

## Online Series

2022. 04. 14. | CO 22-10

## Evaluation of the Ukraine Crisis and Prospects on Changes in International Order

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After the Cold War, NATO moved very quickly to incorporate the eastern side of Europe, and Ukraine has been aiming to join NATO despite political chaos. It has caused security instability in Russia. As a result, President Putin has invaded Ukraine by leveraging Russian people's sense of loss but is currently experiencing strategic limitations. The international order changes are expected amid concerns over the prolonged Ukraine crisis: the reorganization of the World War II and post-Cold War order, Russia's isolation, arms build-up in countries, global tendency of conservative and right-leaning, the confrontation between democracy and authoritarian camps, intensifying U.S.-China strategic rivalry, and fluctuating NPT system. Such changes can also have a direct or indirect impact on the Korean Peninsula.

The Ukraine crisis, which began with the Russian invasion on February 24, 2021, can be attributed to a combination of causes. After the dissolution of the Soviet and Eastern European systems, NATO's rapid movement eastward stimulated Russia's security instability. After independence, Ukraine suffered political turmoil at a time when pro-Western and pro-Russian forces were mixed. This time, Russia's full-blown invasion tends to be prolonged contrary to expectations and faces strong

resistance from Ukraine. In the future, the Ukraine crisis is expected to affect the international order and the Korean Peninsula in multifaceted ways.

### **NATO's Move to Eastern Europe**

After 1990, the Soviet and Eastern European systems collapsed, and all 15 republics that made up the Soviet Union were converted into independent states. The Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), a collective security system in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, also took steps to dismantlement. On the other hand, the European Union (E.U.) and NATO had ventured out into expansion by embracing Eastern European countries.

The regime change in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact meant that the Soviet military shield disappeared. The Soviet Union was concerned about this, and at the time of German reunification, Germany and the United States promised not to expand NATO. On February 18, 2022, the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* reported a document supporting Russia's claim that the West violated its promise not to move NATO east after the fall of the Berlin Wall. During the March 6, 1991 negotiations in Bonn, Germany and the United States made it clear that they would not move NATO eastward, saying, "We will not expand beyond the Elbe" and "We will not make a use of the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Eastern Europe." However, the U.S. soon changed its policy, and Gorbachev, the secretary-general of the Soviet Union, whose domestic political base had become weak, was unable to prevent NATO from advancing to East Germany. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's national power declined rapidly, and Yeltsin, the first Russian president, implemented a pro-Western policy to solve economic problems, which, in turn, had made Russia unable to deter NATO from moving eastward. Putin also faced the same situation at the beginning of his administration.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO's movement toward Eastern Europe was relentless. East Germany was naturally incorporated into NATO due to the unification of Germany. In addition, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary

joined NATO in 1999, along with Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria, as well as former member states of the Soviet Union—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, in 2004. Since then, Albania and Croatia in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, and North Macedonia in 2020 have joined NATO. Except for Ukraine, which hopes to join NATO, only Belarus and Moldova are among the countries in the former Soviet Union that did not join NATO in Europe. In fact, if Ukraine joins NATO, Russia will be in a position of security isolation in Europe with NATO surrounding Russia. This is the flip side of the Ukraine crisis.

### Hardships of Ukraine

Ukraine has 43 million people, and its land is three times the size of the Korean Peninsula, with fertile black land and abundant underground resources called European breadbaskets. Ukraine has many industrial facilities rooted in the former Soviet Union. However, Ukraine's economic power in 2021 was 55<sup>th</sup> globally, and it was not until 2015 that it charted as one of the top 100 countries in the corporate environment index, ranked at 96<sup>th</sup> in the world. According to the 2020 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (T.I), Ukraine ranks 117<sup>th</sup> and is one of the poorest countries in Europe. After independence, political turmoil in Ukraine continued, and it was challenging to unify the people divided into pro-Russian and pro-Western lines.

The first Kravchuk regime was short-lived because it failed to deal with the chaos of the transition period, and the successor Kuchma achieved some financial results throughout his consecutive second term but lost public support due to tyrannical rule. Pro-Russian Yanukovich, nominated by President Kuchma as his successor, won the presidential election in 2004, but the Orange Revolution, which opposed the rigged elections, created the pro-Western Yushchenko regime. However, the Yushchenko regime fell short of the people's expectations, and the leaders of the Orange Revolution, Yushchenko and Prime Minister Tymoshenko made scenes of division and conflict in the face of the economic crisis. Accordingly, Yanukovich

was elected the fourth president in 2010, abolishing pro-Western policies such as joining the E.U. and implementing explicit pro-Russian policies. However, Yanukovich was soon impeached by a civil resistance movement called Euromaidan which opposed Yanukovich's policies and he defected to Russia. Under this pretext, Russia forcibly annexed Crimea, and pro-Russian residents started a civil war in Donbas, Yanukovich's political hometown. President Poroshenko, a former pro-Western entrepreneur, took power in 2014 backed by the spread of anti-Russian sentiment but was embroiled in various corruption allegations, representing the interests of emerging conglomerate Oligarch. Poroshenko was defeated by current President Zelensky in the 2019 presidential election and fled to Poland on charges of treason for helping to finance eastern separatists while in office.

Against this backdrop of political turmoil, Zelensky, a former actor who scathingly satirizes established politics, was elected president with more than 73 percent of the vote in the runoff, but his report card in power was not very successful. President Zelensky appointed writers, producers, and filmmakers, his acquaintances, and friends to critical posts, including presidential chief of staff and intelligence chief, and failed to fulfill his pledges such as eradicating corruption and ending the civil war. Even in the face of imminent Russian invasion, President Zelensky vowed to join NATO and responded complacently to the possibility of war. Just before the war, Zelensky's approval rating for re-election was only 23 percent.

Some say that the U.S. and NATO should have been more cautious about Ukraine joining NATO through a close calculation of strategic methods they can devise by taking into account the hostile relationship between Russia and Ukraine and the presence of pro-Russian forces in Ukraine. If Ukraine joins NATO, Russia's very heart and Moscow will face a security threat from NATO. This is why it is difficult for Russia to neglect it. As such factors still exist, NATO did not immediately comply with Ukraine's demand for membership.

Some say that the Ukrainian leadership's judgment of the situation immediately after independence had been complacent. At that time, Ukraine was involved in complicated matters with Russia. The conflict was dormant because Crimea was

incorporated into Ukraine from Russia during the Soviet Union era, and the eastern part of Ukraine had a solid pro-Russian tendency. Despite these problems, Ukraine signed a memorandum of understanding in Budapest in 1994 (Budapest Memorandum) under pressure from the United States and Russia to recognize its sovereignty and receive economic aid instead of giving up its nuclear weapons. However, over time, the problem between Ukraine and Russia gradually came to surface, and Russia effectively controlled eastern Ukraine by forcibly merging Crimea and supporting rebels. In the end, Russia invaded Ukraine, but NATO and the U.S., which promised to guarantee the sovereignty of Ukraine, were reluctant to intervene directly. If the Ukrainian leadership had considered having more solid security measures, such as signing a non-aggression treaty rather than a non-legally binding memorandum of understanding in Budapest, today's results would have been different.

President Zelensky has shown his ability as commander-in-chief in the face of Russia's invasion, and the Ukrainian people continue to resist heroically. It is a rediscovery of Ukraine. However, the best option for Ukraine's leadership should have been to prevent the war in advance through a cool-headed analysis of the situation and strategic judgment. Therefore, Ukraine's leadership can not be free from the assessment that it has not succeeded in securing diplomatic and security stability of the country in its complex geopolitical position for more than 30 years since independence.

### Limitations of Russia

The Russians took pride in being a communist suzerain as well as a central pillar of the Cold War between the two strong powers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union. However, due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the population and territory were dispersed, and the economic power fell to 11<sup>th</sup> as of 2021. The pride of the Russians during the Soviet Union collapsed, and the system's transition had created economic difficulties for a long time. It is Russia's sense of loss. President Putin constantly calls for a great Russia to use people's sense of loss as his political asset.

Russia's sense of loss is why President Putin has been highly supported despite his prolonged dictatorship. At the time of the annexation of Crimea, Russian people's support was absolute, and there was also a craze for "patriotic travel" to Crimea. President Putin decided to invade Ukraine because of Russia's sense of loss.

However, President Putin made a significant political misjudgment in that he tried to bring the pendulum back to the past. First of all, forced annexation of the territory of Ukraine, an independent country, cannot be tolerated internationally. Russia's merger of Crimea, which has its own justification for Russia, has also not been recognized internationally. If the international community tolerates Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the international order will collapse. In either case, the fact that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is illegal under international law will not change.

Even if Russia wins the war, occupying all of Ukraine for a long time is another matter. Putin's expectations of accepting Russia as a liberating force have been dashed, and anti-Russian sentiment among Ukrainians is exceptionally high. Even if a pro-Russian puppet government is established in Ukraine, Ukrainians will not tolerate it. Astronomical costs are needed to maintain influence over Ukraine, but it is self-evident that the Russian economy cannot afford them.

Unlike the annexation of Crimea and the Donbas Civil War, which are local wars, Russia does not have the ability to conduct a long-term all-out war. Russia's military power is second in the world, but its economic power is only 11<sup>th</sup>. After the post-Cold War, Russia failed to succeed in both reorganizing its industrial structure and modernizing its defense capabilities. Russia has shown an absolute reliance on exports, and its military power is primarily a legacy of the past inherited from the former Soviet Union. In the Gulf War, the United States ended the war in a short period of time by disabling Iraq's command, communications, and air defense networks at once and quickly deploying armored forces on flat desert terrain. However, Russia failed to launch an overwhelming firepower project shortly after the war, and Ukraine's command, communications, and air defense networks are still alive. People's smartphones are becoming the eyes and ears of the Ukrainian military, and the United States and NATO provide virtually unlimited information and military

supplies. Also, Russia's armored forces, unlike they were in deserts during the Gulf war, are becoming useless consumables as they are not modernized enough and thus unfit for combats on narrower spaces, such as roads and streets.

The international community's response is also vital. In particular, Europe, which has already experienced two world wars, responds to the Russian invasion as if their lives depend on it. The United Nations passed a resolution condemning Russia with 141 overwhelming votes and suspended Russia's right to seating on the UN Human Rights Council. International sanctions are directly hitting the Russian economy at the level of an "economic nuclear bomb," and unless a complete withdrawal of Russian forces is made, the possibility of sanctions relief is slim. In fact, it is more of a formation of President Putin fighting with the whole world, and, as a result, Russia is facing heroic resistance from Ukraine in this unjustifiable, unprepared war.

### **Changes in International Order in Post-Ukraine Situation**

The Ukraine crisis is affecting the international order in many ways. First of all, it is a change in the European order based on World War II and the post-Cold War. In the meantime, Russia has inherited the Soviet Union, a victorious country of World War II, but its status as a victor has fallen to as a war criminal country due to the invasion of Ukraine. The Ukraine crisis will convince Europe that it cannot be friends with Russia. Russia's gloomy future dictates that Russia would become an enemy of all Europe and to remain in the kingdom of the East again.

Germany is the vanguard of the anti-Russian front, erasing the shadow of a war criminal country at once. Germany broke the taboo of providing offensive weapons to other countries in the wake of the Ukraine crisis and made an unprecedented decision to increase defense spending from the current 1.5% of GDP to 2% by 2024. Most European countries are also joining the ranks of increasing defense spending. Japan is also expected to take the path of increasing armaments, such as securing the ability to attack enemy bases. There is a possibility that Japan will aim to become a normal country that can wage a war by revising the peace constitution. Japan is

one of the most active countries in imposing sanctions on Russia.

In the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, each country's self-centeredness can be strengthened, and there is a possibility of global tendency of conservative and right-leaning. If the global economic downturn accelerates due to the Ukraine crisis following the U.S. interest rate hike and the slowing Chinese economy, it may create a soil for conservative and rightward politics. After the Ukraine crisis, the right-wing made strides in the French presidential election. Some warn that extremist forces such as Neo-Nazi and white supremacy follow the Ukraine crisis. Some of the international volunteer forces in Ukraine are also part of far-right forces such as Neo-Nazi and white supremacy. Russia, which has roots in the former Soviet Union, is a hostile target for far-right forces like Neo-Nazi. If extremist forces gather in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, the world will face new challenges.

There is a possibility that a new global confrontation will emerge. The Biden administration has strengthened solidarity with the alliance and expanded cooperation with the democratic camp, including hosting the 'World Democratic Summit.' Due to the invasion of Ukraine, Russia is already defined as the "New Axis of Evil," dubbed by Biden. The Biden administration is expected to strengthen the cooperation system of the democratic camp in the wake of the Ukraine crisis to form a confrontational structure against authoritarian camps such as Russia and China. However, it is necessary to be careful in defining the global confrontation structure formed by the post-Ukraine situation as a new Cold War. In the case of the Cold War, the communist bloc formed its own regional value chain, such as COMECON, and was not highly dependent on the capitalist camp. On the other hand, Russia and China rely on the Global Value Chain. Strengthening the global solidarity of the democratic camp is also not an easy task in that the situation of democracy and human rights in each country can be widely different. However, given that most advanced capitalist countries are on democracy, the formation of a confrontation between the U.S.-led camps of democracy versus authoritarianism will be seen as a challenge for China and Russia.

Strategic competition between the U.S. and China is likely to intensify. Despite



the Ukraine crisis, the U.S. diplomatic and security posture of keeping China in check in the India–Pacific region has not changed much. In particular, NATO's rapid arms build-up may ease the burden on the U.S., which may boost its India–Pacific strategy. Given that the Ukraine crisis has strengthened NATO's unity, there is a possibility that the United States would use it to strengthen checks on China. European countries have shown differences in their positions in checking China, but a strong response is expected if China pursues a pro–Russian policy. The Ukraine crisis is likely to be a negative factor for China, which is facing strategic competition with the U.S.

The NPT system is based on the premise that nuclear powers will not attack non–nuclear states with nuclear weapons. This is why most countries on Earth are refraining from developing nuclear weapons even though they can. However, Putin shook the foundation of the NPT system in that he threatened Ukraine with nuclear weapons, which voluntarily chose to denuclearize. Stabilization of the NPT system will be an essential task for post–Ukraine international politics. In the case of NATO, the impact will not be significant given that it has a nuclear sharing agreement with the United States. However, countries facing potential nuclear threats will consider new countermeasures.

### **Implications on the Korean Peninsula**

The Ukraine crisis has a direct or indirect impact on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea's obsession with nuclear possession is expected to grow at a time when Ukraine, which chose to denuclearize voluntarily, has been invaded. Over the course of the Ukraine crisis, North Korea began restoring the Punggye–ri nuclear test site and expanding and renovating the satellite launch site in the West Sea. On March 24, it launched a Hwasong–17 ICBM and violated the moratorium publicly. There is also a high possibility that North Korea will conduct additional nuclear tests. For the time being, North Korea is expected to focus on upgrading its nuclear capabilities rather than negotiating denuclearization.

North Korea is openly supportive of Russia as one of the five nations opposed

to the U.N. condemnation of Russia. It seems to be a move to strengthen the alliance between North Korea and Russia based on a common ground of strong international sanctions. As for Russia being isolated from the rest of the world, there is no reason to refuse to side with North Korea, and there is a possibility that Russia may provide North Korea with energy resource, whose global market is practically blocked. There is a possibility that North Korea, which has strengthened relations with China, may seek trilateral solidarity with China and Russia through close contact with Russia in the future. However, given that the current situation is different from the Cold War era, the synergy effect of the alliance among North Korea, China, and Russia should be limited.

South Korea's new administration under the president-elect, Yoon Seok-yeol, aims to strengthen the Korea-U.S. alliance and restore the Korea-Japan cooperation system and respond in principle to North Korea's provocations. As for North Korea's nuclear capability sophistication, corresponding measures such as ROK-US joint military exercise and strategic asset development are expected. There is a possibility that the inter-Korean and U.S.-North Korea relations would go through tough times in the early days of the new administration. Following the fallout of Putin's remarks on the use of nuclear weapons, North Korea's first deputy director, Kim Yo-jong, mentioned the possibility of using nuclear weapons against South Korea in a statement on April 4. Therefore, strengthening the Korean triaxial system and enhancing the reliability of expansionary deterrence will be a priority for the new ROK government.

Improving Korea-Japan relations will not be an easy task for the new government, given that Japan is expected to become conservative and right-leaning due to the Ukraine crisis. Given that the U.S. is strengthening its alliance with the democratic camp owing to the Ukraine crisis, efforts to strengthen Korea-U.S. relations, including upgrading the comprehensive ROK-US strategic alliance, will gain momentum. If the U.S.-China strategic competition intensifies, there is a possibility that tension between China and the new ROK government, which is planning to participate in the Quad working group, will be formed.

Even before Russia invaded Ukraine, the possibility of world order reorganization, such as intensifying US-China strategic competition, has increasingly floated around. Embarking on an era of new security such as climate change and COVID-19, the era of a new economy has also arrived with global supply chains and high-tech technologies. It is an age of complex major transformation. It is time to find lessons from the Ukraine crisis and take the challenge of the great transition as an opportunity to seek a national strategy that can drive the sustainable development of the Republic of Korea. ©KINU 2022

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