



## **History and nationalism: China's real weapons against the US**

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While others devote their attention to the advanced military hardware of the People's Liberation Army such as the J-20 stealth fighter, the aircraft carrier Liaoning and the Wu-14 hypersonic glide vehicle, Ted Galen Carpenter, a researcher for defense and foreign policy studies at the Washington-based Cato Institute, says China's ultimate weapons against the United States's Asia Pivot strategy are history and nationalism.

Writing in an article published in National Interest magazine on July 16, Carpenter said the visit to Seoul by China's president, Xi Jinping, between July 3-4 not only sent a warning to North Korea to stop ignoring Beijing's objections to its missile and nuclear tests but also signified an intent to draw South Korea to its side from that of the United States and Japan. South Korea has been considered an important ally of the United States against the Communist bloc in East Asia including China and North Korea since the Cold War.

However, sentiment is changing after the US government expressed its support for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's push to allow Japan to reinterpret the country's postwar peace constitution to allow the exercise of collective defense. Like China, Korea was a victim of Japan's territorial expansion from the late 19th century until the end of World War II. Korea became a colony of the Japanese Empire in 1910 and with the help of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang government, activists of the Korean Independence Movement worked together with China to oppose Japanese occupation during World War II.

"Xi missed no opportunity to remind South Korean officials and the public about Japan's war crimes during the 1930s and 1940s," Carpenterwrote. "He also shrewdly framed that indictment to focus on Tokyo's brutal treatment of both the Korean and Chinese people, implicitly linking the fates of the two victims." History is therefore a good bargaining chip for China to drive a wedge between the US and its two most important allies in East Asia.

President Park Geun-hye of South Korea is a strong nationalist. Her father, former president Park Chung-hee, was a strong anti-Communist and a young officer trained by the Imperial Japanese Army in the puppet state of Manchukuo in northeastern China. She has often expressed her resentment of the attitude of the Japanese government to downplay or deny that Korean women were forced into sexual slavery at Japanese military brothels. The "comfort women" issue is likewise a raw wound for China, and an area where the two countries find common ground.

Believing that Japan cannot be trusted to play a larger military role in East Asia as the United States desires, South Korea is likely to set ideological differences aside and stand with China on historical revisionism on Japan's part. One thing Carpenter did not mention in his article is that anti-Japanese sentiment is strong among Allied war veterans from Australia and the United States, two nations that support Japan's right of collective self-defense.

From the perspective of the Chinese government, the United States is destroying the order in East Asia established by the Allies at the end of World War II.

Nationalism also serves as a tool for Xi and his fellow leaders to defend the Communist Party government against challenges from the United States and its allies.

Carpenter likewise omitted to mention that history and nationalism can also serve as means for China to attempt to establish closer relationship with Taiwan, though here a more nuanced sentiment emerges. Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing Empire after its defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Japan's 50-year tenure of Taiwan was far less brutal than the wartime pillaging of mainland Asia. This is reflected in a generally positive view of Japan in Taiwan, while in mainland China anti-Japanese sentiment is a linchpin of Chinese nationalism. So while there were — and are — victims of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan, including a small group of surviving former comfort women, forming a united front with Taiwan on the basis of opposing a stronger Japan would be trickier for Beijing to achieve.