The Japanese-South Korean conflict that we recently discussed is developing, involving other countries and turning into one of the important factors impacting the overall picture of the political situation in Northeast Asia.

Let us reiterate that the Japanese-South Korean relations had always been, to put it mildly, of a somewhat reserved nature. And, the deep historical (that is, comprising several centuries of their shared history) reasons of mutual vigilance are probably something both the Japanese and the Koreans will hardly be able to formulate clearly. In this case, we are probably dealing with processes (concealed and difficult to outline) in the mental and historical unconscious of the bilateral relations system.

However, the fact that, over the last ten years, these relations have continued sliding to the negative (now including not only the political, but also the economic component) is mainly, if not solely, caused by the current political fuss factors.

And here, it is primarily necessary to point out the situation in the Republic of Korea where certain forces are trying to gain political advantage from bringing up the expenses of the history of the Japanese-Korean relations. That is, not its whole history, but only the time span before and during World War II.
Let us note, apropos, that the subject of these ‘expenses’ was formally closed already in 1965, when the diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea were established. However, 10 years ago, someone in South Korea adopted a viewpoint that the comfort women issue (so we will designate it now using the term employed by experts on Korea) still had some political flesh suitable for use today.

One cannot help being surprised by the patience of Tokyo that appeased such moods at the end of 2015 and concluded the well-known Agreement with Seoul. And it had some very sad consequences for Madam Park Geun-hye, the then president of South Korea.

But this patience was over this year, when, first, Seoul ended the Japanese-funded Foundation for providing help for the living comfort women and demanded another apology to them. Moreover, the Emperor of Japan had to perform the apology in person. Besides, South Korea began selling the assets of the Japanese company Nippon Steel accused of compulsory recruitment of Koreans during World War II following a court decision.

Japan decided that this was enough and struck back (as it turned out, the blow was unexpected and extremely painful) in the form of strengthening the control of export to South Korea of materials which have key value in the course of manufacturing end products by a number of the leading South Korean IT companies, first of all, Samsung Group and LG Group.

Seoul understood (probably, too late) that it had gone too far and tried to make an arrangement. But the ministerial level negotiations which took place in Tokyo on July 12 appear to have had no positive result.

The Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, who had spoken two days earlier, once again pointed out the invariance of the new regulations for export control in the trade with South Korea. A week later (that is, after the aforementioned negotiations) a similar statement was made by the minister of the industry Hiroshige Seko.

It is very likely that Japanese action against South Korea will not be limited to economy and may involve information war instruments as well. This is the way the author of this article is inclined to regard the statements made by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and certain members of his office about Seoul’s violating the sanctions regime concerning Pyongyang. Besides, South Korea is accused of instances of exporting strategic materials (which can be used in developing different types of weapons of mass destruction) to some countries of Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

Having failed to resolve the issue in the relations with Japan by negotiations, Seoul declared its intention to bring it up at the regular meeting of the WTO General Council in Geneva which is planned for July 23-24.

The aggravation of the situation in the relations between the closest Asian allies of the US cannot fail to disturb Washington. During the briefing of the new US Department of State spokesperson Morgan Ortagus, it was stated that all possible (public and secret) effort would be made to find ways of strengthening the relations between the three countries, that is, the US, Japan and South Korea.

Let us add that Washington has been working on it for 20 years. The results are described above.

Let us also note that Beijing is also watching the events in the Japanese-South Korean relations closely. However, it is more likely doing that for economic, than political, reasons. The communications between the IT companies of Japan and South Korea are essentially part of the cooperation networks also used by the leading Chinese companies of the industry. Therefore, violating the specified communications is fraught with serious expenses for the IT companies of the People’s Republic of China as well.

Finally, it would appear as appropriate to touch upon the existence (which is obvious for the author of this article) of certain external, along with internal, motives behind keeping up the comfort women issue in South Korea. The point is that keeping this topic hot fits in the activity of one of the most important branches of the world human rights movement aimed at gender equality, the format and borders of which are unclear (which may be intentional). Other branches of this sort are trying to ensure the protection of the rights of juveniles, various minorities and animals.

The South Korean leadership following the aforementioned human rights trend in the century-old problem has led to drastic costs for the country.

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