

Can a Park Statue Destabilize Northeast Asia's Inter-State Relations?

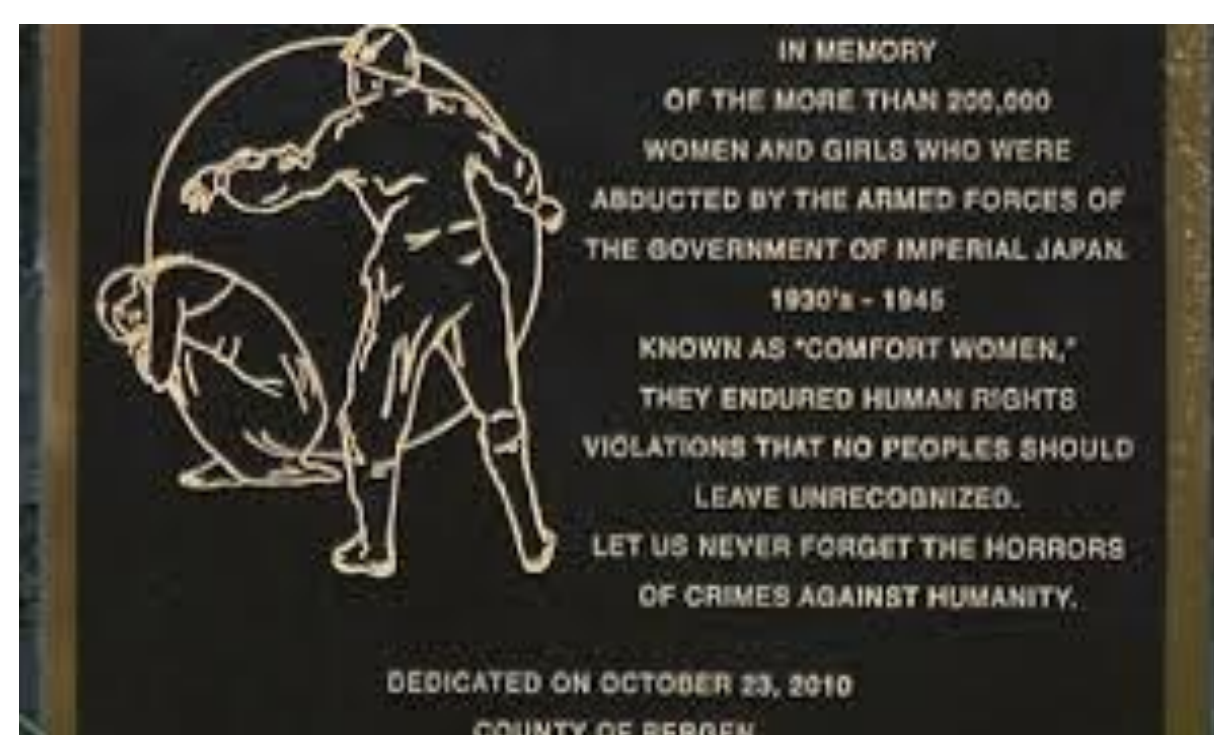
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Abstract



할머니들이 평화비와 함께 포즈를 취하고 있다. (송은석 인턴기자)

In 1991, after fifty years of silence, the forced sexual enslavement of Korean women and girls at the hands of Japan's Imperial Army during World War II emerged as an embarrassing blight upon Japan's otherwise enviable profile as a political and economic miracle. The case against Japan's alleged trafficking of women meandered through the courts of Japan and the United States. It also became an issue for United Nations Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay in August 2014. However, no satisfactory solution has been found. Beginning in 2005 efforts began in the United States to raise public awareness of the conditions that Korean women were subjected to at the hands of Japan. Strong resistance emerged in certain Japanese-American communities to the Korean and Korean-American accounting of events but especially from Japanese government officials who have visited the United States. Japan does not dispute that Korean women and girls served as Comfort Women; however, it disputes the methods of recruitment and the numbers of women indicated in the Korean narrative. We thus find two competing narratives, that of Japan and that of Korea, being disputed in the United States. In most places the Korean narrative has prevailed but in places such as Buena Vista, California and Queens, New York, it has not. This text argues that the "Comfort Women" controversy may undermine Korea-Japan-US relations in Northeast Asia. The President of Korea made it clear in December 2014 that relations with Japan will not improve without addressing this. This article speaks of ways to do indicating the need for an objective review of both narratives and, most likely, the articulation of an American narrative.



Text of Memorial in Palisades Park, NJ
Memorials in the US

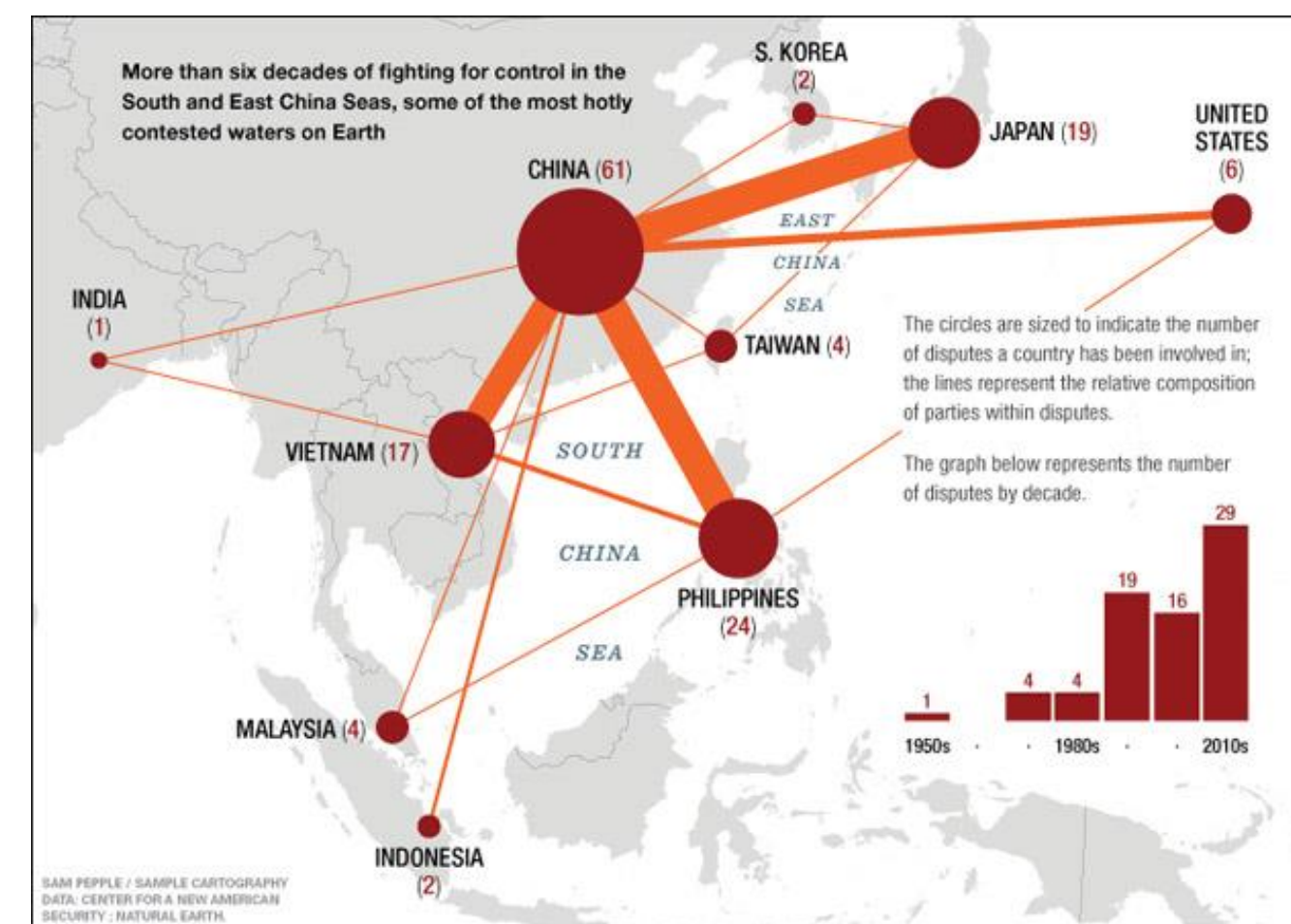
In 2010 two years prior to the dedication of the Comfort Women statue in Seoul, a memorial (see above) to the Comfort Women had been set up in suburban Palisades Park, New Jersey, a city with a population of approximately 20,000, more of half of whom are of Korean heritage. In 2013 a replica of the Seoul statue was dedicated in Glendale, California. The Japanese have reacted vocally and decisively in opposition to these actions with the intervention of representatives both the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japanese Diet (Japan's Bicameral Parliament). There are now numerous venues in the United States with memorials to the Comfort Women of Japan:

1. Glendale, California
2. Fairfax, VA
3. Palisades Park, NJ
4. Hackensack, NJ
5. Fort Lee, NJ
6. Union City, NJ
7. Eisenhower Park, Long Island; NY
8. Veterans Memorial Park
Long Island, NY
9. Queensborough Comm. College
10. Southfield, Michigan

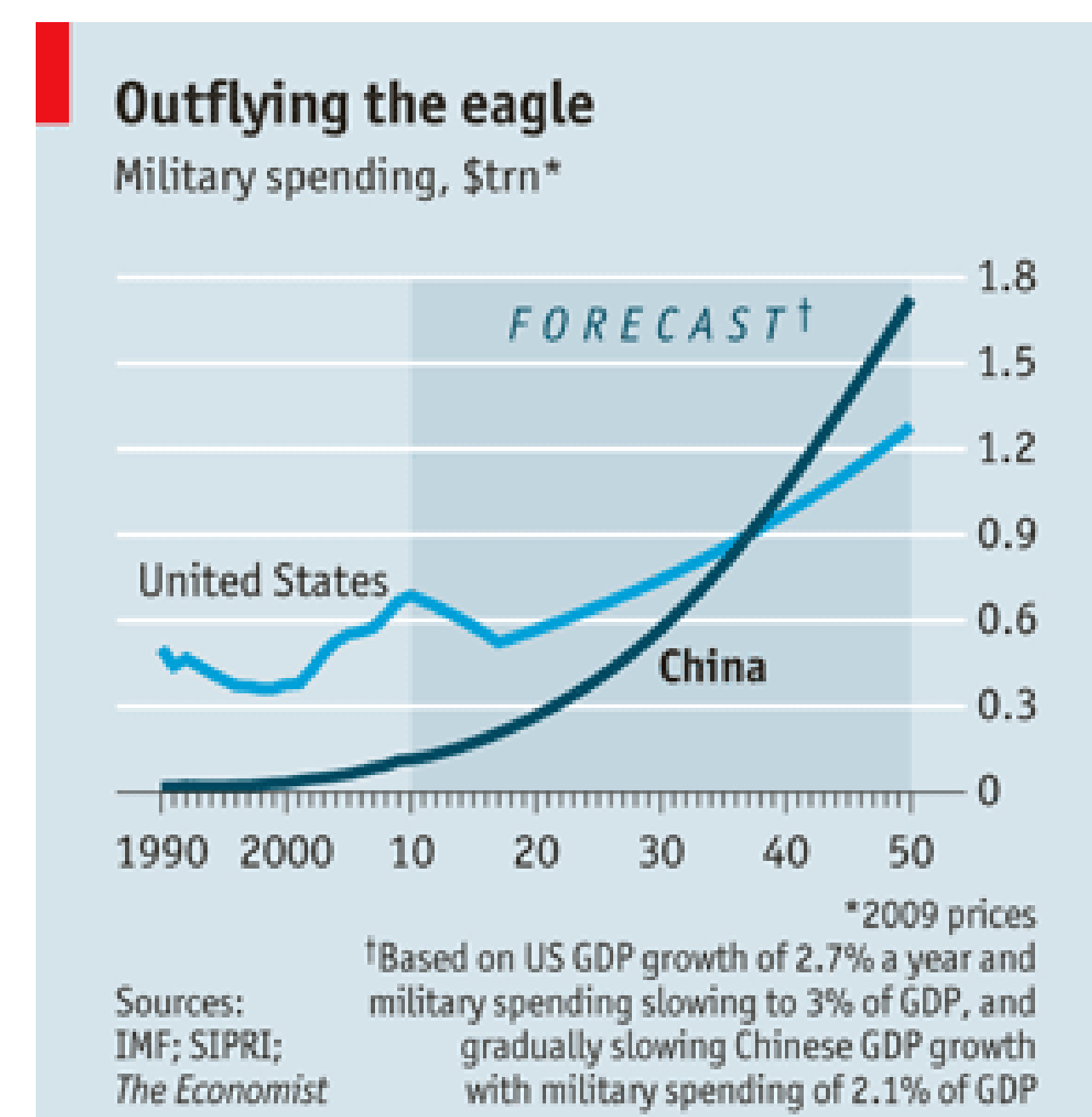
Major Conclusions

1. This is a major controversy that has already led to a virtual breakdown in Japan-Korea relations.
2. If the United States merely backs one of these narratives or the other without a critical review of this history, it will lead to a breakdown in US-Korea or US-Japan relations.
3. At a time when China speaks of a "peaceful rise," there is the need for the major regional democracies, Korea and Japan to support that rise rather than be engaged in internecine struggles.
4. There is the need for an American narrative of these events. The US has long been a player in this region.

A Region Rife with Territorial Disputes



As China's Military Budget rises over the next two decades, will China's future be rule of law or rule out of the barrel of a gun?



Sources

- *Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library; Hyde Park, New York: The Presidential archives of all original communications of Sumner Wells, Undersecretary of State and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's personal representative in all talks with Japan from March 1, 1939 through December 6, 1941.
- *Onsite visits and inspections by Ward and Lay of Comfort Women Memorials in Palisades Park, Union City and Hackensack, New Jersey.
- *Local and International newspaper reports from cities where Comfort memorials have been established.
- *A review of hundreds newspapers articles, journal articles and books specifically addressing the Comfort women Issue.
- *Legal decisions in the Japanese and the United States Court systems.