, Abe expressed his willingness to work with China and other relevant countries to promote the early signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement and accelerate the China-Japan-ROK Free Trade Agreement negotiations.

Last but not least, the Abe government has strengthened public health cooperation with China. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the central and local governments of Japan, as well as the Japanese people, clearly expressed their understanding and support for China's fight against COVID-19 and quickly sent many facial masks, protective suits and other medical supplies to China, showing friendship and good neighborliness between the two countries, which could be summed up by an ancient verse that reads, "though we live in different lands, the same moon and sky make us one."<sup>28</sup> Toshihiro Nikai and Tetsuo Saito, Secretary-Generals of the ruling LDP and its coalition partner Komeito, made a special trip to the Chinese Embassy in Japan, expressing their willingness to provide all possible assistance to China to combat the epidemic. They also mentioned the necessity of strengthening cooperation on epidemic prevention and control between China and Japan, and collected 120,000 sets of protective suits to send to Hubei Province and other places in China. In his meeting with Yang Jiechi, Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission in February 2020, Abe said that "as China and Japan are both having a difficult time in dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic, there are more reasons for the two countries to join forces to overcome the difficulties." He further added, "Japan is ready to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with the Chinese side in information sharing and epidemic prevention and control, so as to send a positive signal to the international community of jointly tackling the challenges to global public health security."<sup>29</sup> After initial containment of the

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28 "Japan Sends Chartered Plane to Take Citizens Back Home from Wuhan and Provides Protective Suits to Support China," *Kyodo News*, January 28, 2020, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2020/01/7fa2850cc447-2-.html>.

29 "Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Meets with Yang Jiechi," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Japan, March 2, 2020, <http://www.china-embassy.or.jp/chn/zrdt/t1751128.htm>.

epidemic domestically, China also did its best to provide assistance to Japan. In the face of the epidemic, the two countries have shown the world a gesture of mutual assistance amid difficulties.

However, the conflicts of security and political interests and value differences between the two countries still exist, which may harm the healthy development of China-Japan relations at any time. The duality of Japan's policy toward China can be seen through its recent attitudes towards affairs related to Hong Kong and the action of renaming the administrative area of the Diaoyu Islands. This leads to a combination of both old and new conflicts between the two countries, which will severely affect the sustainability of political mutual trust.

### **Dilemma of the “Total Settlement of Japan’s Post-War Diplomacy”**

The “total settlement of Japan’s post-war diplomacy” is a foreign policy based on historical revisionism. As a challenge to the post-war international order, it is bound to encounter many constraints in its implementation.

First, the public opinion in Japan questions Abe’s motives and purposes for proposing a “settlement of post-war diplomacy.” Although Abe has repeatedly expressed his determination to advance the policy, he lacks concrete measures to address the remaining Cold War structure in Northeast Asia. Opposition parties and public opinion in Japan have questioned whether the settlement only touches the surface and serves as Abe’s signature line to win the LDP’s presidential election. Japan’s political circle is also unsatisfied with the implementation of the settlement, considering it as vigorous but hard to implement. Some media commentaries in Japan point out that the “total settlement of post-war diplomacy” looks vague because the Abe government fails to take concrete steps to comprehensively resolve the related issues, despite claiming the willingness to hold meetings with Kim Jong Un.<sup>30</sup>

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30 “Abe’s Policy Speech Lack Concrete Measures for Implementation,” *Kyodo News*, October 24, 2018, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2018/10/c37e9aa49b2f.html>.

Second, it's difficult to resolve the contradiction between negotiations of the Japan-Russia peace treaty and settlement of the territorial issue. In Abe's view, the only way to change Japan's image as a defeated country of World War II is to hold negotiations with Russia to determine the sovereignty of the "Northern Territories," and sign a peace treaty on the basis of resolving the territorial issue. However, the Russian side doesn't go along as Japan would wish. It not only reiterates that it does not intend to make concessions on the territorial issue,<sup>31</sup> but also reveals the fact that the US military has rights to set up military installations anywhere in Japan under the Japan-US Security Treaty, which is a major obstacle to conclude a Japan-Russia peace treaty.<sup>32</sup>

In January 2020, after participating in a new round of strategic dialogue in Japan, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov indicated that Russia and Japan could not reach an agreement on the deployment of the US land-based Aegis missile defense system on Japan's soil.<sup>33</sup> It shows that the contradiction between peace treaty negotiations and the settlement of the territorial issue has been increasingly obvious, though the leaders of Japan and Russia agreed to negotiate a peace treaty based on the 1956 Joint Declaration. This is determined by the text of the Declaration, which emphasized the territorial issue as an unavoidable prerequisite to conclude a peace treaty. Abe tried to change the order stipulated in the 1956 Declaration that put the conclusion of a peace treaty before the handing over of Habomai and Shikotan Islands to Japan, and called for the Japanese sovereignty over the four northern islands as one option to be included in future negotiations. This is clearly far from Russia's position of separating peace treaty negotiations from the territorial issue.

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31 "Putin Indicates No Intention to Transfer Northern Territories to Japan," *Kyodo News*, June 22, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/06/f2292cd1d3fe.html>.

32 "Russia's Presidential Spokesman: Transfer of Islands to Japan Impossible Now," *Kyodo News*, September 25, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/09/3c4f583fdc56.html>.

33 "Russia and Japan Fails to Reach Agreement on US Deployment of Land-Based Aegis Missile Defense System on Japan Soil," *Sputnik*, January 10, 2020, <http://sputniknews.cn/military/202001101030427410>.

During the G20 Osaka summit in June 2019, Abe and Putin's effort to reach a framework agreement on the peace treaty and territorial issue also failed, partly due to Russia's tough attitude. The two sides even had disagreements on joint economic activities on the four northern islands that could help promote bilateral negotiations.<sup>34</sup> Even high-ranking Japanese officials who participated in negotiations with Russia admitted that "it is difficult to break the deadlock" in the territorial negotiations, demonstrating a bleak outlook for Abe's "total settlement of post-war diplomacy" with Russia.<sup>35</sup> Affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Japan-Russia Year of Regional Exchanges from 2020 to 2021 in Hokkaido is very likely to be postponed, while the future of other relevant negotiations remains unclear.

Third, the "total settlement of post-war diplomacy" with the DPRK is by no means smooth. On the bilateral issue, Abe intends to resolve the abductions and nuclear issues in accordance with the 2002 Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, and is eager to negotiate over establishing diplomatic relations with the DPRK. The DPRK, on the other side, requests Japan to thoroughly settle the history of colonial rule and give apology and compensations to the DPRK. To address this, Japan emphasizes the resolution of the nuclear and abductions issues as preconditions to restart negotiations on the normalization of the bilateral relations. Well aware of Abe's wishful thinking, the DPRK has repeatedly stated that the historical issue is a major issue that cannot be avoided in negotiating diplomatic relations between the two countries. It may even raise the issue of "forced mobilization" during Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula in future negotiations.<sup>36</sup> The Japan-DPRK relations are unlikely to develop in the way

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34 "Leaders of Japan and Russia Reach Consensus on Joint Economic Activities in Autumn at the Earliest," *Kyodo News*, June 29, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/06/5abafadb4974.html>.

35 "Former Director of Japan's National Security Council: Russia Rejects Inclusion of Territorial Issue in Peace Treaty Negotiations," *Kyodo News*, January 25, 2020, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2020/01/39749b7361fc.html>.

36 "Forced mobilization" means the Japanese government's issuance of the national conscription order in 1939 in accordance with the National Mobilization Law to mobilize the Koreans under its colonial rule. See "DPRK Foreign Minister Indicates Raising 'Forced Mobilization' Issue," *Kyodo News*, January 12, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/01/7ad807dfc7f7.html>.

Abe wishes. The DPRK even claimed that “ties between the two countries have been going from bad to worse rather than becoming normal.”<sup>37</sup> Within the Japanese government, there are views that the DPRK attaches more importance to direct negotiations with the US and doesn't prioritize improving relations with Japan.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the “total settlement of post-war diplomacy” with China doesn't contribute to the improvement of bilateral relations, but in contrast, adds hidden danger to the healthy development of the relationship. Chinese leaders have repeatedly stated that the four political documents and the four-point principled agreement between China and Japan are the foundations for maintaining a healthy development of the bilateral relations. Although the Abe administration proposed a new China policy switching from competition to coordination, the four political documents between China and Japan is still the ballast stone of the bilateral relations. It can be predicted that Abe's coordination with China wouldn't be limited to economic relations and regional economic cooperation. In the future, it may expand to many issues, old and new, in China-Japan relations. Therefore, it's of great importance to develop bilateral relations in the spirit of “taking history as a mirror and facing forward to the future.”

In addition, the ROK's unexpected accusation of the forced labor issue against Japan also disrupts Abe's strategic planning of a “total settlement of post-war diplomacy.” Even though Abe surprisingly recognized the state responsibility of the “comfort women” issue to the ROK, Japan still faces the pressure of being held accountable for the forced labor issue.<sup>39</sup> In 2019, the historical issue between Japan and the ROK spread to other areas including economics and trade, security and

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37 “DPRK Ambassador: Relations with Japan Going from Bad to Worse,” *Kyodo News*, September 18, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/09/9d65ae7859b6.html>.

38 “A Japan-DPRK Summit Hardly Foreseeable,” *Kyodo News*, October 25, 2019, <https://china.kyodonews.net/news/2019/09/efb7868d8e67.html>.

39 Liu Jianping, “The Basic Concept, Origin of Issues and Interstate Norms Relating to Japan's Territorial Issues in the Postwar Era,” *Japanese Studies*, No.6, 2017, p.77.

politics, severely affecting the normal development of their bilateral relations.

## Conclusion

In terms of foreign relations, Abe's "total settlement of Japan's post-war diplomacy" inherits the historical revisionism of Nakasone's concept of "settlement of post-war politics." It has become part of the government's basic policy, under the name of "proactive pacifism" to change the Cold War structure remaining in Northeast Asia and build the foundations of regional peace and prosperity in the new era. However, the real goal of Abe is to change the "post-war arrangements," or even the results of World War II, which clearly shows the characteristics of historical revisionism. With the historical revisionism, Abe attempts to achieve major adjustments of Japan's relations with the DPRK, Russia and China, thereby creating an international atmosphere that these neighboring countries recognize Japan's amendment of the Peace Constitution and extrication from the post-war system. All moves mentioned above even have the unspoken intention of fundamentally blurring the anti-fascist nature of World War II. Nevertheless, facts show that Japan hasn't been able to reach a true historical reconciliation with neighboring countries. On the contrary, the Abe administration's efforts to get rid of historical issues with "total settlement of post-war diplomacy" have been questioned and criticized by relevant countries. Setbacks are inevitable, as the "total settlement of post-war diplomacy" is based only on Japan's national interests and its revisionist view of history. The intensification of territorial and historical disputes between Japan and its neighboring countries reveals that the only rational choice to promote peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia in the new era is to pursue historical justice. 