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Contents

The U.S.-China Rivalry and South Korea's New North Korea Policy:
Its Prospects and Implications 5

Jihwan Hwang

North Korea in Changing World: Challenges for Seoul 35

Andrei Lankov

The Yoon Suk-yeol Administration and China-South Korea Relations:
A Chinese Perspective 65

Gong Keyu

Russia's War in Ukraine: How the 19th Century Imperialism and
20th Century Fascism Found Home in the 21st Century Russia 95

Michael Khodarkovsky

Promoting Measures for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia:
Conditions and Major Agenda 113

Jong-chul Park

Russian Invasion of Ukraine and the Decline of the World Order 135

Yongmin Park

The U.S.-China Rivalry and South Korea's New North Korea Policy: Its Prospects and Implications

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Abstract

For the past several years, the United States and China have been competing for global leadership through the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative. In fact, the security environment on the Korean Peninsula had moved from the U.S.-Soviet balance during the Cold War to the U.S. unipolar system after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is now entering into the third period of U.S.-China strategic rivalry. When the U.S.-China conflict intensifies, South Korea will face a strategic dilemma in its North Korea policy, because it is difficult for the South Korean government to strategically harmonize with both great powers. In this sense, South Korea should make efforts to actively create a strategic room for its own policy rather than passively responding to the U.S.-China competition. This article examines the recent regional development of the U.S.-China strategic competition and analyzes how it will affect the newly launched Yoon Suk-yeol government's policy toward North Korea.

Key Words: United States, China, South Korea, North Korea policy

Introduction

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the end of February 2022, U.S.-Russian conflict has deepened to the point that it is reminiscent of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. In particular, it is true that the Ukraine crisis has intensified a new Cold War situation at a time when the world order is destabilized due to the deepening strategic conflict between the U.S. and China. Russia's invasion of Ukraine strengthened the NATO alliance unprecedentedly in the Atlantic region, and the U.S.-China conflict has deepened the relations between the U.S. and its Asian allies in the Pacific region. From this perspective, John J. Mearsheimer argued that a new Cold War era has arrived. In particular, he sees that the U.S. and China are in a state of intense competition in the construction of military networks and the new weapons development.¹

However, it is still necessary to carefully evaluate whether the U.S.-China relationship will develop into a new Cold War like the one in the past. If we understand the Cold War as “a protracted international rivalry,” as defined by John Gaddis,² there would be no great-power relationship other than the Cold War. Although the current U.S.-China relationship is different from the U.S.-Soviet relationship in the past, the bipolarity between the two has strengthened and the perception of mutual threat has intensified. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the ideological conflict between democracy and authoritarianism has recently become clearer. The great-power rivalry appears to move toward the Cold-War like situation in political, economic and security dimensions, and fierce debates has taken place over the possibility of a new Cold War.

Because the U.S.-China conflict still has the aspect of a regional power competition, mainly taking place in the Asia-Pacific region, the impact

1 John J. Mearsheimer, “The Inevitable Rivalry America, China, and the Tragedy of Great-Power Politics,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 100, no. 6 (2021): 48-58.

2 Hal Brands and John Lewis Gaddis, “The New Cold War America, China, and the Echoes of History,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 100, no. 6 (2021): 10-20.

on the Korean Peninsula is quite large. Conflicts and competition between the United States and China can also escalate in the North Korean issue. For example, both the United States and China were very sensitive to each other for having summits with North Korea in 2018 and 2019. China has tried North Korea to depend on it, seeking to have leverage economically and strategically. China has sought to use its influence over North Korea as a leverage for the United States and South Korea. So, the U.S.-China rivalry is one of the biggest challenge for the South Korean government's policy toward North Korea, and it is important for the government to establish its own strategic position amid the changing security environment.

For the past several years, the United States and China have been competing for global leadership through the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative. In fact, the security environment on the Korean Peninsula had moved from the U.S.-Soviet balance during the Cold War to the U.S. unipolar system after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is now entering into the third period of U.S.-China strategic rivalry.³ When the U.S.-China conflict intensifies, South Korea will face a serious strategic dilemma in its North Korea policy, because it would be very difficult for the South Korean government to strategically harmonize with both great powers. In this sense, South Korea should make efforts to actively create a strategic room for its own policy rather than passively responding to the U.S.-China competition.

This article examines the recent regional development of the U.S.-China strategic rivalry and analyzes how it will affect the newly launched Yoon Suk-yeol government's policy toward North Korea. So, it first aims to examine the ways in which the changing dynamics of the U.S.-China rivalry are impacting South Korea's policy toward North Korea. Based on this analysis, it will provide policy recommendations for how the new South Korean leadership can navigate this strategic environment in dealing with North Korea. In this sense, this article suggests that the new North

3 Jihwan Hwang, "The Two Koreas after U.S. Unipolarity: In Search of a New North Korea Policy," *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2013): 77-88.

Korea policy should not be limited within the bounds of domestic ideologies but reflect a nonpartisan and bipartisan disposition, taking into account both internal and external factors. On the other hand, the South Korean government should actively pursue peace on the Korean Peninsula and build a foundation for unification by encouraging change in North Korea. A genuine North Korea policy should be linked to a unification policy that wins the hearts of the North Korean people.

U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry and the Korean Peninsula

Trump and U.S.-China Conflict

During the Trump administration, relations between the United States and China began to deteriorate, starting with a trade dispute.⁴ In particular, it has developed into a sharp conflict since 2020, due to the worsening situation such as COVID-19, the Hong Kong Security Law, ideological confrontation, etc. The global spread of COVID-19 has expanded to an emotional battle between the U.S. and China over the origin of the virus. The United States has accused China of covering up early information about the coronavirus outbreak, and contended that China is responsible for its global spread and damage. In addition, when China enforced the National Security Law on Hong Kong on July 1, 2020, the United States criticized for threatening liberal democracy and human rights.

Since then, the Trump administration's conflict with China had deepened into an ideological confrontation between liberal democracy and Communism, and also a clash of civilization between the West and China, in addition to the existing trade dispute and military rivalry. In a

4 Ryan Hass and Abraham Denmark, "More Pain Than Gain: How the US-China Trade War Hurt America" (The Brookings Institution, August 7, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/07/more-pain-than-gain-how-the-us-china-trade-war-hurt-america/>.

speech at the Nixon Presidential Library, then-Secretary of State Michael Pompeo described China as an existing threat to the United States and argued that China's threats came from Communist ideology.⁵ He said that the United States helped open China in good faith, but China threatened U.S. national security. According to Pompeo, the United States should not seek for the approach of “Trust and Verify” that President Reagan had taken toward the Soviet Union, but “distrust and verify” in dealing with China. He perceived China as very threatening because it intended to destroy democratic ideas and the Western value.

In fact, the conflict between the U.S. and China went beyond trade disputes and military rivalry, suggesting the possibility of expanding to the clash of civilizations between the West and the non-Western, which Samuel Huntington contended in his 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article.⁶ The Trump administration recognized that the ideological nature of the conflict was deeply rooted between the U.S. and China. Pompeo insisted that “This is deeply embedded in an ideology. This is bigger than any one person. The threat from the Chinese Communist Party emanates from the nature of the Chinese Communist Party doctrine and ideology, We’re gonna have to be at this for a while.”⁷ In the “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China” submitted to Congress in May 2020,⁸ the Trump administration also criticized China for pursuing changes in world order for its national interest and ideology. It suggested that the U.S. should put pressure on China. Against this backdrop, the Trump administration presented the idea of establishing the “Economic Prosperity Network” to build a supply chain

5 Michael R. Pompeo, “Communist China and the Free World’s Future,” Speech at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California, July 23, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future-2/index.html>.

6 Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.

7 Michael R. Pompeo, “Interview with Maria Bartiromo of Fox News Sunday Morning Futures” (Washington D.C., May 31, 2020), <https://2017-2021.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-with-maria-bartiromo-of-fox-news-sunday-morning-futures/index.html>.

8 White House, “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China” (May 20, 2020), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/U.S.-Strategic-Approach-to-The-Peoples-Republic-of-China-Report-5.24v1.pdf>.

excluding China,⁹ which has continued under the Biden administration.

As the ideological conflict between the U.S. and China intensified, an American opinion poll showed that Americans' dislike for China had risen to 66%, and that 90% of Americans perceived China as a threat to the United States.¹⁰ This reflected the significant increase in Americans' perception of threats and unfavorable attitude to China, regardless of the ideological polarization between the conservative and the progressive inside the U.S. domestic politics. This was similar to the fact that South Koreans' favorable reception with China cut in half after China's economic retaliation for South Korea's introduction of THAAD in 2016. China criticized U.S. strategy toward China, saying that Trump described China as a competitor that challenged U.S. interests, economy and values, and accused the U.S. of having a "Cold War mindset."¹¹

Biden's Indo-Pacific Strategy and China

Also, in the Biden administration, U.S.-China relations intensified into an all-round strategic rivalry. During the Obama administration, the United States adopted a strategy to encircle China by implementing the policy of "Pivot to Asia" or "Rebalancing." In response, the Xi Jinping government seemed to avoid a head-on collision with the United States by proposing a "new type of great power relations," which was declined by the Obama administration, but China has adopted quite an offensive policy in the west, the "Belt and Road Initiative." In the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report

⁹ Humeyra Pamuk and Andrea Shalal, "Trump Administration Pushing to Rip Global Supply Chains from China: Officials," *Reuters*, May 4, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-china-idUSKBN22G0BZ>.

¹⁰ Kat Devlin, Laura Silver and Christine Huang, "U.S. Views of China Increasingly Negative Amid Coronavirus Outbreak: Republicans More Negative Than Democrats toward China, though Unfavorable Ratings Have Climbed among Both Parties" (Pew Research Center, April 21, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/04/21/u-s-views-of-china-increasingly-negative-amid-coronavirus-outbreak/>.

¹¹ Simon Denyer, "Trump Alarms China with 'Cold War' Rhetoric in State of Union Address," *The Washington Post*, January 31, 2018; Charlotte Gao, "China Reprimands US over 2018 National Defense Strategy," *The Diplomat* (February 12, 2018), <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/china-reprimands-us-over-2018-national-defense-strategy/>.

released in early June 2019,¹² the Trump administration intended to expand military cooperation with its allies to contain China. This was an attempt to contain China's "Belt and Road Initiative" policy, not only at the economic level but also at the military level.

Although the Biden administration's policy toward China differed from Trump's in its approach and response, it is not fundamentally different. For example, Biden also criticized China's aggressive foreign policy and predatory trade policy, while maintaining a domestic consensus of hardline on China. However, Biden said unlike Trump that he would pursue a customized response to China through cooperation with allies, and that he would pressure China by establishing extensive international cooperation.¹³ The Biden administration has responded to the China threats through multilateral cooperation, restoration of global governance, and strengthening of alliances. In fact, Biden's response was embodied in his Indo-Pacific strategy. The Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy was not very different from the previously presented Asia-Pacific strategies by Obama and Trump in a broad framework. It is like collaborating Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy with Obama's Pivot to Asia and Rebalancing strategy. The overall discussion of the Indo-Pacific strategy was an expression of the long-time U.S. global strategy in the region that the U.S. would protect and strengthen the liberal and rule-based world order that it has built since the end of World War II. Biden has tried to maximize U.S. national interest, not by following Trump's "America first" slogan, but by pursuing his new leadership to strengthen U.S. influence by working with allies, partners, and regional institutions in the region.

Although the term of the Indo-Pacific was coined during the Trump era, the reason for Biden's accepting the word is that as mentioned in the report, this region with over half the world's people including 58% of

¹² U.S. Department of Defense, "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnership, and Promoting a Networked Region" (June 1, 2019), <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

¹³ Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Why America Must Lead Again? Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy after Trump," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 2 (2020): 64-8.

youth, 60% of global GDP, two-thirds of global economic growth, 65% of the world's oceans and 25% of its land is coming further under China's growing influence.¹⁴ The Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy has been pursued as a global strategy beyond a regional one. This is due to the perception that the United States needs to deal with the growing Chinese influence not only in the Asia-Pacific region, but also in the global context. The Biden administration also has the perception that China's foreign policy has also been expanding beyond its regional strategy. From this point of view, the Indo-Pacific strategy explicitly mentions about cooperating with the UK, France, EU and NATO countries as well as allies, partners, and regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific region, including like-minded countries as well. This shows the view that issues in the Indo-Pacific region cannot be resolved only within the region but must be discussed and dealt with at the global level, addressing that European countries also emphasize the importance of Indo-Pacific region. In this regard, it seems clear that the focus of U.S. global strategy is shifting toward the Indo-Pacific region. This strategy is not just something made under the Biden administration but reflects long-term U.S. global strategy that includes of Obama's Pivot to Asia and Rebalancing and Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy.

The Indo-Pacific strategy clearly addresses the threat from China and the possibility of U.S.-China conflict by specifying that the region faces serious challenges from China. Of course, it is still not clear whether the U.S.-China relationship will develop into a new Cold War like the one from the last century. In fact, there are so many areas that require cooperation with China, such as climate change, global pandemics, etc. In addition, the Biden administration has shown the intention of rebuilding the U.S.-centered liberal order in the region rather than focusing on an anti-China framework. This clearly shows that the Biden administration has maintained the One China policy

¹⁴ White House, "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States" (February 2022), 5, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

while ensuring the defense of Taiwan and the stability of the Taiwan Strait.

Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Korean Peninsula

There are some concerns that the Indo-Pacific strategy downplays the importance of the Korean Peninsula because it is understood to link the QUAD countries: Australia, India, Japan and the United States.¹⁵ However, the Korean Peninsula and South Korea are considered relatively important in the Biden's Indo-Pacific Strategy. South Korea is clearly specified along with Australia and Japan in the regional alliance, which is the core of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, because the strategy emphasizes the importance of strategic cooperation with regional allies. In particular, the Indo-Pacific strategy report addresses that "Like the ROK, we aim to promote regional security through capacity-building."¹⁶ The key is what the U.S. will demand in the process of strengthening its relations with regional allies. Whereas Trump made outspoken demands for increased cost burdens, Biden would want to increase South Korea's regional contribution and accountability in a much subtle way. This can be clearly seen from the U.S. interest in the Korean Peninsula shown at the U.S.-South Korea summit in May. The Biden administration showed much interest in such issues as trade, supply chain, and norms.¹⁷

Under the Indo-Pacific strategy, the U.S.-China conflict is highly likely to pose a strategic dilemma for South Korea. If the U.S.-China conflict deepens, South Korea will have no choice but to face a strategically difficult security environment. The United States will not only persuade South Korea to promote alliance, democracy, rules-based liberal order,

¹⁵ Andrew Yeon, "South Korea Is the Missing Link to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy," *The Hill*, May 18, 2022, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/3492960-south-korea-is-the-missing-link-to-the-u-s-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

¹⁶ White House, "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States," 7.

¹⁷ White House, "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement" (May 21, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/21/united-states-republic-of-korea-leaders-joint-statement/>.

and the value of human rights, but also want South Korea to contribute to the peace and stability in the region. Meanwhile, the Biden administration is expected to show a customized response to regional allies, while making efforts to strengthen trilateral security cooperation between the U.S., Japan and South Korea. China will emphasize historical, cultural, and geographical closeness as a neighboring power and make efforts to persuade South Korea to break free from American influence. South Korea's strategy to embrace both the United States and China is not easy, but it is significant to create a strategic room so that South Korea does not get caught up in the negative effects of U.S.-China rivalry at the regional level beyond the Korean Peninsula. In a situation where the U.S.-China conflict intensifies, it is necessary to expand the strategic room through flexible responses rather than strategic ambiguity or rigidity. In this sense, South Korea needs to pursue multilateral cooperation to complement bilateral relations, middle power strategy to respond to great-power politics, and soft balancing strategy to hard power security competition.

These strategic conflicts between the United States and China and the Indo-Pacific strategy pose a fairly complex challenge to South Korea's policy toward North Korea. The Korean Peninsula is a core region of the U.S.-China strategic rivalry, so the North Korea policy is most likely to be affected by changes in the regional order. Furthermore, as China's influence expands, South Korea's policy has been severely constrained. This is because security environment on the Korean Peninsula has been moving away from the unipolar order by the United States that had persisted for the past 30 years since the early 1990s.¹⁸ Rather, inter-Korean relations in the future are more likely to show similar patterns to those affected by the U.S.-Soviet balance during the Cold War. This means that it may become more difficult for the South Korean government to lead its North Korea policy in the midst of strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China. Under these circumstances, South Korea's policy toward North Korea needs to be designed in a more sophisticated way while

¹⁸ Hwang, "The Two Koreas after U.S. Unipolarity": 77-88.

closely examining changes in U.S.-China relations.

South Korea's New North Korea Policy amid U.S.-China Rivalry

The Yoon Suk-yeol Government's Policy towards North Korea

In his Foreign Affairs contribution as a presidential candidate, President Yoon Suk-yeol criticizes Moon Jane-in government, contending that “A foreign policy tailored mostly to improving relations with North Korea has allowed Seoul’s role in the global community to shrink.”¹⁹ He says that “Most importantly, the U.S.-South Korean alliance has drifted owing to differences between the two countries on North Korea policy,” because “Seoul has focused on cooperating with Pyongyang whereas Washington has prioritized confronting North Korea over its nuclear threats and human rights violations.” Although dealing with the North Korean issue is an important task for South Korea, he believes that it should not represent the whole of Seoul’s diplomacy. President Yoon recognizes dialogue with North Korea as a specific means to a specific end, that is, the complete denuclearization of North Korea, criticizing the Moon government for regarding dialogue with the North as end in itself.

In fact, the Yoon government’s policy toward North Korea is based on the concept of “global pivotal state.” According to President Yoon, “South Korea should no longer be confined to the Korean Peninsula” but “advance freedom, peace, and prosperity through liberal democratic values and substantial cooperation” as a global pivotal state, which is in line with the Biden administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy. He made this clear again when he met U.S. President Joe Biden in May, reaffirming “their

¹⁹ Yoon Suk-yeol. “South Korea Needs to Step Up: The Country’s Next President on His Foreign Policy Vision,” *Foreign Affairs* (February 8, 2022), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1128401>.

commitment to strengthen the U.S.-South Korea alliance and to broaden its focus beyond the Korean Peninsula to take on global challenges, including threats to the rules-based international order, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine."²⁰ He means that South Korea should not maintain an approach of strategic ambiguity when U.S.-Chinese tensions have grown, but state a principled position and take a firm stance on a number of issues between Washington and Beijing. He says that "Washington and Beijing have created an impression that South Korea has been tilting toward China and away from its longtime ally, the United States."²¹ He called for clarity and boldness and for a commitment to principles as a global pivotal state in a moment of change and flux in international politics. He thinks that "a foreign policy tailored mostly to improving relations with North Korea has allowed Seoul's role in the global community to shrink."

In this sense, President Yoon wants to change South Korea's relationship with China. Although China is the South's largest trading partner, two countries differ strongly on security concerns, especially with regard to North Korea. While China's main goal on the Korean Peninsula is to preserve the stability of the Kim Jong-un regime and support the denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula, the South Korean goal is the complete denuclearization of North Korea. In order to address such difference that may get in the way of economic ties, the Yoon government wants to hold regularly high-level strategic dialogues with China. Moreover, he demands that China should not oppose but accept South Korea's cooperation with its allies, particularly the United States, because the South needs to respond to the North's nuclear and missile capabilities by strengthening alliance with the United States. The Yoon government has planned to strengthen South Korea's air and missile defenses, hold the joint military exercises with the United States and also reinforce U.S.

²⁰ White House, "Readout of President Biden's Meeting with Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol" (May 21, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/21/readout-of-president-bidens-meeting-with-republic-of-korea-president-yoon-suk-yeol/>.

²¹ Yoon, "South Korea Needs to Step Up."

extended deterrence against North Korea.

In reality, President Yoon and President Biden agreed at the Summit “to reactivate the high-level Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group at the earliest date,”²² which was established in 2016 during the Obama administration and suspended since 2018 during the Trump administration. Reaffirming their commitment to the defense of South Korea and the combined defense posture, Biden and Yoon also agreed “to initiate discussions to expand the scope and scale of combined military exercises and training on and around the Korean Peninsula.” Moreover, the U.S. and South Korea also reaffirmed “the commitment of the U.S. to deploy strategic U.S. military assets in a timely and coordinated manner as necessary, as well as to enhance such measures and identify new or additional steps to reinforce deterrence in the face of DPRK destabilizing activities.” Of course, the United States affirmed the U.S. extended deterrence commitment to South Korea “using the full range of U.S. defense capabilities, including nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities.” The Yoon government seeks to further strengthen deterrence against the threats posed by North Korea, by being committed to ensure close cooperation with the United States.

The Yoon government also pursues to “put forward a road map for the denuclearization of the North that clearly sets parameters for negotiations and establishes corresponding measures for each step Pyongyang takes toward the goal.”²³ For this purpose, international sanctions against North Korea may be eased only in line with verifiable and irreversible steps North Korea must take toward complete denuclearization. Regarding South Korea’s economic support and cooperation projects, the Yoon government will move forward only if Pyongyang declares its existing nuclear programs in sincere and complete way and makes the bold decision to denuclearize. Negotiations with the North will rest on this idea of complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization.

²² White House, “U.S.-ROK Leaders’ Joint Statement.”

²³ Yoon, “South Korea Needs to Step Up.”

Of course, the Yoon government would provide humanitarian aid to help the most vulnerable North Korean people in a practical way and also be willing to work with the international community to provide assistance to the North Korean efforts to combat the COVID-19.²⁴ Interestingly, President Yoon suggested in his presidential campaign that he would pursue to establish the liaison office in Panmunjom or Washington D.C. among the United States and two Koreas and build a permanent trilateral dialogue channel. Given the Yoon government's statement, however, its overall North Korea policy appears to be similar to those of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments. As North Korea criticized those two conservative governments in the past, it is likely to take a very critical stance on the Yoon government's policy toward North Korea, and inter-Korean relations is more likely to deteriorate in the near future.

Old Constraints on New North Korea Policy

No matter what policy the Yoon government pursues toward North Korea, North Korea is unlikely to accept inter-Korean dialogue at this point, so it is very difficult for the new South Korean government to pursue a new North Korea policy. In particular, several issues regarding the United States and North Korea that were formed before the Yoon government took office are likely to make it difficult to start a new North Korea policy in the near future.

First of all, North Korea poses a serious challenge to the South Korean government's policy. After the failure of the U.S.-North Korea summit at Hanoi in February 2019, North Korea declared the "heads-on breakthrough" strategy in December at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the North Korean Workers' Party.²⁵ North Korea maintained

²⁴ White House, "U.S.-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement."

²⁵ "Report on the 5th Plenary Session of the 7th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of DPRK," *Rodong Sinmun*, January 1, 2020.

its hardline stance at the 8th Party Congress in January 2021 and refused to talk with the U.S. and South Korea.²⁶ North Korea now seeks to create a new security environment on the Korean Peninsula while strengthening its awareness of the new Cold War order. In his address to the Supreme People's Assembly on September 29, 2021, Kim Jong-un stated that "as the structure of international relations changed into a new Cold War structure, it has become more complex and that is the major characteristic of the current international situation change."²⁷ Kim Jong-un showed a very critical perception on the changes in international relations, contending that this was because the United States and its followers' pressure and tyranny caused by "the unilateral and unfair partisan foreign policy of the United States." However, it is doubtful that such a new Cold War structure has worsened Pyongyang's strategic environment on the Korean Peninsula. The worst security environment for Pyongyang was the era of U.S. unipolar system since early 1990s when it lost two great-power patrons from the Cold War. Therefore, the new Cold War structure provides a new and better strategic environment for Pyongyang like the one during the Cold War. It means that South Korea would be placed in a more difficult situation to deal with the North Korean issues under the new Cold War structure.

Second, the Biden administration's policy toward North Korea poses another serious policy challenge to the South Korean government. The Biden administration after taking office in January 2021, has not shown an active policy toward North Korea, but one like Obama's "strategic patience," which is an approach of wait-and-see that the U.S. does not move until North Korea changes its course of action first. Likewise, Biden is unlikely to adopt a new North Korea policy if North Korea does not change its course of action first. After reviewing its North Korea policy in 2021, the Biden administration agreed to come up with a coordinated

²⁶ "Kim Jong-un's Report at the 8th Congress of the North Korean Workers' Party," *Rodong Sinmun*, January 9, 2021.

²⁷ "Kim Jong-un's Speech at the Supreme People's Assembly," *Rodong Sinmun*, September 30, 2021.

strategy with South Korea on how to deal with North Korea.²⁸ Also in the Biden-Yoon summit held in May 2022, two leaders “reiterate their common goal of the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and agree to further strengthen the airtight coordination to this end.”²⁹ President Yoon and President Biden also shared “the view that the North Korean nuclear program presented a grave threat not only to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula but also the rest of Asia and the world.” Two leaders also emphasized that “the path to dialogue remains open toward peaceful and diplomatic resolution with the DPRK and call on DPRK to return to negotiations.”

In fact, following a review of its North Korea policy, the Biden administration described its North Korea policy as a “calibrated and practical approach” - different from Trump’s summit diplomacy and Obama’s strategic patience.³⁰ Given the lack of details of this approach including specific agenda as well as the conditions in which negotiations will take place, however, there are concerns about how calibrated and practical the Biden administration’s approach will be. Biden does not appear to undertake a North Korea policy in earnest unless North Korea makes the first move.³¹ Biden said that he would pursue diplomatic efforts for complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula but would not make a major compromise on North Korea. Furthermore, As the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has exacerbated global security environment, the United States lacks the time and interest to focus on North Korea. The problem is that North Korea is not likely to engage with the Biden administration, because it has been very critical

28 White House, “U.S.-ROK Leaders’ Joint Statement” (May 21, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/21/u-s-rok-leaders-joint-statement/>.

29 White House, “United States-Republic of Korea Leaders’ Joint Statement.”

30 “Biden Administration Sets New North Korea Policy of ‘Practical’ Diplomacy,” *Reuters*, May 1, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/biden-administration-has-completed-north-korea-policy-review-white-house-2021-04-30/>.

31 Robert Einhorn, “The Rollout of the Biden Administration’s North Korea Policy Review Leaves Unanswered Question” (Brookings Institution, May 4, 2021), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/05/04/the-rollout-of-the-biden-administrations-north-korea-policy-review-leaves-unanswered-questions/>.

of U.S. policy.³² So, the stalemate between the U.S. and North Korea will continue and it would be really difficult to resolve the deadlock in the near future.

Moreover, if the North Korean human rights issue comes to the fore, harsh words will come and go between the U.S. and North Korea, and the crisis is highly likely to escalate. In fact, the biggest change in North Korea policy at the Biden-Yoon summit in May was on the North Korean human rights issue. Two leaders expressed “grave concern over the human rights situation in the DPRK.”³³ This was quite different from the expression addressed at the Biden-Moon summit held in May 2021. Two leaders at the time agreed “to work together to improve the human rights situation in the DPRK.”³⁴ Such a change shows the strong will of President Yoon and President Biden on the North Korean human rights issue. In particular, President Biden is known to have a very critical perception of human rights situation in North Korea. Biden once criticized Trump on the human rights situation in North Korea after the collapse of the working-level negotiation between the U.S. and North Korea held in Stockholm, Sweden in October 2019, and introduced his past policies on Twitter. He said that “15 Years ago, I worked to help pass the North Korea Human Rights Act. We made our values clear to the brutal regime in Pyongyang. Trump has instead made excuses for the dictator in the North and refuses to appointed a special envoy for human rights in NK. It is disgraceful”³⁵ In 2004, Biden as a U.S. Senator supported the passage of the Bush administration’s North Korean Human Rights Act. He also criticized Trump for not addressing the human rights issues at all while meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un three times. The Obama administration, where Biden was vice president, took various measures related to human rights issues in North Korea at the UN Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly,

³² Sang-hun Choe, “North Releases Its First Response to Moon-Biden Summit,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2021.

³³ White House, “United States-Republic of Korea Leaders’ Joint Statement.”

³⁴ White House, “U.S.-ROK Leaders’ Joint Statement.”

³⁵ Biden’s Twitter, October 19, 2019, <https://twitter.com/joebiden/status/1185337261409427463?lang=ko>.

and the Security Council, and also led the North Korean human rights debate in the UN Security Council since 2014. However, U.S. discussion on human rights situation in North Korea has been halted since 2018 because of the Trump administration's ignorance of the issue. In this respect, there is a possibility that the Biden administration may appoint a special envoy for human rights in North Korea, which has been vacant for more than five years.³⁶ In reality, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman recently referred to the Biden administration's intention to fill the position of a special envoy for North Korean human rights at the Hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the U.S. House of Representative, although she admitted that she could not give a time table because the administration wanted to make sure of finding the right person.³⁷ It is noteworthy how North Korea will react to the United States and South Korea if the Biden administration appoints a special envoy. Moreover, as the U.S.-China conflict intensifies, the tension on the North Korea human rights will also intensify. China's perception of the human rights situation in North Korea is completely different from that of the U.S. and South Korea,³⁸ so considerable conflict is expected if the issue arises. If such a situation occurs, it seems likely that Biden's North Korea policy will explicitly return to Obama's "strategic patience."

Third, the China-North Korean relations presents another challenge for the South Korean government. An important aspect of Pyongyang's confrontation against South Korea comes from its improving relations with China. Kim Jong-un once noted that "Through five rounds of DPRK-China summit, the Workers' Party has deepened strategic

36 Robert R. King, "When Will the United States Have a Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights?" CSIS Commentary (September 10, 2021), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/when-will-united-states-have-special-envoy-north-korean-human-rights>.

37 U.S. House of Representative Committee on Foreign Affairs, "Restoring American Leadership in the Indo-Pacific" (April 6, 2022), https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/_cache/files/8/a/8adcd05e-2876-4359-a5ea-f888e1897fad/B86E54C4AF7147E1F17974C0585E1032.04-06-22-hfac-hearing-transcript.pdf.

38 Jihwan Hwang, "China's Approach to the North Korean Human Rights Issues and South Korea's Response," in *China and North Korea: Between Development and Security*, ed. Catherine Jones and Sarah Teitt (London: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2020), 176-96.

communication and mutual understanding between the two parties, thereby providing a firm guarantee for further strengthening and developing the DPRK-China relationship.”³⁹ Improvement of Beijing-Pyongyang relations is evident in the congratulatory message of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China introduced during the 8th Party Congress and the congratulations of President Xi Jinping on the appointment of Kim Jong-un as general secretary.⁴⁰ In fact, there are strategic and political considerations behind the Chinese position because Beijing has had geostrategic national interests regarding the Korean Peninsula. Although Beijing seems to recently perceive Pyongyang as more of a burden than before,⁴¹ Beijing still perceives the strategic importance of North Korea in Northeast Asia. North Korea has not only acted as a buffer zone on the Korean Peninsula, but also been strategically important with regard to U.S.-China relations. For this purpose, Beijing does not want the Kim regime to be destabilized for any reason, preferring the status quo on the Korean Peninsula. There are also huge concerns about the North Korean defectors in China that if the North Korean regime is destabilized or even collapsed, millions of North Koreans would likely move into the Chinese territory, which inevitably leads to serious political, economic, and social instability in the northeastern provinces of China.⁴²

39 “Kim Jong-un’s Report at the 8th Congress of Workers’ Party of DPRK,” *Rodong Sinmun*, January 9, 2021.

40 “The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Sent a Congratulatory Message to the 8th Congress of the Workers’ Party of DPRK,” *Rodong Sinmun*, January 6, 2021; “The 8th Congress of the Workers’ Party of DPRK Sent a Reply to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China,” *Rodong Sinmun*, January 12, 2021.

41 Isaac Stone Fish and Robert E. Kelly, “North Korea Is Ultimately China’s Problem: How Washington Can Get Beijing to Step Up,” *Foreign Affairs* (June 8, 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-06-08/north-korea-ultimately-chinas-problem>; Weiqi Zhang, “Neither Friend nor Big Brother: China’s Role in North Korean Foreign Policy Strategy,” *Palgrave Communications* 4 (February 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0071-2>.

42 Bonnie S. Glaser and Yun Sun. “Chinese Attitudes toward Korean Unification,” *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2015): 71-98.

A Starting Point for a New North Korea Policy

In such a difficult situation for a new North Korea policy, the only policy agenda that can be pursued is to build an opportunity for inter-Korean dialogue through humanitarian cooperation. It is possible to widen the interface of inter-Korean relations through humanitarian aid in response to the COVID-19, which North Korea has been struggling with. In fact, the Yoon government does not exclude the possibility of humanitarian aid to North Korea. President Yoon once mentioned about providing humanitarian support to help the people of North Korea in a practical way and promote people-to-people exchanges and cross-cultural communication between the two Koreas.⁴³ He also affirmed with U.S. President Biden at the summit that he has the commitment to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable North Korean people.⁴⁴ It may be possible to find an opportunity for a new inter-Korean relations while considering humanitarian aid to deal with the unprecedented situation of COVID-19 in North Korea. Even if Pyongyang is less likely to accept the South Korean offer, it would be helpful to make efforts to build a dialogue channel in the long-term.

To a certain extent, North Korea's domestic political and economic situations are expected to impact the North Korea nuclear problem. Throughout the Kim Jong-un era, there have been serious concerns that North Korea has experienced grave domestic difficulties caused by the international sanctions, shutdown of its borders to deal with COVID-19, and natural disasters including typhoons and floods. In the recent Voluntary National Review (VNR) submitted to the United Nations,⁴⁵ North Korea acknowledged that it has been experiencing difficulties with cereal productions as well as medical supplies including COVID-19

43 Yoon, "South Korea Needs to Step Up."

44 White House, "U.S.-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement."

45 Democratic People's Republic of Korea, "Voluntary National Review: on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development" (United Nations, June 2021), https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/282482021_VNR_Report_DPRK.pdf.

vaccines. During the 8th Party Congress, Kim Jong-un even admitted that the 5-year economic development plan had failed.⁴⁶ Even though Pyongyang announced first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in early May this year,⁴⁷ it has been pulling all resources to prevent the spread of the pandemic. If the domestic predicament persists, North Korea may produce other provocative measures to deal with its domestic difficulties. It may be possibly forced to engage in an aggressive foreign policy aimed at garnering attention from the international community. Although some predicted the possibility of the regime instability, the Kim Jong-un regime still appears to be sustainable enough to go through all these difficulties.

In order to provide humanitarian support to North Korea such as the provision of vaccines, it is necessary to work with the international community. In particular, the South Korean government needs to cooperate not only with the WHO, an international vaccine provider to the underdeveloped countries like North Korea, but also with the United States, a major vaccine country. This may allow the Yoon government to build inter-Korean dialogue channels for other occasions in the future. North Korea is not likely to accept the South Korean offer and it is difficult to achieve any breakthrough in inter-Korean relations in the near future, but it is still meaningful to give the humanitarian support another chance.

Conclusion

The biggest challenge facing the Yoon government is to establish a strategic position amid the deepening U.S.-China conflict. Over the past few years, the U.S. and China have competed over global hegemony

⁴⁶ “Kim Jong-un’s Report at the 8th Congress of Workers’ Party of DPRK,” *Rodong Sinmun*, January 9, 2021.

⁴⁷ “Decision by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of DPRK,” *Rodong Sinmun*, May 12, 2022.

through the Indo-Pacific strategy and Belt and Road Initiative, respectively. This has had a considerable impact on the design and implementation of their North Korea strategies. Following the division of the Korean Peninsula, the North Korea policy environment has continually changed over the course of three eras - the Cold War, the U.S. unipolar system, and the U.S.-China strategic rivalry. Amid intensifying U.S.-China tensions, South Korea is likely to be put in a strategic dilemma. A Washington-friendly policy would trigger Beijing to respond with hostility and vice versa. Seoul should strive to create a strategic room rather than passively responding to the U.S.-China competition.

After all, it seems unfeasible for the new Yoon government to find a new breakthrough in the North Korean issue. U.S.-North Korea negotiations on denuclearization have been at a stalemate since 2020, and North Korea started a long-term strategy of “heads-on breakthrough.” Meanwhile, the Biden administration has maintained the de facto “strategic patience” policy, which was Obama’s North Korea policy essentially equated to a “wait-and-see” approach. While Washington remains focused on the Ukraine crisis, Pyongyang is likely to feel relatively left out. It is possible that North Korea will initiate a series of military provocations to bring U.S. attention back on the Korean Peninsula and use the war in Ukraine as an opportunity to further strengthen its position.⁴⁸ Pyongyang is also likely to take a tougher stance on inter-Korean relations and become more reluctant against breaking the stalemate and returning to the negotiation table. So, Pyongyang will continue to negatively respond to the South Korean government's proposals on various agenda of inter-Korean cooperation. Pyongyang has already taken a lukewarm attitude toward the Yoon government’s North Korea policy and will possibly voice greater criticism. Even if the Yoon government proposes a security guarantee and inter-Korean cooperation, Pyongyang is unlikely to accept it. Pyongyang also remains hostile against

48 “Statement by the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson,” *Korean Central News Agency*, February 28, 2022.

agendas for humanitarian cooperation such as the supply of COVID-19 vaccines and humanitarian aid. In this regard, Kim Jong-un emphasized the need to hold on the strategy of heads-on breakthrough against the enemies at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the North Korean Workers' Party.⁴⁹ If North Korea continuously conducts military provocations and the international community imposes additional sanctions, its relations with the U.S. and South Korea will inevitably remain strained. This will make it much difficult for the Yoon government to deal with the North Korean issues.

In this sense, the new North Korea policy should reflect a nonpartisan and bipartisan disposition, moving beyond ideological conflicts between conservatives and liberals. For the past 30 years, South Korea's North Korea policy has been associated with specific ideologies and political parties, causing domestic partisan conflicts. While conservatives believed that sanctions and pressure would trigger change in North Korea, progressives considered engagement, exchange, and cooperation to be the key. In hindsight, both approaches were ineffective. The Yoon government needs to set nonpartisan targets and pursue bipartisan policies through a flexible approach that is unbiased toward certain ideologies or prejudices. In other words, Yoon's North Korea policy should not be limited within the bounds of domestic ideologies but take into account both internal and external factors. This will be the way the new North Korea policy can produce results in the midst of the U.S.-China strategic rivalry.

On the domestic front, the Yoon government should actively pursue peace on the Korean Peninsula and build a foundation for unification by encouraging change in North Korea. Unless Pyongyang decides to alter its national strategy, the North Korea crisis is likely to persist. In the long run, the Yoon government should induce North Korea to break away from hyper-securitization and the "Byungjin" line of building up nuclear

⁴⁹ "Regarding the Expanded Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the DPRK Workers' Party," *Rodong Sinmun*, June 11, 2022.

capability and economic development simultaneously and to its new national strategy focusing on its priorities toward economic development and public welfare. Above all, South Korea should draw the support of North Koreans, as in the case of East Germany. A genuine North Korea policy should be linked to a unification policy that wins the hearts of the North Korean people. A shift in Pyongyang's national strategy, along with the free will of North Koreans, will be able to change the nature of inter-Korean relations. It is necessary to instill a perception that progress in inter-Korean relations and unification are in the interests of both Koreas. A North Korean policy that is in the likes of North Koreans is also a unification policy based on democratic values.

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North Korea in Changing World: Challenges for Seoul

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Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and U.S.-China rivalry have changed the international landscape, and Korean Peninsula is not immune to the consequences. North Korea's value for China increased, so the Chinese government switched to almost unconditional subsidizing of North Korea, in order to maintain status quo. This makes North Korean leadership less likely to experiment with economic reforms, and less sensitive to outside pressures as well as benefits negotiations with ROK, U.S. and other international players can bring. It means that Seoul now has even less leverage in dealing with Pyongyang, and this situation is likely to last.

Key Words: North Korea, US-China rivalry, Ukraine, nuclear proliferation, sanctions

On February 24th, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to invade Ukraine. A large-scale war between two modern states and two modern armies - fought for the control of territories - was long thought to be an obsolete part of the early 20th-century political landscape (at least, in the developed world). Now, it has made a comeback.

The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, as well as the speedy deterioration of Sino-US relations, marked the rather abrupt end of the period in international relations history that began in 1990 ~ 1992 with the collapse of the USSR and disintegration of the communist bloc. This period was marked by the (relatively) benign U.S. hegemony, growing interconnectedness throughout the world, the gradual emergence of the truly global economy, and, for a while, the seemingly unstoppable advance of liberal democracy. The optimism of the era was well-encapsulated by Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* where it was stated with the world finally reaching a universal and nearly eternal consensus on the issues of goals and values. However, history had not ended, as Fukuyama himself eventually admitted.¹

It is impossible to know whether we are now dealing with the end of globalization and liberal-democratic dreams or just with their temporary decline. Even if the latter is true, this decline will likely take a long time to redress. It might take decades before the ideals of a global, democratic, interconnected world become dominant again.

For Korea, all of this is bad news. The world order of the 1990 ~ 2020 period was remarkably beneficial for South Korea whose export-oriented economy gained much from globalization. South Korea's alliance with the United States seemingly ensured the ROK's security from external threats, even though few would have taken such threats seriously in 1990 ~ 2020. The younger generations of Koreans have become accustomed to living in a world that seemed stable and safe. Korean diplomacy concentrated

¹ Ishaan Tharoor, "The Man Who declared the 'End of History' Now Fearful of the Very Fate of Liberal Democracy," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2017.

primarily on economic issues while security concerns - in spite of all the noise surrounding the North Korean nuclear issue - generally took a back seat.

Korean diplomats have been working, above all, to create the best possible conditions for South Korean firms in the new globalized world. For centuries, diplomacy has concentrated on security issues, being quite frankly, a “continuation of war by other means.” Since times immemorial, diplomats have either worked to reduce the likelihood of an external attack on their country, or, in contrast, to create conditions where their country could effectively attack and subdue its neighbors. For few recent decades such millennia-old approach looked outdated, even paranoid. However, the old situation is gradually returning, with its specific set of priorities.

The changes in the world, as will be shown, will have significant impact on the future of North-South relations. North Korea now operates in a very different environment, and pursue a new set of objectives. This means that many old approaches to the North are not going to work. At the end of the article we will talk about these new challenges at some length.

In this article, first we will introduce the changes the international system has experienced in recent few years, and the new rules which are emerging amidst ongoing crisis. Then we will discuss how these new changes are likely to influence the Korean Peninsula in general and North Korea in particular. Special attention will be paid to the Sino-U.S. rivalry and its likely impact on Korean affairs. Finally, we will discuss what can be done by Seoul in dealing with North Korea under the new - and unfavorable - circumstances.

The present article deals with the current issues, so its use of theoretical literature is necessarily limited. One can only notice that the ongoing changes in the world system for the time being confirm the observations and predictions of the realist schools. It will suffice to mention that John Mearsheimer, one of the foremost names in the realist school, predicted the Sino - US conflict some 20 years ago.²

² John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 4.

The Revival of the Blocs and the (Partial) Demise of the Unified Global Economy

The world economy, which had been seemingly moving toward the emergence of a single world market until recently, is now increasingly carved into a small number of competing blocs. The creation of these blocs is driven by concerns over strategy and security but it also has a massive impact on the economy.³

Currently, we can talk about two blocs even though their number might increase; one includes China, Russia, and a few countries whose ruling regimes are heavily dependent on Moscow and Beijing (for example, several countries in Central Asia).⁴ It cannot be ruled out that some countries in the Middle East (such as Iran) will eventually join this bloc. The other bloc, which can be called the “Western bloc,” consists of the United States and the developed countries of Western and Central Europe, as well as some East Asian states (Korea and Japan).

In theory and rhetoric, the Western bloc is based on shared democratic and liberal values, while its opponents tend to talk about “national values” and emphasize their countries’ “glorious traditions,” despite in real life being largely a coalition of assorted autocrats and dictators of different shades. Admittedly, the division lines are much less clear in practice, since some autocratic regimes - driven by the logic of national interests - might join the “Western bloc” (Vietnam is a good candidate)⁵ and some democracies may find themselves in the “Eastern Bloc” for the same reasons (Armenia, for example).⁶

3 Adam Posen, “The End of Globalization? What Russia’s War in Ukraine Means for the World Economy,” *Foreign Affairs* (March 17, 2022), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2022-03-17/end-globalization>; Andrew Stuttaford, “Bloc Trade: Russia, China, and the Limits of Globalization,” *National Review* (March 2022), <https://www.nationalreview.com/2022/03/bloc-trade-russia-china-and-the-limits-of-globalization/>.

4 Parag Khanna, “Russia Joins the Asian Club,” *Foreign Policy* (March 29, 2022), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/29/russia-india-china-ukraine-war-putin-asia>.

5 Huynh Tam Sang, “The US-Russia-Vietnam Triangle: Decoding Hanoi’s Strategic Balancing,” *The Diplomat* (June 01, 2022).

6 Mary Glantz, “Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia’s Balancing Act Over Russia’s War in Ukraine” (The United States Institute of Peace, March 15, 2022), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/armenia-azerbaijan-and-georgias-balancing-act-over-russias-war-ukraine>.

When it comes to the economy, competing blocs will strive to become autarkic and self-sufficient, minimizing all dependence on trade and cooperation with countries outside their bloc. Economic and technological interdependency - much celebrated in the days of globalization - is now seen as dangerous. This position makes sense, as the Russia-Ukraine war has demonstrated. The main diplomatic weapon of Putin's Russia may be its ability to limit or stop the supply of oil, gas, grain, and other strategic commodities to Western countries. It turns out that the surprising dependence of several Western European countries on Russian gas and oil has significantly impacted their foreign policy.⁷ Meanwhile, the decision of Western governments and companies to withdraw from the Russian market delivered a massive blow to the country that has grown dependent on Western technologies.

For example, virtually all Russian automobile plants came to a standstill after the withdrawal of major foreign partners.⁸ The future of high-speed trains became doubtful when their major partner, the German company Siemens, decided to abandon the joint venture that produced and serviced "bullet trains."⁹

In recent years, U.S. policy toward China has been largely aimed at reducing the American economy's dependence on interactions with China. Such restrictions are often justified by referencing national security concerns (for example, in the case of the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei). However, these justifications could be misleading. The US is opposed to over-engaging with China not only because Huawei-produced equipment may indeed contain spyware. The main reason is actually that the US and its allies are striving to ensure that everything vital for the functioning of the American economy can

7 Christina Lu, "Russia Is Back to Blackmailing Europe Over Energy," *The Foreign Policy* (April 29, 2022), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/29/russia-energy-poland-bulgaria-europe>.

8 Sergey Aslanian, "Russian Automotive Industry Won't Survive Departure of Foreign Automakers," *The Insider* (May 31, 2022), <https://theins.ru/en/opinion/sergey-aslanian/251715>.

9 Railway Supply, "The Operation of High-speed Trains in Russia Is Open to Question," *Railway Supply* (May 16, 2022), <https://www.railway.supply/en/the-operation-of-high-speed-trains-in-russia-is-open-to-question>.

be produced within the U.S.-dominated Western bloc.¹⁰

Over the past 25 ~ 30 years, South Korea has pursued a policy that boils down to the oft-repeated formula: “Rely on the United States on security issues, and rely on China on economic issues.” Since 2003, China has remained South Korea’s largest trade partner. Its share of South Korea’s foreign trade has been steadily increasing and currently stands at 27%. If we include Hong Kong, which typically acts as an intermediary in the supply of Chinese goods, then the actual share of China will reach 33.2% - exactly one-third - of South Korea’s entire foreign trade volume.¹¹

Until the US-China confrontation, this growing dependence on China had not caused much concern in Seoul, even though the “THAAD crisis” of 2016 ~ 2017 demonstrated that the Chinese side could use economic leverage to put pressure on South Korea and “punish” it for decisions Beijing did not like. However, South Korea is currently facing serious pressure from another side: Washington - understandably - wants Seoul to significantly reduce its economic interactions with China, and more broadly, with all countries that are not part of the emerging “Western bloc.”¹² This policy is promoted with particular zeal when it comes to high-tech products, particularly semiconductors.¹³

For Korea, this means that it will be increasingly tied to a restricted bloc market that - in terms of volume - will only be part of the world market. Until recently, the Koreans saw the entire world market as their field of operations, but this approach is no longer sustainable in the new world of competing coalitions. Frankly, Korea has little choice. In the foreseeable future, Washington will put constant pressure on Seoul,

¹⁰ Economist, “America’s War on Huawei Nears Its Endgame,” *The Economist* (July 16, 2020), <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/07/16/americas-war-on-huawei-nears-its-endgame>.

¹¹ <https://santandertrade.com>.

¹² Kai Jin, “Will South Korea Join the US Effort to Insulate Supply Chains From China?” accessed June 21, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/will-south-korea-join-the-us-effort-to-insulate-supply-chains-from-china/>.

¹³ Jung-a Song, Christian Davies and Demetri Sevastopulo, “South Korea’s SK Hynix Caught in US-China Semiconductor Battle,” *Financial Times*, November 25, 2021.

demanding that they minimize trade with China, Russia, and other countries it deems dangerous or unreliable. Given that security concerns in this dangerous new world will take precedence over concerns about economic prosperity, Korea will have to bow to the pressure; its relationship with the US is far too important for the country's security.

Growth of Blocks, the US-China Rivalry and Korea's Future

An important feature of the new situation is the US-Chinese confrontation. With a touch of hyperbole, one can say that this conflict is a major driving force behind the ongoing implosion of the old world order. Both sides (especially the US) justify this confrontation with references to ideological differences and different value systems. While these references are not completely unfounded, there are reasons to agree with Graham Allison's argument and see what is happening as yet another manifestation of the so-called "Thucydides trap."¹⁴ This phenomenon is well-known: the emergence of a new hegemon in the system of international relations usually causes concerns in the old hegemon, who seeks to weaken its rival.

Even though the coming US-China clash has been predicted for decades, the United States embarked on a policy of containment of China quite late, during the Trump administration. Nonetheless, this policy clearly has bipartisan support and reflects both the perceived long-term national interests of the USA and deep ideological convictions. The above-described emerging division of the world economy into competing blocs is closely related to the US-China division.

There are reasons to believe that the US-China "Cold War 2.0" will last for a long time. The US-Soviet Cold War 1.0 of 1945 ~ 1990 only

¹⁴ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

ended when the Soviet Union collapsed under the burden of its own gross economic inefficiency, aggravated by the growth of minorities' nationalism. However, there are no signs that China could suffer a similar fate in the foreseeable future; it has a market capitalist economy that is far more efficient than the clumsy Soviet model and the Han Chinese constitute an overwhelming majority of its population and are ready to suppress resistance from minority groups. The prospects of reconciliation between Washington and Beijing are slim; therefore, most likely in decades to come, the intense US-Chinese rivalry will determine the world's international system. As was the case with the Cold War 1.0, periods of acute confrontation will be followed by periods of détente but the conflict will last for a long time and all interested parties should base their plans on this assumption.

It is unlikely that China, even assisted by Russia - its (very) junior partner - will be able to establish a truly global hegemony. However, this should not set South Koreans in an overly optimistic mood. While China is unlikely to be able to successfully challenge American hegemony on the global level, it might be able to establish its own regional hegemony, becoming the dominant force in territories adjacent to China's borders, meaning Central Asia and East Asia.

The Chinese bid for East Asian hegemony will become a grave challenge for Korea. China will look unfavorably at Seoul's seemingly unavoidable drift toward Washington. However, more immediate problems are being created by the recent shift in China's attitude toward North Korea.

China's New Policy towards to North Korea

One consequence of this confrontation is a radical change in China's position on the North Korean issue. As we will argue, this change is likely to have lasting and manifold consequences.

Traditionally, the Chinese leadership has been ambivalent toward

North Korea. One can cite a recent report of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission that encapsulated this ambivalence: “The history of China-North Korea relations shows that despite their treaty alliance and close economic ties, mutual distrust, resentment, and even antipathy have long plagued the bilateral relationship.”¹⁵

On one hand, China has always considered the Korean Peninsula an important buffer zone. Throughout the last two millennia, there have been several situations in which China chose to participate in a conflict unrolling on the Korean Peninsula. It was done, above all, to ensure that it would be controlled by a government friendly - or at least neutral - to China. The most recent example of such intervention is China’s participation in the Korean War of 1950 ~ 1953; while it tried to do the same thing (unsuccessfully) in 1882 ~ 1895, this approach has much deeper historic roots. Thus, from the Chinese perspective, it has been desirable to have the northern part of the Korean Peninsula under the rule of the Kim Family, a not exactly friendly but definitely not hostile regime. As Wu Peng, a professor of political science at China’s Southwest University, put it in a 2016 interview, “the North is a safety wall and a strategic buffer zone for China.”¹⁶ This is the logic that made China the North Korean ally and this centuries-old logic is unlikely to change.

On the other hand, the Chinese leadership has never been fond of the Kim family regime. Beijing was annoyed by Pyongyang’s stubborn unwillingness to undertake Chinese-style reforms and by the tendency of North Korean propaganda to downplay the role of Chinese assistance to North Korea, including the role played by the Chinese troops during the Korean War. However, the most important item in this list is, of course, the North Korean nuclear and missile program.¹⁷

Being one of the "official" nuclear powers, China is understandably

15 Ben Frohman, Emma Rafaelof and Alexis Dale-Huang, *The China-North Korea Strategic Rift: Background and Implications for the United States* (Washington: US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2022), 3.

16 Byong-jun Ko, “China Won’t Give up N.K. as It Provides ‘Strategic Buffer Zone’: Expert,” *Yonhap News*, November 17, 2016, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20161117006100315>.

17 Frohman, Rafaelof and Dale-Huang, “The China-North Korea Strategic Rift.”

worried by the prospect of nuclear proliferation. Proliferation will water down the massive strategic advantage China enjoys due to its “lawful” possession of nuclear weapons. In addition, the possibility of nuclear proliferation in East Asia poses a very direct challenge to China. China is surrounded by hostile and unfriendly neighbors (Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan, and possibly Thailand and Burma) most of whom have both the technological capabilities to go nuclear and the potential intention to acquire nuclear weapons primarily to deter China. Thus, an unrestricted nuclear arms race in the region might result in China being surrounded by a chain of hostile nuclear-armed countries. As an observer (who is less than sympathetic toward Chinese hegemonistic ambitions) noted, “a nuclear balance of terror would have the added benefit (from the perspective of Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul) of freezing the status quo in the region and thwarting Beijing’s revanchist goal of recreating an East Asian order with China at its apex.” Needless to say, such a situation might be seen as beneficial in Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul but not in Beijing.

Thus, China’s attitude to North Korea has always been ambivalent; this ambivalence was frequently reflected in the ambiguity of China’s official position. While the Chinese assistance to North Korea never stopped, the Chinese diplomats voted at the UN Security Council for sanctions against North Korea. This vote was not an empty diplomatic gesture; for a while in 2016 ~ 2018, China demonstrated rather strict - if imperfect - compliance with the toughest UN sanctions.¹⁸

However, the outbreak of conflict with the US has seriously changed Beijing’s calculations. Now, China has valid reasons to turn a blind eye to the nuclear ambitions of the Kim family regime. The strategic importance of North Korea as a buffer zone has increased dramatically, making all other considerations secondary. Citing Wu Peng once again, “The North’s strategic value has been regarded as more important at a time when the U.S. is seeking the isolation of China.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Jamil Anderlini, “Asia Opts for a Replay of Cold War Nuclear Deterrence,” *Financial Times*, May 24, 2017.

¹⁹ Ko, “China Won’t Give up N.K. as It Provides Strategic Buffer Zone’.”

Now China is interested, above all, in maintaining stability and the status quo in North Korea. The Chinese leadership fears that the collapse of the Kim family regime might create a chaotic situation that would pose a threat to China. Chinese leaders do not want to deal with chaos and anarchy in nearby countries that have large stockpiles of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) such as nuclear weapons. Neither do they want to get directly involved in such crises. Even if the situation prompts China to dispatch troops to the North, such intervention is not considered desirable. Most importantly, China fears that the result of such a regime's implosion will be the German-style unification of Korea under de facto Seoul control. This will mean that a large state will emerge in the immediate vicinity of China whose ideology will most likely be a fusion of democratic and nationalist ideas. This might also have an undesirable impact on the minds of the Chinese public, especially the minds of the ethnic Koreans of China, who live proximate to the borders of Korea and might embrace the ideas of pan-Korean nationalism. Worse still, a unified Korean state will almost certainly remain an ally of the United States and might even have US forces stationed there.

In the past, China has been willing to grudgingly accept the possibility of the Kim family regime's collapse and was ready to quietly negotiate compromises regarding a hypothetical post-Kim arrangement of the peninsula. Some meaningful - if cautious - discussions of this kind occurred in 2008 ~ 2010, when, after Kim Jong Il's stroke, the stability of the Pyongyang regime was cast into grave doubt. At that time, China looked flexible. Beijing was seemingly ready to accept the eventual unification of Korea under South Korean control, providing that Beijing's strategic interests would be respected. Some Chinese scholars with good political connections at the time even expressed China's preliminary conditions openly. For example, Shi Yinhong wrote in 2009 that, "China's expectations are likely confined to a few non-negotiables: the peninsula must not threaten China's security through internal disruption or chaos; it must not function as a strategic fortress for U.S. "containment" against China; it must not damage China's territorial and national integration

by any irredentist and “pan-Korean” aspirations driven by extreme nationalism.”²⁰ This statement at the time echoed many similar pronouncements that Chinese scholar-officials made in private talks with the present author.

However, all of this is a thing of the past. Compromise was possible in the pre-2018 world where the emergence of G-2 or “Chimerica” - to use Niall Ferguson’s then-popular term - looked possible.²¹ Unfortunately, the world has changed dramatically since then and present-day Beijing is not ready for such compromises, which will require a measure of goodwill with and trust in the US. Nowadays, when such trust is completely gone, China is unwilling to negotiate post-collapse arrangements in North Korea. Instead, it is determined to prevent such a collapse and maintain the status quo.

With the relations with the US at their lowest point in decades, China has every reason to provide ongoing “life support” to North Korea to ensure North Korea’s internal political stability. China does not seek to promote significant economic growth in the North; if Pyongyang acquires a sound economic basis, it will likely split from China, escaping Beijing’s “zone of influence.” China’s goals are modest, China merely needs to meet North Korea’s minimum requirements in three types of products: food, fuel, and fertilizers. This will suffice to keep North Korea stable, which is enough for China.

Meanwhile, China is unlikely to make serious investments in North Korea. Even though Chinese diplomats block the introduction of additional UN sanctions, Beijing is reluctant to openly violate existing sanctions. If sanctions violations are too frequent and/or significant, it will damage China’s image that its diplomats and propagandists are now promoting, that is, the image of China as a defender of the world order and an oppo-

20 Shi Yinhong, “China and the North Korean Nuclear Issue: Competing Interests and Persistent Policy Dilemmas,” *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 21, no. 1 (March 2009): 33–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10163270902745620>.

21 Niall Ferguson, “U.S.-China Cooperation Is Critical to Global Economic Health,” *Washington Post*, November 17, 2008, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/16/AR2008111601736.html>.

ment of unilateral actions. Thus, China will keep North Korea afloat but will keep its involvement as hidden as possible by hardly investing in sustainable economic growth.

North Korea's Reaction to China's Aid

For North Korean leaders, the ongoing US-China conflict is a gift from heaven. This development has massively impacted their policies, including their internal policies.

There are reasons to believe that even during the COVID-19 pandemic and strict quarantine, Chinese aid was still flowing to the country. Satellite images confirm that ships from China regularly entered North Korean ports, having spent a few weeks anchored nearby; these ships presumably delivered grain and fertilizer.²²

Fuel was pumped through a pipeline and the volume of these supplies is very difficult to estimate. Nonetheless, North Korean market data confirms that food, fertilizer, and fuel are coming in significant quantities.²³ Over the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite severe quarantine measures and a crisis in domestic food production, retail market prices for rice and other cereals have remained generally stable, as have fuel prices. The latter is important; North Korea has no domestic oil fields, so this price stability indicates that Chinese supplies to the DPRK are sufficient to fully meet the domestic demand for fuel.

Apparently, the Chinese leadership is ready to grant such “social welfare” to North Korea for a long time. Indeed, as long as the US-China strategic confrontation continues, China will need a buffer zone in the

22 Jieun Kim, “China Quietly Shipping Grain to North Korea, Port Sources Say,” *Radio Free Asia*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/food-06232020164802.html>; Jieun Kim, “Maritime Trade between North Korea and China Picks Up,” *Radio Free Asia*, December 15, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/maritime-12152021184450.html>.

23 Takeshi Kamiya and Yoshikazu Hirai, “China Bailout to North Korea: Massive Food and Fertilizer Aid | The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13897237>.

northern part of the Korean Peninsula. It has often been claimed that such support is burdensome. However, the present author would estimate the necessary level of support at \$1 ~ 2 billion USD per year, which is not a big deal for China, which can keep paying such money indefinitely. After all, the likely consequences of regime collapse in North Korea will cost China substantially more.

Some observers claim that North Korean leaders are unhappy about their exclusive and growing dependence on China. Indeed, the essence of North Korea's strategy for decades has been its unwillingness to "put all your eggs in one basket." The 1960 ~ 1990 situation indeed is ideal for North Korean diplomacy. At the time, North Korea skillfully used the Sino-Soviet conflict to obtain relatively generous aid from both Moscow and Beijing, who were in a state of intense conflict but gave little in return to either of its great power sponsors. Both Communist great powers provided aid to North Korea at the time because they needed its support - or at least neutrality - in their noisy quarrel. Indeed, North Korean diplomats normally prefer to deal with several rival and hence manipulable sponsors.²⁴

However, such an approach could not work at present, largely due to the existence of tough UN sanctions. No other major player that could theoretically be dragged by the North Koreans into their diplomatic game (the USA, South Korea, or Japan) is likely to openly violate UN sanctions, so China is irreplaceable for now. If North Korea is now forced to put up with dependence on China, this is the price they must pay to stay afloat, a price Pyongyang readily pays.

However, the scale and significance of this dependence should not be overestimated. Historical experience shows that North Korea is not going to obediently follow what its sponsors say on issues North Korean leaders perceive as vital for their own interests. This was the case in 1960 ~ 1990 when North Korea was dependent on the Soviet Union and China, even more so in the early 2000s when it depended on South Korea. Most

²⁴ Cheng Xiaohe, "The Evolution of Sino-North Korean Relations in the 1960s," *Asian Perspective*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2010): 173–99.

likely, its current dependence on China will also have clear limits.

North Korea can occasionally vote in the UN as suggested by China, especially on issues that do not directly affect North Korean interests. However, the experience teaches us that there will be no compromises on important issues, even if the sponsor blackmails Korea with reductions in economic aid. In the early 1960s, the Soviet Union significantly reduced its assistance to the DPRK in retaliation for Kim Il Sung's then pro-China stance. Predictably, it did not help; North Korea continued drifting toward China for a few more years. The North Korean leaders eventually changed their attitude to Mao's China and moved to a policy of equidistance, but they only did so when such a turn fitted their own perceived interests.²⁵ This time will hardly be different. If anything, North Koreans will be more reluctant to bow to Chinese pressure because they understand how important - nearly irreplaceable - they have become for China during the US-China Cold War 2.0.

The Impact of the New Chinese Stance on North Korean Domestic Policies

The new situation will significantly impact North Korea's domestic politics as North Korea will no longer need to engage in economic reforms. During 2012 ~ 2017, Kim Jong Un pursued a, generally successful, policy of economic reform largely emulating China of the 1980s. For a while, the North Korean economy grew rapidly and the lives of its population improved. However, unlike its Chinese prototype, the market-oriented economic reforms were not accompanied by political openness - that is, a dramatic increase of international contacts and a significant relaxation of domestic surveillance and control. In other words, Kim Jong Un's policies in 2012 ~ 2018 can be described as "reforms without openness."

²⁵ Bernd Schaefer, "North Korean 'Adventurism' and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972," *CWIHP Working Paper*, no. 44 (2004), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/north-korean-adventurism-and-chinas-long-shadow-1966-1972>.

This policy made sense at the time. To stay in power, Kim Jong Un needed to improve the economy. The per capita income gap between his realm and neighboring countries - especially South Korea - was huge and growing, and in spite of all efforts to keep his country isolated, dangerous knowledge of foreign - especially South Korean - prosperity was increasing. In the long run, it could become destabilizing, and Kim Jong Un understood that without economic improvements, his long-term survival prospects were uncertain.²⁶

Kim Jong Un and his advisers were also aware of China's tremendous success and understood the economy could be improved by implementing market-oriented economic reforms. Thus, they decided to introduce such reforms - largely copied from the Chinese experience of the 1980s - but were careful to limit these changes to economic issues. They choose to have Chinese-style economic reforms but not Chinese-style political openness. If anything, the country became even more closed to the outside world under Kim Jong Un's watch. Kim Jong Un and his advisers understood that pursuing a policy of openness in North Korea's peculiar case would be destabilizing. The masses should remain ignorant of South Korea's prosperity and sufficiently fearful of the authorities; otherwise, they would likely become uncontrollable.

The reforms worked. While foreign observers do not agree on the exact figures, they all admitted that the North Korean economy grew fast in 2012 ~ 2018. For example, even the Bank of Korea estimated the North Korean economic growth in 2016 at 3.9%, its highest level in decades.²⁷ Perhaps, it was even larger, since the Bank of Korea is known for systematically underestimating North Korean economic growth figures. This growth was uneven and favored Pyongyang and

26 Andrei Lankov, "Is Byungjin Policy Failing? Kim Jong Un's Unannounced Reform and Its Chances of Success," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2017): 25-45, <https://doi.org/10.22883/kjda.2017.29.1.002>; Dongho Jo, "Kim Jong Un's Economic Opening and Reform: Opportunities, Constraints and Prospects," *Global Asia*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2021), https://www.globalasia.org/v16no3/focus/kim-jong-uns-economic-opening-and-reform-opportunities-constraints-and-prospects_dongho-jo.

27 Kwang-t'ae Kim, "(2nd LD) N. Korea's Economy Grew 3.9 Pct in 2016: BOK," *Yonhap News*, July 21, 2017, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170721004652320>.

a handful of other urban centers far more than the countryside, but it was present.

However, in the post-2018 situation, the North Korean leadership saw no reason to continue their reforms. With the arrival of Chinese aid, the rationale for reforms evaporated. Even the most cautious economic reforms in the long run still pose a potential threat to political stability. Marketization inevitably increases the autonomy of both managers of state-owned enterprises and private entrepreneurs and reduces the population's dependence on state provisions. In the long run, this autonomy could pose a threat to the regime. From the point of view of status quo maintenance, it would be much better to keep the old system of central planning, state management, and rationing in operation, since such a system makes it much easier to keep the population under surveillance. This would have been impossible prior to 2018 since North Korean leaders could not afford to return to the grossly inefficient system of the state economy. However, everything changed with the arrival of Chinese aid.

North Korean leaders understand that thanks to the steady input of Chinese aid, they need not worry about prospects of mass starvation in their country or about the associated threats of riots and popular discontent; when North Korean agriculture falls short, shipments of Chinese cereals compensate for this deficiency. Chinese aid not only keeps the populace alive - even if occasionally malnourished - but also gives the government opportunities to reward the efforts of its bureaucrats and enforcers, increasing the pay of those whose job is to supervise the population and punish dissenters. With the populace less likely to be driven to desperation and enforcers well-rewarded for their zeal and loyalty, the survival chances of the regime increase significantly.

Thus, in the new system, the "reforms without openness" policy that just a few years ago looked like the only way to avoid systemic disintegration is no longer necessary. Therefore, there is little surprise that the North Korean press after 2018 has increasingly discussed the need to strengthen the leading role of the state and party - not only in industrial

production but also in retail trade and the service sector. As far as we know, some of the 2012 ~ 2018 reforms have been rolled back and there have been attempts to restore the rationing system.²⁸ All these efforts are aimed primarily at stabilizing the regime at the expense of economic efficiency, of course, but this does not look too dangerous with unconditional and long-term Chinese support.

Backed by China, the North Korean regime will exist more or less unchanged for a long time, which is what its leaders really want.

The North Korean Nuclear Program: Emerging Challenges

North Korea will continue working on its nuclear program. If anything, the sorry fate of Ukraine has further strengthened their determination to go and stay nuclear. Ukraine made a bad deal; when it signed the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, it agreed to surrender Soviet-era nuclear weapons in exchange for security promises from the US, the UK, and Russia.²⁹ Subsequent events demonstrate the real worth of these lofty promises and the lesson is not lost on North Korean decision-makers - like the earlier lessons of Iraq and especially Libya. For the North Korean elite, Ukraine is yet another country that was naïve to trust the promises of the great powers for which it eventually paid a high price.

However, the nuclear weapons of Russia have made Western

²⁸ Economist, "Kim Jong Un Rediscovered His Love of Central Planning," *The Economist*, accessed June 21, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2021/07/01/kim-jong-un-rediscovered-his-love-of-central-planning>; Peter Ward, "North Korea Continues to Claw Back Control from the Private Economy," *NK PRO*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.nknews.org/pro/north-korea-continues-to-claw-back-control-from-the-private-economy/>; Jeongmin Kim, "North Korean Cabinet Moves to Strengthen Pyongyang's Oversight over the Economy," *NK News*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.nknews.org/2020/02/at-its-first-2019-ple-nary-meeting-cabinet-emphasizes-its-leading-role-in-econ>.

²⁹ The Editorial Board, "Opinion | How Ukraine Was Betrayed in Budapest," *Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2022, sec. Opinion, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-ukraine-was-betrayed-in-budapest-russia-vladimir-putin-us-uk-volodymyr-zelensky-nuclear-weapons-11645657263>.

countries very cautious when dealing with the ongoing conflict. It is sometimes argued that the United States did not intervene in Ukraine because there was no formal alliance between Ukraine and the United States. However, the absence of a formal alliance did not prevent the United States from sending troops to protect/liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion back in 1991. Therefore, the fear of confrontation with a nuclear Russia certainly played a role this time.

Although North Korea's nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches are not met with enthusiasm in Beijing, China puts up with these North Korean activities. The value of North Korea as a buffer zone is too high and North Korean decision-makers will not heed China's advice anyway. Therefore, we will likely see North Korea successfully complete its tactical nuclear weapons acquisition program in due time - as well as a number of other military programs that were made public in January 2020 at the 8th Party Congress.

The new situation is highly favorable for the North Korean nuclear ambitions, both internationally and domestically.

In the current situation, one can be quite certain that neither China nor Russia will support additional UN Security Council sanctions targeting North Korea. As one could see in 2022, attempts to pass such a resolution by the UN Security Council were blocked by the Chinese and Russian representatives. They blamed the US for tensions in Korea and claimed that sanctions would make dialogue more difficult;³⁰ it could not be otherwise. While both China and Russia remain unhappy about North Korea's nuclear ambitions, the logic of their confrontation with the United States makes them support North Korea. Interestingly enough, this support might be reciprocated. In March 2022, North Korea became one of only five countries that - at the UN General Assembly meeting - opposed a resolution that condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine,

30 Edith Lederer, "China and Russia Defend North Korea Vetoes in First at UN," *Washington Post*, June 8, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/china-and-russia-defend-north-korea-vetoes-in-first-at-un/2022/06/08/fbaa0100-e75f-11ec-a422-11bbb91db30b_story.html.

Pyongyang's way of expressing thanks.³¹

After 15 years of UN sanctions, their efficiency is doubtful. This is not really surprising, since the world experience has demonstrated that sanctions seldom work.³² Nonetheless, sanctions definitely slowed down the North Korean nuclear program even though they were unable to either halt or reverse it. Now, North Koreans can be certain that no additional brakes will be added no matter what they do.

Domestically, the new situation also favors North Korea's nuclear and missile R&D. We could see in the days of massive famines in the late 1990s that the North Korean government was willing to continue its nuclear project even when the population faced extreme hardships. In those days of the Arduous March, they could not find money to buy food or fertilizer but still purchased equipment for their nuclear and missile programs.

However, it will now be unnecessary for North Korean decision-makers to go to such extremes. Money and food are fungible resources, so Chinese support for North Korea will mean that the North Korean government will need fewer resources to keep its population alive and its enforcers motivated: this important job is - to a large extent - taken over by the Chinese. Instead, the North Koreans can concentrate on their nuclear weapons and delivery systems programs.

Remarkably, the North Korean leaders have not made any secret of their intention this time. During the 8th Congress of the KWP, they presented a list of goals they wanted to achieve with regard to their nuclear and missile development. Thus far, they have thoroughly and systematically followed this wish list. One can be certain that in the near future, they will acquire most of what they included, such as tactical nuclear weapons, "hypersonic gliding flight warheads," and multiple-

31 Farnaz Fassihi, "The U.N. General Assembly Adopts a Strong Resolution Blaming Russia for Ukraine's Humanitarian Crisis," *The New York Times*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/24/world/europe/un-general-assembly-russia-ukraine.html>.

32 Richard Hanania, *Public Choice Theory and the Illusion of Grand Strategy: How Generals, Weapons Manufacturers, and Foreign Governments Shape American Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 119–40.

warhead ICBMs.³³

The development of tactical nuclear weapons in North Korea, one of the tasks declared at the 8th KWP Congress, can radically change the strategic situation on the Korean Peninsula; the program is specifically intended to change the balance.

At present, North Korea is close to creating a deployable ICBM capable of delivering nuclear warheads to the continental United States. The possession of such an ICBM, combined with the possession of tactical nuclear weapons, will create several security threats for the South.³⁴

One new challenge will be the re-emerging threat of a successful full-scale North Korean attack against the South. Such a scenario ceased to be considered seriously at some point around 1990. South Korea's military superiority, further strengthened by its alliance with the US, looked too overwhelming. However, the combination of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons, soon likely to be in the possession of Pyongyang leaders, makes the subjugation of the South theoretically possible again. The war in Ukraine - especially if it ends with victory for Putin's forces - might further embolden Pyongyang leaders' adventurism.

Of course, North Korean leaders hardly intend to start their "Southern expedition" right now. Nonetheless, their efforts to develop and perfect nuclear weapons and their recent official statements indicate that such a scenario is considered a possibility, to be carried out at some point in the relatively distant future, when the circumstances will favor such an undertaking.

Their possible plan consists of two stages. First, North Korea will use its strategic weapons to blackmail the United States to "decouple" the US from the ROK. Most likely, North Korea will declare that the instigating

33 Ankit Panda, "Party Congress: Kim Jong Un's Weapons Wishlist Suggests Testing Campaign Ahead," *NK PRO*, January 10, 2021, <https://www.nknews.org/pro/party-congress-kim-jong-uns-weapons-wishlist-suggests-future-nuclear-tests>.

34 Ankit Panda, "North Korea's Tactical Nuclear Plans Are a Dangerous Proposition," *Foreign Policy (blog)* (April 28, 2022), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/28/north-korea-tactical-nuclear-plans-dangerous-proposition>.

conflict on the Korean Peninsula is an internal Korean affair so Pyongyang will respond to US attempts to militarily intervene by striking American cities with nuclear-armed ICBMs. If there is a weak and/or isolationist-minded US president at the time of the crisis, such blackmail may be successful. The US-South Korean alliance was concluded in 1954, when no one considered the possibility of North Korea being in possession of nuclear weapons and delivery systems. It was then implicitly assumed that in the event of conflict, the US would risk the lives of its soldiers but the vast majority of US citizens would remain safe. With the emergence of the ICBM and nuclear warheads in North Korea, one cannot help but wonder whether the US president would be ready to risk San Francisco and New York to save Seoul.

Once decoupling is achieved, it will be time to start operations against the South; that is, to move to Stage 2. The tactical nuclear weapons will give the North a decisive advantage. Despite South Korea's recent military buildup, its high-tech conventional weapons are no match for North Korea's primitive yet nuclear system. A military defeat (or surrender) of the South is possible and even probable if tactical nuclear weapons are actually used - even a credible threat might do the trick.

It is not incidental that in April 2022, both Kim Yo Jong and then Kim Jong Un himself - with rare frankness - on two separate cases stated that North Korean nuclear weapons could be used on the Korean Peninsula and against ROK armed forces.³⁵ Their remarks remained largely unnoticed but the North Korean leaders themselves debunked a curious illusion - remarkably popular among the South Korean left (or "progressives") - that North Korea would never use nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula against their South Korean "brethren." Now, the two top North Korean leaders clearly and unequivocally confirmed that this is not so.

35 NBC. "North Korea Says It Will Strike South with Nuclear Weapons If Attacked," *NBC News*, accessed June 21, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/north-korea-says-will-strike-south-nuclear-weapons-attacked-rcna22956>.

Conclusion: What Can (and Should) South Korea Do?

North Korea now has no incentives to improve its relations with Seoul and South Korea has little if any leverage to influence Pyongyang's behavior. This situation arose largely - but not exclusively - due to the US-China rivalry. For the first time in decades, the South has neither carrot nor stick to deal with the North.

When it comes to North-South relations, in spite of lofty "unification" and "national brotherhood" rhetoric, Seoul has been perceived by the North Korean leadership primarily as a source of financial and material assistance since around 2000 - at least when the progressive parties were in power. Even in cases where the North Korean leadership agreed to take part in humanitarian or cultural activities - such as meetings between divided families or musical concerts - the main motivation behind their decision were hopes to get more money or material assistance from the rich - and sometimes generous - South. Indeed, the "humanitarian" and "cultural" activities were seldom independent; on the contrary, they usually constituted a de facto part of a larger package that included aid or heavily subsidized "trade." For North Korea, the South is, above all, an ATM.

However, North Korea cannot hope to get such assistance at present as the existing system of sanctions makes it almost impossible to deliver material goods to North Korea. Even when the South Korean administration wants to send aid to the North or make investments there, this cannot be done due to UN Security Council resolutions that clearly and explicitly ban such activities. An exception is made for food and some humanitarian aid North Korea does not particularly need now, since such items are delivered by China. Therefore, from Pyongyang's point of view, relations with Seoul have lost their former significance, at least for the time being. South Korea cannot perform its ATM function properly; it cannot deliver banknotes and thus should be ignored.

Therefore, the South can neither reward nor put additional pressure on North Korea. Russia and China are determined to block the UN Security

Council resolutions, making it impossible to introduce additional sanctions. There is no reason to believe that the position of Moscow and Beijing will change and without unity of the UN Security Council, this institution is useless.

The imposition of unilateral sanctions by South Korea, the United States, and other countries will have little impact on North Korea. Such sanctions are largely symbolic since North Korea does not currently conduct meaningful trade with any of the countries in the Western bloc. The same is applicable to the South Korean unilateral sanctions: how can North Korea be sanctioned by the South if the two parties have virtually no interaction? Thus, unilateral sanctions might sell well to the domestic audience but their efficiency is very low if it exists at all.

Neither should one pin too much hope on diplomatic efforts. China has long become the key to dealing with North Korea, but it is now decisively uncooperative. Efforts to change Beijing's position might be undertaken but are doomed to be unsuccessful. In the new world, created by the revival of the bloc rivalry, North Korea is too valuable to China. It does not help that South Korea will necessarily drift toward an even closer alliance with the US, perhaps limiting its economic interaction with and technology transfers to China - actions that will further annoy Beijing and make it even less willing to cooperate.

This drift toward even closer relations with the US is unavoidable; not only because of ideological unity and pro-American sentiments among the Seoul elite but due to strategic calculations. In the long run, South Korea will face challenges created by the growth of North Korea's nuclear program, which changes its nature from defensive to potentially aggressive. The need to counter such threats is real and will likely grow in the immediate future.

One should expect a serious intensification of talks about South Korean nuclear weapons. In fact, such conversations are being conducted with great intensity. However, after analyzing the general situation in and around Korea, one can only conclude that the dreams of a South Korean nuclear weapon will remain dreams. Korea, being a democratic country

too dependent on foreign trade, cannot afford to develop nuclear weapons in defiance of the international community and there are slim chances that such an undertaking would be approved by the major international players.

This leaves only one option, namely further strengthening the ROK-US alliance. Of course, the alliance has flaws. Above all, there are doubts about the strength and reliability of the American commitment; indeed, nobody can guarantee that the US president will be ready to get into conflict with an opponent who has both nuclear warheads and ICBMs. An alliance also has a price, such as the need to follow the US line even when it contradicts South Korea's own interests (like leaving the lucrative Chinese market because that is what Washington wants). However, compromises are unavoidable in tough times when many old certainties have gone.

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The Yoon Suk-yeol Administration and China-South Korea Relations: A Chinese Perspective

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Abstract

The world is undergoing epochal changes, a process compounded by the global pandemic, intensifying U.S.-China rivalry, and raging Russo-Ukrainian conflict. As close neighbors, China and South Korea are economically complementary and culturally similar. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of China-South Korea diplomatic relations, ties that have grown from complete estrangement to interdependence and common development. The bilateral relationship is a template for developing a new type of state-to-state relations, as well significant challenges and disagreements still exist. For South Korea, the Yoon Suk-yeol administration's foreign policy is driven by the intensifying China-U.S. rivalry, North Korea's recent missile tests, and Seoul's perceptions of its national strength and international role. This article offers a Chinese perspective on President Yoon's possible policy changes, the status quo of the Beijing-Seoul relationship, its challenges, and prospects.

Key Words: China-South Korea relations, strategic and cooperative partnership, Korean Peninsula

With the persistent Covid-19 pandemic, the raging Russo-Ukrainian war, and profound changes unseen in a century, today's world has entered a new era marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (a VUCA era). A new administration was inaugurated in South Korea on May 10, 2022, promising to make significant policy changes. The Yoon Suk-yeol administration's foreign policy is driven by the intensifying China-U.S. rivalry, North Korea's recent missile tests, and Seoul's perceptions of its national strength and international role. This article offers a Chinese perspective on President Yoon's possible policy changes, the status quo of the Beijing-Seoul relationship, its challenges, and prospects.

China Policy Shift

Foreign policy is about a sovereign state's planning and execution of a blueprint on how to advance national interests based on an accurate understanding of its strategic environment and comprehensive national strength. Amid shifting international and domestic landscapes, the new president has to adjust its China policy as part of a broader foreign policy shift to better serve the nation's strategic and security interests.

Context for Changes: International and Domestic

Growing China-U.S. competition. The Biden administration has maintained elements of President Trump's economic policy, accelerating global supply chain reshuffles and seeking to decouple from China. On the other hand, the Biden White House emphasizes the ideological dimension of China-U.S. rivalry, framing growing tensions as part of a broader contest between democracy and autocracy. Washington is seeking to mend relations with allies and partners, in particular those in the Indo-Pacific region, to form a democratic as a military and ideological counterweight to Beijing's growing reach in the region. A new cold war

is looming over the Korean Peninsula, hampering regional efforts to reduce tensions arising over Pyongyang's missile tests, making Northeast Asia another arena of great power contest.

Two years into the global pandemic, more than 500 million people have been infected and over six million have lost their lives. Casualties of the virus also include stalled global trade and travel, disrupted supply chains,¹ widening gap between the Global South and developed nations, and the growing digital divide.

Russia's special military operation that began on February 24 is also creating ripple effect across the world. The largest war on the European continent since 1945 is pitting a resentful Russia against a revived NATO that has found a renewed sense of mission after years of flat defense budgets. The conflict is causing worldwide energy and food crises and spreading to the Korean Peninsula due to changes in the international situation.²

Pyongyang's growing military capabilities, its expanding missile and nuclear arsenals, are cause for concern for the whole world. It has conducted 18 tests by far this year, including with intercontinental, submarine-launched, and hypersonic missiles. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has taught Pyongyang that nuclear weapons are indispensable for national security. Seoul's diplomatic efforts during the Moon Jae-in administration focused on improving inter-Korean relations have yielded little significant progress. Sustained international sanctions, recent Covid-19 outbreaks, and hungers and floods have only exacerbated Pyongyang's economic woes, leading to stalled denuclearization negotiations, frosty South-North relations, and Pyongyang's further self-isolation.³

With the inauguration of a new administration come Seoul's

1 Wand Xiaoke and Wand Yuting, "The Development Condition and Prospect of China-ROK Economic Relations under the Impact of the Epidemic," *Contemporary Korea*, no. 4 (2021): 24.

2 Jae-hung Chung, "The Yoon Suk-yeol Administration's China Policy: Challenges and Tasks," *Current Issues & Policies*, no. 19 (April 2022), <https://sejong.org/web/boad/22/egoread.php?bd=23&itm=&txt=&pg=2&seq=6464>.

3 South Korean Think Tank: "The New Government Should First Resolve Domestic Conflicts over North Korea Policy," *Yonhap News*, March 31, 2022, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://cn.yna.co.kr/view/ACK20220331002800881>.

changed perception of national interests and international roles as well as a new president's preferences and predilection.

A sovereign nation's interests are usually about survival, unity, security, and prosperity. Some scholars have recently suggested that if past pursuit of national interests is mainly about economic advancement, such as more trade, investment, and tourists, in the future South Korea should make greater efforts in elevating its national prestige, reputation, and image on the world stage.⁴

Seoul's rising international stature is raising its ambitions to play a more prominent role in regional and global affairs. It overtook Russia as one of the world's 10 largest economic powerhouses⁵ with a gross domestic production of 1.6 trillion dollars in 2020, making it an increasingly important player in international bodies like the United Nations, World Trade Organization, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, East Asia Summit, ASEAN plus Three, and Group of Twenty. South Korea was labeled an advanced industrialized country at the 68th session of the Trade and Development Board of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in July 2021, a recognition of its success story - the only country transforming from a developing nation into an advanced economy - in the seven decades since the end of the Second World War. A growing proportion of South Koreans now support Seoul to assume a larger international role commensurate with its newfound economic and military strength. One of the six goals of the Yoon administration is building a global pivotal state that contributes to freedom, peace, and prosperity.

South Korea adopts a presidential system of government, with the president exercising the functions of head of state and head of

4 South Korea's 'Strategic Ambiguity' Is Coming to an End," *The Korea JoongAng Daily*, November 2, 2021, accessed May 3, 2022, <http://chinese.joins.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=103510>.

5 "Full Text of President Moon Jae-in's Address on Korea's 76th Liberation Day," *Yonhap News*, August 15, 2021, accessed March 29, 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20210815003000315>.

government. The alliance with the United States has been the foundation of South Korea's foreign relations for decades, though progressive and conservative presidents may approach it with slight differences.⁶ On the other hand, the president's political will and competence, foreign policy orientation and leadership, the lineup of his national security team also exert significant impact on Seoul's foreign relations. A prosecutor turned president with no prior congressional or foreign policy experience, Mr. Yoon is deemed a political layman, the "Donald Trump of South Korea" and "Zelensky of Asia." But his circle of advisers are all professional experts who have studied in the United States and served under President Lee Myung-bak, which will reduce the uncertainty⁷ in Mr. Yoon's foreign policy.

President Yoon's China Policy Outlook

New Administration, New Conception

In an article⁸ published in *Foreign Affairs* in the leadup to the general election, Mr. Yoon laid out his vision of South Korea as a more confident and proactive pivotal state with a focus on promoting freedom, peace, and prosperity based on Seoul's liberal democratic values and – crucially – cooperation. To achieve that, he emphasized the importance of the "Global Comprehensive Strategic Alliance" between Washington and Seoul, closer security coordination between Japan, South Korea, and the United States, and the advancement of Beijing-Seoul relations based on mutual respect with a view to the verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Peninsula.

As President Yoon sees it, the Washington-Seoul alliance is the

⁶ Hee-ok Lee, "A List of the Main Points of Contention in South Korea-China Relations in Sino-US Relations," *Sungkyun China Observer*, vol. 32 (October 15, 2020).

⁷ "Yoon Suk-yeol's Diplomatic Keywords: The ROK-US Alliance 'Unshakable,' the ROK-China 'Mutual Respect'," *The Korea JoongAng Daily*, March 14, 2022, accessed May 30, 2022, <http://chinese.joins.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=105462>.

⁸ Suk-yeol Yoon, "South Korea Needs to Step Up," *Foreign Affairs* (February 8, 2022), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-korea/2022-02-08/south-korea-needs-step>.

bedrock of South Korea's foreign relations, including its ties with China. There will be no compromise or concession in matters that concern Seoul's core values and interests. Even as it seeks more substantial cooperation with Beijing in areas where their interests overlap, Seoul views addressing the military and economic threats posed by a rising China as its top foreign policy priority.

China Policy Shift

Adopting an "Anything but Moon Jae-in" approach, the Yoon administration accuses his predecessor of being too accommodative toward Beijing and Pyongyang, vowing to retool its complex relationship with Beijing. President Yoon is seeking to revive and elevate Seoul's relations with Washington by abandoning the past policy of strategic ambiguity. Seoul will try to reorient and strengthen the US-ROK cooperation on China-related issues with a principles-based framework toward "a resilient Asia."⁹

President Yoon will seek to increase high-level communication with Chinese leaders by regularizing and institutionalizing exchange of presidential visits and strategic dialogue to promote substantive cooperation, build mutual trust, and forge a bilateral relationship based on respect and coordination.

Economic issues are important to both countries, and it is not unilateral. It is unquestionable that the two countries cannot neglect or ignore one another.¹⁰ Even as it pursues closer economic ties with its largest trading partner, South Korea will make serious efforts to reduce over-reliance on Beijing by reshuffling its industrial, supply, and logistical chains with China.

Acting on the principle of pragmatism, South Korea will seek to

⁹ Yonho Kim, *US-ROK Strategic Communication: Track II Dialogue on the US-China Strategic Rivalry and the US-ROK Alliance* (Institute of Korean Studies, the George Washington University, May 2022), 1.

¹⁰ Min Joo Kim, "Interview with South Korea's Next President, Yoon Suk-yeol," *Washington Post*, April 14, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/14/south-korea-president-yoon-transcript/>.

maximize its national interests by expanding cooperation with China in areas such as public health, climate change, green development, and cultural exchange.

Even as it acknowledges Beijing's unique and constructive role in Peninsula affairs, Seoul will not overrate China's role in Pyongyang's denuclearization and pin hope solely on Beijing's persuasive power over North Korea. Consistent with President Lee Myung-bak's "Vision 3000: Denuclearization and Openness," President Yoon's insistence on "denuclearization before normalization" focuses on coercive diplomacy toward Pyongyang that involves restoring joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises and stepping up crippling sanctions, a stark contrast to Beijing's "double freeze" proposal.

In pursuit of a higher profile in regional and global affairs, President Yoon will try to assuage Beijing's mounting concern over Seoul's participation in cooperation under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue framework on such issue as vaccine development and distribution, climate mitigation, and new technologies. At the same time, President Yoon will not shy away from asserting Seoul's biding interest in a "free and open Indo-Pacific,"¹¹ and policy positions on a number of issue concerning Beijing's core interests, for example, the South China Sea and cross-strait relations, even as he will try his best not to stoke unnecessary tensions.

On the sensitive issue of THAAD deployment, the new administration plans to purchase and deploy additional THAAD systems with its own budget, abandon the so-called "three-no" stance of October 2017 (i.e., no additional deployment of THAAD, not joining the U.S.-led missile-defense system, and no upgrading of Korea-U.S.-Japan security cooperation to a military alliance), and explore with Washington how to respond to possible Chinese retaliations.

¹¹ Sue Mi Terry, "Two Presidents, One Agenda: A Blueprint for South Korea and the United States to Address the Challenges of the 2020s and Beyond" (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Hyundai Motor-Korea Foundation Center for Korean History and Public Policy Program, May 2022), 3.

In sum, reciprocity, respect, and interests are the three best watchwords for the Yoon administration's China policy.

China-South Korea Relations: Where Are We Now?

State of Affairs

Since diplomatic relations were established between China and the Republic of Korea on August 24, 1992, ties between Beijing and Seoul have been growing steadily in depth and breadth, as proven by the terms used to describe the upward evolution of the bilateral relationship, from “friendly cooperative relations” in 1994 and “a cooperative partnership facing the 21st century” in 1998 to “comprehensive cooperative partnership” in 2003 and “strategic cooperative partnership” in 2008. Now the task ahead is how to advance this strategic partnership with real and substantive actions.

1) Politics. Leaders of the two countries have maintained regular communications through exchange of visits and meetings at multilateral forums to increase mutual understanding and reduce distrust. During the pandemic, President Xi and President Moon talked by phone in February and May 2020 and January 2021. President Xi sent his congratulations immediately after Mr. Yoon won the election on March 10, 2022, and the two had a phone conversation on March 25, the first ever talks between a Chinese president and a South Korean president-elect.¹² Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan was dispatched to South Korea as Mr. Xi's special envoy to attend President Yoon's inauguration. Regular interactions between top leaders are expected to provide steady guidance for the bilateral relationship amid a shifting international landscape.

¹² “What Signal Does the Call Mean between the Chinese Leader and the South Korean President-elect?” *Global Times*, March 25, 2022.

2) Economics. The China-South Korea economic scorecard has been impressive over the years. Beijing is Seoul's largest trading partner, export market, source of imports, and second-largest investor, while Seoul is Beijing's third-largest trading partner and second-largest investor.¹³ Bilateral trade volume has exceeded 300 billion dollars with more than 10 million people traveling between the two countries and cumulative investment approaching 100 billion dollars.¹⁴ By the end of 2020, South Korea's trade with China was larger than its trade with America and Japan combined. In 2010, South Korea's market share in China was 10 percent and stood at 8.4 percent in 2020.¹⁵ At their height, South Korean companies had nearly 50 thousand business operations in China, compared with today's 37 thousand.¹⁶ Fast-growing economic ties and increasing numbers of tourists are the ballast of the bilateral relationship.¹⁷

3) Military and Security. Military exchange and security cooperation between Beijing and Seoul started relatively late. Before tensions arose over THAAD deployment, the two sides had already established a high-level military exchange mechanism, agreeing to maintain regular communication and cooperation on port calls, cadet exchanges, disaster rescue, antiterrorism, and UN peacekeeping operations. Of special significance, since 2014, as proposed by the South Korean military, remains of Chinese soldiers killed in the Korean War have been returned to the Chinese side. Each handover ceremony since then has been a testament to the growing bilateral ties.

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, accessed May 15, 2022, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_676524/sbgx_676528.

¹⁴ "Wang Yi Holds Talks with ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong," *The Paper* (September 15, 2021), http://www-thepaper-cn-s.vpn.sdu.edu.cn/newsDetail_forward_14513178.

¹⁵ Hee-ok Lee, "How to Build a New Type of Relationship between South Korea and China in 2022," *Sungkyun China Observer*, vol. 37 (January 15, 2022).

¹⁶ Ning Fukui, "South Korea's Economy and Its Response in COVID-19 Epidemic and Prospects for Key Areas of China-South Korea Economic and Trade Cooperation," *Dongjiang Journal*, no. 1 (2022): 38.

¹⁷ Yunling Zhang, "The Way of Coexistence between China and South Korea in the New Era," *World Knowledge*, no. 8 (2020): 72.

4) Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges. People-to-people exchanges have been growing steadily, from 130 thousand people traveling between the two countries' shores in 1992 to more than 10 million by the end of 2019. There are now 1,000 flights each week between the two countries, and the Chinese accounted for 35 percent of all foreign visitors to South Korea in 2019.¹⁸ 194 pairs of sister cities have been established and friendship organizations include the China-Republic of Korea Friendship Association, Korea-China Friendship Association, Korea-China Cultural Association, 21st century Korea-China Exchange Associations, and Korea-China Culture and Friendship Association. About 500 thousand South Koreans are living in China and major Chinese cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Qingdao all have Korea Towns.

5) Regional and Global Affairs. Beijing and Seoul keep regular contact and hold similar policy positions on a number of major regional and global challenges, such as denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, UN reforms, opposition to trade protectionism, international financial reforms, climate mitigation, and regional peace and stability. Besides, Beijing and Seoul have also maintained policy coordination in many international bodies, like the United Nations, APEC, Asia-Europe Meeting, ASEAN Plus Three, and ASEAN Regional Forum.

Challenges

There is a rich body of literature on the multiple challenges facing China-South Korea relations. Chinese scholar Zhang Yunling argues that there are three constraints hampering the efforts to improve the bilateral relationship: U.S. policy and China-U.S. relations, Beijing-Pyongyang relations and inter-Korean ties, and South Korea's domestic politics.¹⁹ Zhang Huizhi thinks that China-South Korea relations are centered

¹⁸ Ha-sung Jang, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to China, "Ambassador's Speech," accessed May 15, 2022, https://overseas.mofa.go.kr/cn-zh/wpge/m_1223/contents.do.

¹⁹ Zhang, "The Way of Coexistence": 72.

around four major issues, North Korea, historical perceptions, trade disputes, and maritime interests and rights.²⁰ Liang Yabin believes that China-South Korea discord arises mainly over trade friction, historical and cultural disagreements, fishery, and maritime dispute over Suyan Islet/Socotra Rock.²¹

Professor Chung Jae-ho of Seoul National University lays out eight major challenges, i.e., historical disputes, trade and economics, norms and values, North Korea, U.S.-South Korea alliance, maritime disputes, Korean Peninsula unification, and mutual strategic perceptions.²² Professor Lee Hee-ok of Sungkyunkwan University argues that China-South Korea disputes arise over institutions and ideas, core interests, means of settling North Korean nuclear crisis, U.S.-ROK alliance, South China Sea, and multilateral issues.²³

Generally speaking, China-ROK relations face challenges in the following seven areas, namely, different policies toward North Korea, including denuclearization, perceptions of U.S.-ROK alliance, trade frictions (dumping), historical dispute over the Goguryeo Kingdom, maritime disputes over Suyan Islet/Socotra Rock and Jiandao/Gando, different political systems and social values, and China's policy toward peninsula unification.

To further improve China-ROK relations, outstanding issues in all the seven areas must be addressed or mitigated.

1) North Korea and its nuclear program. As Seoul sees it, Beijing has always sided with Pyongyang no matter what the latter do. Even after Pyongyang continued its missile and nuclear tests in violation of UNSC resolutions, Beijing was still unwilling to abandon it even though

20 Huizhi Zhang and Xiaoke Wang, "Twenty Years of Sino-Korea Relations: Achievements and Problems," *Contemporary International Relations*, no. 1 (2013): 21.

21 Yabin Liang, "The 30th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and South Korea: Current Status, Problems and Future," *Asia-Pacific: Security and Maritime Affairs*, no. 2 (2022): 103-5.

22 Jae-ho Chung, "New Analysis on ROK-China Strategic Cooperative Partnership," *Northeast Asia Forum*, no. 6 (2013): 36-41.

23 Lee, "A List of the Main Points of Contention in South Korea-China Relations in Sino-US Relations."

it had agreed to tougher international sanctions that had never been enforced strictly by China.

2) Washington-Seoul alliance. Seoul thinks that China's attitude toward the security alliance has been contradictory. Beijing said nothing about it when diplomatic ties were established in 1992, but has repeatedly expressed concerns or even objections to closer military coordination between Washington and Seoul in recent years. Seoul complains that Beijing has deliberately exaggerated the threat posed by THAAD and imposed ill-justified economic sanctions over Seoul's legitimate security concerns.

3) Trade and Economics. Since 1992, South Korea has mostly run trade surplus with China. But whenever deficit occurred, South Korean investment in China would decline, leading to trade disputes. Concern and criticism regarding economic over-dependence on China have also mounted in recent years. When the trade relationship between the two countries turn from complementary to competitive, trade friction will also increase.

4) Unresolved Goguryeo controversy. Even though China and South Korea shelved the issue through an oral agreement, assigning scholars to settle the dispute, historical controversies in Northeast Asia have always been the most contentious issues and could give rise to virulent nationalism if they are not handled properly.

5) Maritime dispute. Territorial integrity is deemed a core interest of China. As its maritime awareness grows, Beijing attaches greater importance to the protection of not only its legitimate maritime rights and interests but also legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens living abroad. In this context, disputes over Suyan Islet/Socotra Rock and fishery in Western Sea have increased.

6) Different values. As Seoul sees it, many concepts, initiatives, visions promoted by Beijing since President Xi took office, such as a new type of major power relations, a community with a shared future for mankind, Belt and Road Initiative, all aim at popularizing international norms, rules, and standards with Chinese characteristics and establishing

a political and economic model very different from the Western model based on universal values. Seoul cherishes its own development model that emphasizes economic growth and political liberalization, and views and approaches such issues as human rights, democratization, and disarmament very differently from Beijing.

7) South-North unification. Beijing has openly declared its support for a unification process in an autonomous, independent, and peaceful manner. But Seoul thinks that a South-led unification process is more realistic and likely, a process Beijing has yet to endorse.

Any of the above outstanding issue may trigger or exacerbate bilateral tensions, sending shock waves throughout the region.

China's Perceptions

Misperceptions between China and South Korea deserve close attention as judgments and calculations made from different perspectives have sometimes created tensions and crises.

1) History. Thousands of years versus fifty years. Chinese people's self-perceptions and worldviews are rooted in their historical sense of a nation at the center of a tributary system and a Confucian cultural sphere. In this system and sphere, nations on the Korean Peninsula were once viewed as vassal states.²⁴ These perceptions of its neighborhood sometimes contribute to China's sense of superiority and condescending attitude toward the Peninsula. South Korea's economic and political performance over the past half century have been impressive, from its economic takeoff in the 1960s to political liberalization in the 1980s to the accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1996, joining the ranks of advanced economies. But as some in China see it, South Korea has only been ahead of China in the past 50 years, and in 2020, China had overtaken South Korea by a wide

²⁴ John King Fairbank Editor, *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); J. K. Fairbank and S. Y. Teng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 6 (1941): 135.

margin in terms of total GDP, trade volume, and investment growth rate.²⁵

2) Geography. Land power versus sea power. Located at the center of Northeast Asia, the Korean Peninsula is like a springboard²⁶ to the Sea of Japan where land powers meet sea powers. It is foreign forces' entry point into the Asian landmass and a beachhead of defense against maritime powers' interference, a region with particular strategic value and a pivotal site of geopolitical contest since ancient times, according to Nicholas J. Spykman's rimland theory. But due to the longstanding separation and estrangement between the South and North, Seoul strategically feels like an isolated island.

3) International status. South Korea has become the world's tenth-largest economy, fifth-largest trading power in goods, and the sixth military power. On the other hand, South Korea faces China's Jiaodong peninsular across the Yellow Sea, faces Russia to its north, and Japan to the east. In addition, the United States is also an influential player in the region. Seoul is like a shrimp surrounded by four whales. Moreover, it relies on the United States for its security as wartime military command authority resides with Washington rather than Seoul. Psychologically and militarily, South Korea has never been recognized as a great power on the world stage.²⁷

4) Political culture. Chinese leaders usually talk in terms of hundred years, emphasizing coherence and consistency of its major domestic and foreign policies. South Korean politics turn on elections, five-year turnover of the executive branch, and four years for congress. Occupants of the Blue House, whether progressive or conservative, usually prefer short-term and visible policy outcomes without giving much consideration

25 Kyung-mi Kim, "It Has Been 29 Years Since China and South Korea Established Diplomatic Relations, China's GDP Has Exceeded South Korea's 14 Times," *The Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 23, 2021, accessed May 20, 2022, <http://chinese.joins.com/news/article-View.html?idxno=102493>.

26 Fengjun Chen, *Asia-Pacific International Relations after the Cold War* (Xinhua Press, 1993), 48.

27 Xiangrong Dong, "How Cognitive Biases Affect South Korea's Diplomacy," *Global Times*, May 23, 2022.

to their legacies. Domestic and foreign policies therefore lack consistency. To curry favor with voters, presidential candidates may resort to extreme rhetoric and grandiose promises that are difficult to fulfill but harmful to foreign relations.

5) Third-party influence. In the eyes of the Chinese, North Koreans are our brothers and comrades and the Beijing-Pyongyang relationship was forged in blood. The two countries have maintained special and deep bonds between their governments, ruling parties, and citizens. In contrast, Beijing and Seoul had remained long estranged from each other for nearly half a century. Before the establishment of diplomatic relations, Beijing and Seoul viewed each other suspiciously as the result of the Korea War and the two countries shared little in common in terms of ideology, political system, and social values. As Beijing sees it, Seoul is the last East Asian country to establish diplomatic ties with China and for long the Chinese viewed its eastern neighbor as a subservient U.S. ally plagued by erratic autocratic rule, student movements, and mass protests, a vassal state and a pawn in Washington's strategy to strangle China in its early days. In those hostile times, Beijing resolutely sided with Pyongyang. The Washington-Seoul alliance is one of the world's most well-established military alliances, with a robust legal and institutional architecture and a full-fledged command and control system, and now "the two Presidents reaffirm their commitments to a global comprehensive strategic alliance firmly rooted in the shared values of promoting democracy and the rules-based international order, fighting corruption, and advancing human rights."²⁸ Dr. Brzezinski referred to South Korea as one of the five geopolitically pivotal state in his masterpiece *The Grand Chessboard*.²⁹ Even as it tilts toward Washington on security matters, Seoul is also hedging its bet by forging closer economic ties

²⁸ "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement" (May 21, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/21/united-states-republic-of-korea-leaders-joint-statement/>.

²⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primary and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 19.

with China, to the effect of “straddling two boats.” “Now and for the foreseeable future, China is not emerging as a strategic alternative to the United States for South Korea; South Korea’s alliance with the United States is not replaceable with a strategic partnership with China.”³⁰

6) Culture. China’s Confucianism has a profound influence on Korean culture. China and South Korea share many traditions, customs, and social ethics. In South Korea, social mores include respecting the elderly and loving children, filial piety, benevolence, etiquette, and frugality. Festivals like Lunar New Year, Dragon Boat Day, and Mid-Autumn Day are also celebrated in South Korea. Many cultural elements and social beliefs that had been renounced during China’s Cultural Revolution have been preserved and carried forward in South Korea.³¹ But occasionally disputes may arise over cultural relics like Gangneung Danoje festival and Korean Costumes during the Beijing Winter Olympic Games.

7) Psychology. Siege Mentality versus Small-nation Complex. Historical grievances, continued North-South separation, and U.S. military presence have a deep impact on South Korean national psyche. Pyongyang’s advancing nuclear and missile programs have also reinforced South Koreans’ apocalyptic views of the crisis. Moreover, China’s rising power and influence have further increased Seoul’s strategic anxiety. Some are concerned that the new superpower will one day dominate South Korea sooner or later, as it once did. Some are even openly discuss reverting to Siege Mentality it once practiced in much of its history.³²

8) Public opinion. Patriotism versus nationalism. Foreign policy is not immune to public opinion and public mood sometimes direct policy making.³³ For now, populism seems a safe bet for South Korean

30 Ji-young Lee, “The Geopolitics of South Korea-China Relations, Implications for U.S. Policy in the Indo-Pacific,” *Perspective, Expert Insights on a Timely Policy Issue* (RAND Corporation, November 2020), 17.

31 The former Korean Ambassador to China H. E. Kim Ha-joong, “Ten Years of ROK-China Relations and Prospects,” *Contemporary International Relations*, no. 3 (2003): 2.

32 Zhang, “The Way of Coexistence”: 72.

33 Sung-lac Wi (The former Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs and former Ambassador to Russia), *Upgrading Our Diplomacy* (21 Century Books, 2020).

politicians. Thanks to the pandemic, in-person meetings are replaced by virtual ones, making disinformation easier to spread, especially among younger generations of the two countries. Young Chinese grew up in a China devoted to reform and opening-up and free from ideological debates. They are witnesses to the nation's rise to great power status and instilled with exuberant national pride and honor. Born after military rule and political democratization, younger generations in South Korea tend to be self-centered, subjective, and susceptible to media influence. Mutual suspicion between the young people of the two countries has increased in recent years.

Mutual perceptions during the Moon Jae-in administration persist. As China sees it, President Moon did not dismantle the THAAD system as he promised on the campaign trail and therefore was not trustworthy. Restrictive measures against South Korea will stay in place as long as THAAD remains. President Moon believed that he had risked his political popularity to preserve the relationship with Beijing. In contrast with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's visit to China, President Moon felt he was given the cold shoulder in China. And during the Moon administration, Chinese President Xi Jinping had never visited South Korea.

Beijing believes that instead of approaching the bilateral relationship as a strategic, cooperative partnership. Given Beijing's significant influence with Pyongyang, Seoul has to seek Beijing's assistance and support in some aspects of inter-Korean diplomacy at some time. But whenever it can, Beijing's views and voices were ignored, as it happened during the inter-Korea summits, Trump-Kim meetings, and Trump-Kim-Moon meeting at Panmunjom. Had the Moon administration invited Chinese leaders to the meetings for discussions of replacing ceasefire arrangements with a long-term peace settlement, today's Korean Peninsula might have looked very different.

All the above are the challenges that the Yoon administration has to address in years to come. For whatever disputes and disagreement that exist between the two countries, China offers extraordinary

economic opportunities with its vast markets, well-connected transport networks, rich resources, and human capital. China has a unique to play in diplomacy and security affairs. South Korea is directly influenced by China, and the “fate of the Korean Peninsula” is intertwined with China, adding more importance to the bilateral relationship.³⁴ Of course, President Yoon’s pro-Washington posture since taking office do not necessarily portend anti-Beijing policies in the future. More likely, what we may expect is a new administration that is less deferential and accommodative to China’s preferences and a new president who will seek a more equal and reciprocal relationship with Beijing.

Outlook and Recommendations

Structural problems between China and South Korea defy easy, short-term solutions; they require putting oneself in the other’s shoes. Some other issues arise from the changing global landscape and shifting regional dynamics, calling for clear-eyed assessments and judicious actions on the part of both countries. Still others result from leaders’ decisions and moves, requiring serious attention from top policymakers and constant multilevel and multi-channel communication.

China’s has always approached its relations with South Korea from a strategic perspective. As early as 2014 when President Xi Jinping visited Seoul, he proposed to build a China-ROK partnership that makes new contributions to common development, regional peace, Asian revival, and world prosperity.³⁵

In his congratulatory phone call with President-elect Yoon on March 25, 2022, President Xi said that “China and South Korea are permanent

34 Byung Kwang Park, “President-Elect Yoon Suk-yeol’s China Policy and Changes in South Korea-China Relations,” *Issue Brief*, vol. 38, no. 11 (2022), https://www.inss.re.kr/en/publications/bbs/ib_en_view.do?nttId=410369&bbsId=ib_en&page=2&searchCnd=1&searchWrd=

35 Jinping Xi, “China and South Korea Should Become Four Partners,” *Xinhua News Agency*, July 4, 2014, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-07/04/c_1111449746.htm.

neighbors and inseparable partners.... The two countries should seize upon the occasion of the 30th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations to increase mutual respect and political trust, advance people-to-people friendship, and push for a stable and steady growth of the bilateral ties.”³⁶

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi also said that “China and the ROK are friendly neighbors sharing a deep historical bond,” “Past events have proven that China and the ROK are not adversaries, but partners with converging interests, a lot to offer each other and much untapped cooperation potential. China will work with the ROK and take the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties as an opportunity to carry forward our tradition of friendship, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and achieve greater development together.”³⁷

Marking the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties, China stands ready to work with South Korea to continue the friendship, deepen mutually-beneficial cooperation, and achieve common development.

Beijing and Seoul should take stock of what has been achieved and learn the right lessons, jointly plan for a bright future of mutually beneficial cooperation, and update the bilateral ties to make it a regional template.

3) Example of a new type of international relations. China proposed building a new type of major power relations in its diplomacy vis-a-vis the United States, emphasizing “no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation.” As its diplomatic efforts progress, Beijing began to apply the proposal to other bilateral relations, the China-South Korea relationship included.

Beijing’s vision is also compatible with President Yoon’s “China

³⁶ Xi Jinping Sends Message of Congratulation to Yoon Suk-yeol on Election as ROK President, *Xinhua News Agency*, March 25, 2022.

³⁷ “State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China, March 7, 2022, accessed May 5, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202203/t20220308_10649559.html.

policy based on mutual respect.” As close neighbors, the two countries should respect each other’s choice of development path, core interests, and traditions and cultures.³⁸ If the two sides can transcend ideological differences, abandon the cold war mentality, and rise above bloc rivalry, they will not only be able to build a healthy and stable bilateral ties, but also demonstrate to the world that building just, equal, stable, democratic, and constructive state-to-state relations is not just a theory or vision but can really be realized.

2) Example of a community with a shared future. Beijing put forward the vision of humanity as a community with a shared future as early as 2013, followed by other important related notions such as Asian community with a shared future, responsibility community, interest community, and community for nuclear security. President Moon also mentioned a China-South Korea community with a shared future during his visit to China in 2017.³⁹

China and South Korea share not only cultural elements and historical relics, but also many vital interests, for example, peace and stability on the Peninsular and Northeast Asia, economic development, cooperation, and prosperity, North Korean denuclearization, preventing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, opposition to resurgence of Japanese militarism and radical right forces. If the two sides replace Western values with East Asian traditions like “shelving differences and pursuing common ground,” “seeking harmony without uniformity,” and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” the two neighbors will be able to forge even closer ties and coordination.

3) Joint efforts to implement the Global Security Initiative. Beijing proposed a Global Security Initiative at the Boao Forum for Asia in April 2022 amid the raging Russo-Ukrainian conflict. President Xi emphasized six commitments that are essential to ensuring lasting peace and stability

³⁸ ROK’s New Foreign Minister Park Jin Holds Virtual Meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, *Yonhap News*, May 17, 2022.

³⁹ “Moon Jae-in Speaks at Peking University,” *Yonhap News*, December 15, 2017, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://cn.yna.co.kr/view/ACK20171215004200881>.

for the whole world. Three of the six commitments hold special significance for China and South Korea, i.e., “stay committed to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and work together to maintain world peace and security”; “stay committed to abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, reject the Cold War mentality, oppose unilateralism, and say no to group politics and bloc confrontation”; and “stay committed to peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation, support all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of crises, reject double standards, and oppose the wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction.” China and South Korea share a sense of victimhood and national humiliation as they once suffered from military occupations. Today’s China and South Korea are important guardians of world peace and oppose any efforts by the once aggressor nations to whitewash, paper over, or deny their history of aggression and atrocity.

Closer coordination on security issues between Beijing and Seoul not only can help reduce disagreements and disputes and address sensitive matters, but also facilitates cooperation on regional common challenges, such as climate change, cyber security, biological security, especially the security dilemma arising over the North’s nuclear and missile programs.

4) Leading international efforts to implement the global development initiative. Beijing put forward the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (collectively called the Belt and Road Initiative) in September and October 2013 respectively. Infrastructure projects under the initiative have been welcomed in many countries along the two routes. What is noteworthy, in recent years, South Korea has also proposed a number of regional cooperative initiatives, for example, the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative, Eurasia Cooperation Initiative, and Korean Peninsula New Economic Map.

In September 2021, Beijing proposed a Global Development Initiative, emphasizing a development-first and people-centered program that is

inclusive, innovative, environmentally-friendly, and results-oriented. President Yoon's vision of South Korea as a global pivotal state could come to fruition if Beijing and Seoul could better align their economic cooperation initiatives and improve regional infrastructure interconnectivity.

Policy Recommendations

Beijing and Seoul should renounce ideological rivalry, rise above the cold war mentality, abandon the approach to bilateral ties as a zero-sum geostrategic competition, and replace values-based alliance with interest community. A good neighbor is better than a distant relative. Only by meeting halfway can the two sides build a more mature and steady bilateral relationship.

Diplomacy

a) Expanding channels of communication. The two sides should further institutionalize the high-level strategic dialogue between foreign affairs departments and the "2+2" dialogue between foreign and security affairs departments. On the other hand, nonofficial strategic dialogue, Track 1.5 and Track 2 interactions should be established and expanded, free from the influence of change of government, so that contact and cooperation between parliaments, academia, and civil societies can produce real results.

b) Reducing disagreements and bigotry. On the one hand, Seoul should change its fixed and fatalistic views of U.S.-ROK alliance and think hard and long about the far-reaching impact of China's continued growth and rising stature. China, on the other hand, should also change its calculations about the North Korean factor in its regional diplomacy and implement a more effective policy toward Pyongyang.

c) Alleviating tensions and distrust. Sensitive issues should be

handled properly and escalatory retaliations be avoided. Politically and diplomatically contentious issues should not spill over to economic and trade domains. Anything that might further stoke bilateral tensions or hurt each other's national feelings should be avoided. Red lines concerning each other's core interests should never be crossed.

Security

a) Military cooperation. Clear and common strategic objectives for security cooperation should be set to advance and institutionalize contact and coordination between military and security affairs departments.

b) Institution building. Beijing and Seoul should seek to update the Six-Party Talk into a regional security mechanism that is capable of replacing North-South ceasefire with a Peninsular peace settlement, producing multilateral cooperation to reduce the impact of all possible strategic scenarios in North Korea including regime collapse, utilizing the China-South Korea Maritime Affairs Dialogue and Cooperation mechanism to reduce tension, and increasing military transparency to reduce the risk of arms race.

c) Contingency planning consultation. Crisis prevention and management mechanisms that include prewarning systems, response procedures, and effectiveness assessments should be put in place after intense consultation to respond to sensitive issues like additional THAAD deployment and overlapping air defense identification zones.

d) Nontraditional security challenge. Global common challenges like terrorism, pandemics, and cybercrime call for closer bilateral cooperation, for example, in the form of joint maritime search and rescue, disaster relief, and health promotion.

Economics

a) The two sides should full recognize the potential and importance of free trade agreements and try their best to complete the second phase

of China-ROK free trade agreement to elevate bilateral trade links to a higher level.

b) Emerging areas for economic cooperation. South Korean enterprises should be allowed to participate in infrastructure development and ecological system building in China's western region and help revive the old industrial base of China's northeast. The two sides should also find more impetus for growth. For example, cooperation should be increased in diversification of transport and energy supply after the Arctic routes are opened.

c) Better strategic alignment. Projects under the Belt and Road Initiative should be aligned with programs of South Korea's economic development blueprint. Sub-regional cooperation such as the Economic Rim of Yellow and Bohai Seas should be increased. Besides, the two sides could also strengthen third-market cooperation to better advance multilateralism and free trade.

Education and Cultural Exchange

a) Expanding cultural and people-to-people links, for example, by increasing understanding and communication between younger generations of the two countries. The two countries could also improve policies toward the expatriate communities within their borders. Factors that contribute to misunderstanding, prejudice, and hurt feelings must be identified and eliminated.

b) Improving public diplomacy. The two sides should engage the widest possible citizenry in public diplomacy, popularize their common cultural assets, and increase the scope and depth of people-to-people links.

c) Shaping public opinion. The two countries should manage domestic public opinion and encourage the media to play a positive role in improve bilateral ties.

d) The two sides should encourage and facilitate overseas study and internship programs. The two countries could consider creating

a two-hour intercity circle by facilitating travel and transport between major sister cities like Beijing and Seoul, Shanghai and Busan, and Guangzhou and Gwangju.

North Korea Denuclearization

a) Building mutual trust. The root cause of the persistent North Korean issue is the deep-seated distrust between Pyongyang and Washington. Seoul and Beijing should play intermediary and help find and broaden channels of communication between North Korea and the United States. Beside Seoul and Beijing should also strengthen coordination and put forward their own proposals for a long-term solution acceptable to all regional stakeholders.

b) Addressing symptoms and root causes. Seoul should recognize that Beijing has supported and enforced international sanctions against Pyongyang. But as China sees it, sanctions are means not ends. To find a sustainable solution to the persistent problem, the international community must also accommodate Pyongyang's legitimate interest and concerns. Or else any external pressure, political, economic, or military, will be futile.

c) Crisis management. North Korea's situation remains in flux. Regional stakeholders should increase contingency planning to respond to any possible scenarios. More Track 1.5 dialogue mechanisms should be set up to reduce misjudgment and miscalculation.

Conclusion

The world is undergoing epochal changes, a process compounded by the global pandemic, intensifying U.S.-China rivalry, and raging Russo-Ukrainian conflict. As close neighbors, China and South Korea are economically complementary and culturally similar. The bilateral relationship is also intertwined with other regional two-way relations,

such as those between China and the United States, China and Japan, China and North Korea, and North Korea and the United States. Steady growth of China-South Korea relations will certainly help stabilize international relations of East Asia.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of China-South Korea diplomatic relations, ties that have grown from complete estrangement to interdependence and common development. Even though it is no exaggeration to say that the bilateral relationship is a template for developing a new type of state-to-state relations, significant challenges and disagreements still exist.

Beijing and Seoul should approach their relations from a long-term strategic perspective of national interests, uphold the spirit of mutual respect and win-win cooperation, and make new contribution to their people's welfare and regional peace and stability. As a Chinese saying goes, "a man should fully establish himself when he turns thirty." Marking the 30th anniversary of China-South Korea relations, political leaders of the two neighbors should have the will and determination to advance the ties in a healthier, more mature, and more stable direction.

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Russia's War in Ukraine: How the 19th Century Imperialism and 20th Century Fascism Found Home in the 21st Century Russia

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Abstract

This essay provides a brief background to the Russian-Ukrainian War and examines a history of the current conflict in the context of national policies of the Russian empire, the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Russia. The essay offers an analysis of Moscow's actions, intentions, and consequences. The main argument is that in its ambitions and policies, Putin's Russia is more an heir to the Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan of the 1930s than to the Russian imperial rulers of the nineteenth century. The dense fog of Moscow's propaganda machine should not obscure the naked fact that Putin created a criminal state with the fascist ideology bent on subverting and destroying the current world order. As such Putin's departure from the scene is not sufficient to change the regime. Russia needs a sort of denazification that took place in Germany after World War II. Herein lies the danger not only to Ukraine but to the rest of the world, as Russia, supported by similarly-inclined regimes, presents a genuine challenge to democracies and a current world order, which for decades maintained peace and stability.

Key Words: Ukraine, Russia, war, fascism, Putin, geopolitics

On February 24, 2022 Russia launched a full scale invasion of Ukraine. Without a formal declaration of war and without any reason other than patently false statements from Moscow, Russia invaded a neighboring sovereign country which presented no threat. In this and many other ways, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine is similar to the Nazi Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938, when under the pretext of liberating the German-speaking population of Czechoslovakia, the Nazis first occupied one region of the country, the Sudetenland, and several months later occupied the entire country. It is even more similar to the Japanese invasion of China. Then, Imperial Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and established a puppet state of Manchukuo. It took another six years before Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China in 1937. The invasion was preceded by an official Japanese declaration that Chinese were neighbors and racial brothers, "the same script, the same race," and therefore should naturally be ruled by Japan.¹

Russia too first invaded Ukraine in 2014, annexed part of its territory in the south, the Crimea, and established a puppet state in the occupied territories in the east, known as the Donbass region, that is the basin of the Donets River. It is only now, eight years later, that Mr. Putin decided on a full-scale invasion. Like Japan in the 1930s, Moscow also uses a twisted logic that Ukrainians are their Slavic brothers and therefore have no right to be sovereign. And similar to the Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, Russia's invasion too is accompanied by atrocities and murder of civilians and daily war crimes.

Are we witnessing a rerun of the 1930s? Is World War III about to begin? Or did it already start? Why did Russia's invasion of Ukraine happen now and what is behind it? Below we shall try to examine the answers to some of these questions.

Should we begin in the 1990s, when the USSR fell apart? At the

¹ Tomohiko Uyama, "Unmasking Imperial History: Emotional Empire, Violent Politics of Difference, and Independence Movements in the Name of Autonomy" in *Ab Imperio* 1 (2022): 121-6.

time it seemed like a remarkably peaceful demise of the Soviet Union. There were ethnic tensions in several regions of the country and several hundred people died in violence over several years preceding 1991. But overall, in comparison with former Yugoslavia, the demise of the Soviet Union was peaceful. Or so it seemed. It is now clear that the violence was not avoided but only delayed and that those who wanted to preserve the USSR have always bet on revanchism and only waiting for the right moment.

Or perhaps we should begin in 1936 when Stalin's constitution inscribed the right of the Soviet nations to self-determination and their right to secede from the Soviet Union. At the height of Stalinist repressions and purges, the Constitution was yet another propaganda tool to show to the world the progressive nature of the Soviet regime. At the time, Stalin could not have imagined that such right to secession would ever be exercised.

Or maybe we need to start in 1922, when the Bolsheviks after five years in power, decided on the ethno-national approach to found the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, the USSR? The idea was to tame the strong national movements at the time and to channel them into the socialist system. There were few critical voices suggesting that the ethno-national approach with enshrined territorial boundaries for each ethnic and national group was a mistake, contrary to socialist principles, and may lead to ethnic tensions. One of such critical voices of the Bolshevik revolution and Lenin's approach was a German Communist, Rosa Luxemburg.²

Theoretically, the new ethno-national political composition of the country was supposed to be a federative structure. In reality, by the 1930s, the federation remained in name alone as the country was placed under a highly centralized system run from Moscow. By the late 1940s, with World War II over, the Soviet Union, initially conceived as

² Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

federation of equal peoples, became dominated by Russia and ethnic Russians. This situation remained unchanged until the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Perhaps we should start our inquiry in the waning days of the Russian empire when in the late nineteenth century, in order to deal with the rising demands of nationalist movements within the empire, the Russian tsars embarked on the Russification campaign by banning local languages and publications and limiting cultural expressions not in line with the Russian Orthodox Christian culture and Russian autocracy. Needless to say, the attempts to crush the incipient national movements within the empire only exacerbated the situation and produced more inter-ethnic and national tensions.

Even this, very cursive look at the Russian empire and its successor, the USSR, should suffice to show that both the Russian and Soviet political entities were colonial empires dominated by ethnic Russians, who by various means aimed to suppress independent national movements within the country. The case of Ukraine might be the most complex because of its large territory and population, and because of its traditional linguistic, religious, and cultural affinities with Russia.

From Moscow's point of view, no other parts of the former Soviet Union could match Ukraine in economic, demographic, and strategic importance. The Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania or the country of the Caucasus Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, or the Central Asian countries - all sufficiently different from Russia in language, religion, and culture. Moreover, economically and demographically, none of them can match the importance of Ukraine. It was not surprising that Mr. Putin, who openly stated that the collapse of the USSR was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century, saw Ukraine as a pivotal point in his revanchist project of restoring the USSR.

But in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, there was no nostalgia for either the days of the Russian empire or the Soviet Union. Since 1991 Ukraine emerged as a rumbunctious democracy with no taste for renewed dominance of Moscow, even though continuously seduced by offers of

cheap gas and petroleum from Russia, promises of sizable financial help, and links between corrupt Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs.

Ukrainian national movement could be traced to the late eighteenth century when a series of Ukrainian writers began to raise the issue of a separate Ukrainian identity in their works written in Ukrainian. Russians were traditionally dismissive of the Ukrainians referring to them as Little Russians. This is exactly the attitude of Putin and his government who today continue to deny the existence of the Ukrainian language and identity and consider Ukrainians as some wayward Russia's brothers. For a long time Ukrainians themselves were not certain of their identity, as many spoke both Ukrainian or/and Russian, belonged to the Catholic Church or Russian or Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and shared cultural and historical roots. But Putin's war on Ukraine did something what generations of Ukrainian intellectuals could not do – unite all sorts of Ukrainians against Russia and provide them with a strong sense of a distinct Ukrainian national identity.³

Putin and his Russia are stuck in the world of the nineteenth century geopolitics and the Cold War mentality. Following the ideas of the late Secretary of State Zbigniew Brzezinski, who argued that Russia could not be a major empire without Ukraine, Putin wants to achieve exactly that - to resurrect Russian/Soviet empire, which he too believes cannot be done without submitting Ukraine to Moscow's interests. From the Kremlin point of view, Ukraine represents a major threat in another way. It is a true democracy, imperfect as it is, and its success would clearly be an indication to the Russian people that there is an alternative way: with genuine elections and change of leaders, with real parliament and opposition parties, with free press, free courts, and free people who want to be part of Europe, not Russia. In other words, Ukraine is an existential threat to Putin's hold on power and to the political system he created.

Of course, following a well-established Soviet tradition, the Kremlin

3 Serhii Plokhyy. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

created a thick fog of propaganda trying to justify the war and its real intentions. Its main canard is the threat of NATO and Ukraine's critical role in keeping the NATO off the Russian borders. So much ink has been spilt on NATO as a threat that most people forgot the basic facts. NATO is a purely defensive pact formed in 1949 to counter the Soviet military threat against Europe. It withstood the test of time and proved effective in providing collective security for Europe. Never in its history did NATO invade any other country. The only exception was the NATO bombing strikes against the Serbian military in the spring of 1999 to stop the genocide in Kosovo. The record of the USSR and Russia is quite different leaving behind a trail of human destruction, murder, and intimidation: crushing the June 1953 uprising in East Germany, the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the threat to invade Poland in 1981. Putin's Russia continued this bloody record with the invasion of Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014, and now a full-scale war, called "a special operation" in Ukraine.

Moreover, NATO forces, unlike Russia's, has traditionally been in defensive posture. It is Russia which militarized the Kaliningrad region and brought in the Iskanders, ballistic missiles with a range of 400-500 km, which put most of the countries around the Baltic Sea within their range. It is Russia that turned every plot of the newly-seized lands into a launching pad for its military operations. This happened in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the Caucasus, and it happened in the Crimea, a beautiful and peaceful peninsula in the Black Sea which is now bristling with Russian military. One could also ask why Russia, a country that claims to fear NATO's invasion, has over 12,000 tanks, that is twice more than the US. After all, tanks are primarily an offensive weapon.

One could ask why Russia, which is the largest country in the world but also one most sparsely populated, wants more territory. By comparison, with about ten million or so people more than Japan's, it occupies a territory nearly 45 times larger than that of the island-country. Yet Russia wants more. It wants to restore "historical Russia," which, Mr. Putin claims, includes Belarus, Ukraine, and parts of

Kazakhstan and the Baltic region. In fact, Mr. Putin insists, these countries would not have existed, if not for the Russian empire, and it was mistaken Soviet nationality policies that created those states. Imagine the British government saying that because mistaken British policies in the past led to the emergence of the US and Canada, they should now therefore be restored to the United Kingdom.

Recent past is littered with the shards of collapsed empires, but unlike Russia, few of them embarked on a path of a full imperial restoration. After all, the British do not claim India, nor do the French claim Algeria. The last time the two powers tried to restore their imperial influence by military means was at the time of the Suez Canal invasion in October 1956, and that episode ended up in ignominy. Incidentally, during that same week, the Soviets invaded Hungary, and while the British and French withdrew from the Suez within a month, the Soviet troops stayed in Hungary until 1991.

But perhaps a closer parallel to Russia was the collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires in the aftermath of World War I. We know how Nazi Germany tried to restore its historical empire by laying claims to German-speaking populations outside of its national boundaries, and we know that was only the beginning.

Is Mr. Putin's vision limited to restoring "historical Russia?" Hardly. From Venezuela to Central Africa to Syria and Myanmar, Moscow is deeply involved in supporting local brutal regimes. Mr. Putin's hostile rhetorical escapades against the West culminated in Russia's occupation of parts of Georgia in 2008. Then there followed the occupation of the Ukrainian Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014. The Crimea was annexed under the slogan "Crimea is ours," and now it seems that the slogan is being applied to Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan.⁴

Russia is besieged by multiple problems. First of all, there is a declining standard of living. The choice of militarizing the economy,

⁴ Serhii Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

reliance on massive state orders, war, and Western sanctions exert a heavy price. Russia's economic development has been stunted in recent years declining from \$16,000 per capita in 2013 to \$10,000 in 2021. China, with a population ten times that of Russia, has now exceeded Russia's per capita GDP.

Then there is Russia's declining population. Like all statistics coming out of Russia, the official numbers are suspect, but the trend toward population decline was obvious even before the Covid-19. The decline of birth rates among the Slavic population, in particular, is apparent and much of the population growth in Russia now comes from Russia's Muslims. Could Russia become a Muslim majority country in 30 years? By some calculations, yes.

But above all, it is a decline of Putin's popularity that forces the Kremlin to make desperate moves. The rate of political repression accelerated last year with hundreds incarcerated for political activities and thousands forced to flee the country. Human rights organizations have been dismantled, Russian critics of the regime branded "foreign agents," and those from the West labelled Russophobes. By current standards, great Russian writers like Leo Tolstoy, who condemned Russian imperialism, today would have likely been imprisoned, Anton Chekhov, who often satirized the Russian character, denounced as a Russophobe, and Ivan Turgenev, known for his humanism and tolerance, accused as a "foreign agent."⁵

The current war against Ukraine is driven by Russia's own internal reasons but also by a continuous perception of Western weaknesses. Putin had two decades to observe both the systemic weaknesses of a democratic system of government and the human weaknesses of specific elected leaders. The Kremlin elites have a low opinion of the Westerners, who, they believe, are fools and could be easily manipulated or seduced by a promise of profits.

5 For an imperialist tradition in Russian literature, see Matthew Omolecky, "The Ally of Executioners: Pushkin, Brodsky, and the Deep Roots of Russian Chauvinism," *The American Spectator*, May 13, 2022.

Disinformation and propaganda, as with so many things in Putin's Russia, are a faithful continuation of Soviet norms. If there is anything that distinguishes the current occupants of the Kremlin, it is the particularly brazen nature of manufactured lies, which are based on two basic principles: charge your opponents with misdeeds that you yourself are committing and offence is the best defense. Because the West does not have a similar propaganda machinery, many of the falsehoods made in Moscow are not debunked and continue to linger in Western media. At least such was the case until the war. Now even those who found every possible excuse for Russia's behavior ran out of reasons to justify Putin's war.

For domestic audience, Putin's propaganda machine continues to generate new images. Mr. Putin's wardrobe in the Kremlin must be longer than those of many opera houses or kabuki theaters that are full of glamorous historical costumes and masks for any occasion. Most recently, Putin reached for a new costume, that of an eighteenth-century Russian tsar and emperor, Peter the Great.

This is only the last one of Putin's numerous incarnations. In the early 2000s, he tried a suit and a tie of an efficient manager, whose main goal was to revitalize the Russian economy. Over the years, the suits and ties became more expensive, as improvements to the country's economy were in direct proportion to the blatant self-enrichment of Putin and his cronies. In 2008, he replaced a suit of the president for a suit of the prime minister, as he stepped aside for four years to abide by the Russian Constitution that banned more than two consecutive terms for a president. Since then the Constitution was amended to allow Putin to remain president indefinitely.

All along, the Kremlin spin-masters were tirelessly looking for an appropriate historical images to legitimize Putin's agendas. First, they reached for a historical image of Peter Stolypin, one of the last and most effective prime-ministers in the waning days of the Russian empire. Stolypin was known for his important economic reforms combined with tough police actions against revolutionaries. Later, the Kremlin deployed

an image of Alexander I, Russian emperor in the early nineteenth century known for his reforms and relative tolerance.

But in 2012, after the mass protests against a manipulated election that brought Putin back to presidency, Putin began to reach deeper into his wardrobe. For a short time Putin tried on a costume of Ivan the Terrible, a bloody sixteenth-century tyrant presented in Russia as a ruler whose enormous violence was justified because he acted in the name of the Muscovite state. Then there was Nicolas I, the Russian emperor, who unlike his predecessor Alexander I, created a brutal police state and plunged Russia into wars.

And of course, there was Stalin's garb soaked with blood of millions of innocent victims dispatched to death and labor camps. But this fact was swept under the rug, as Putin took the mantle of Stalin as a great victor in World War II, referred to in Russia as the Great Patriotic War. Since then the Soviet victory became a sacred cow, a main rallying point for the Russian national identity, cynically exploited by the Kremlin for its political needs. Recently adopted laws make any criticism of the Soviet role in the World War II a criminal offence.

Sometimes the wardrobe was not enough, and Putin's spin-masters turned to a more lasting image in bronze. In 2016, a gigantic, 57 feet-high statue to Vladimir the Great, was erected next to the Kremlin walls. Vladimir was the tenth-century Grand Prince of Kyiv, who brought Christianity to the region. The statue was a celebration of Putin, whose name is also, Vladimir, but it was more than that. Since 1863, the statue to Vladimir the Great stood on the bank of the Dnepr River in Kyiv, where baptism reportedly took place. The new statue in Moscow was meant as an unmistakable signal to Kyiv that it was not Ukraine but Russia that was a legitimate heir to Vladimir the Great.

With no shortage of "the greats" in Russia's imperial pantheon, Putin has many choices. Yet all the choices amount to the same. All Russian rulers, whether autocrats or reformers at home, were unabashed and opportunistic imperialists. In the pre-modern world this was not much of a surprise. Most governments and nations practiced different

forms of imperialism and colonialism. The fact that Putin reverted to the same old paradigm is a vivid illustration of his outdated world-views.

The wardrobe has many costumes but the man choosing them does not change. His project has always been the one of revanchism, a restoration of Russia's greatness reflected only in Russia's size and power over others. In fact, behind the various garbs of Russian and Soviet rulers today stands a man, who took his country back into the 1930s, into the world of naked and brutal aggression.

Today some European leaders talk of helping Putin to save face and avoid humiliating Russia, others call for Ukraine's territorial compromise. It seems that despite Russia's destruction of Ukraine and Putin's naked ambitions that go beyond Ukraine, there still seems to be little understanding of what Putin's Russia represents - an anti-modern, militaristic state uninterested in peace and prosperity but bent on revanchism at any cost. The costumes and masks will come and go and so will Putin. But we should not lose sight of the fact that the Russia he created is now more similar to fascist regimes of the 1930s than the imperial Russia of the tsars.⁶

In the end, we should all be grateful to Ukraine for forcing Mr. Putin to show his hand in the wake of the Euromaidan revolution in 2014. Until then, NATO countries were asleep at the wheel, cutting their own defense budgets and supplying Russia with modern technologies, while Moscow was increasing its military budget in a drive to modernize the military. If not for Euromaidan and Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, NATO might have woken up one day with massive Russian troops build-ups at the borders of its member states and with little means to respond.

And yet Mr. Putin geopolitical gambits will end up the same way that the Soviet ones did. Russia traditionally defined its greatness through territorial expansion, military might, and extension of its

⁶ For a classic discussion of fascism, see Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005) and a more recent warning about rising fascism by Madeleine Albright, *Fascism: A Warning* (New York: Harper, 2018).

influence through intimidation and fear. Such is the nature of autocracy that it measures its greatness by projecting power abroad and by focusing on geopolitics at the expense of the domestic economy. After all, the USSR collapsed, among other reasons, because its leaders cared little about their own people and continued to invest limited resources into the military that by some estimates in the 1980s constituted two-thirds of the Soviet economy. Mr. Putin is repeating mistakes of the past by ignoring the Russian people at home in his pursuit of Greater Russia.⁷

The war in Ukraine has made clear what was an open secret: that 20th century fascism found a new home in Russia. Putinism is not a mere authoritarianism; it is fascism, and like all such regimes, it is about imperial nostalgia, restoration, and expansionism. Fascist regimes are based on grievances, perceived humiliation by outsiders, and a national leader whose masculinity, will, and determination promises to restore the past greatness. And greatness is defined not through prosperity and well-being of the people but through the ability to dominate and harness prestige from abroad.

Like other fascist leaders of the 20th century, Putin, in the words of the CIA Director, William Burns, has been “stewing in a combustible combination of grievance and ambition for years.” But he has been doing more than stewing. He has been also brain-washing Russia’s people through massive government propaganda, railing against the liberal values of the West, militarizing society through military-patriotic clubs for youth, supporting proliferation of martial arts clubs, and modernizing the military.

For many years Putin and his inner circle were avid readers of Ivan Ilyin, the ideologue of Russian fascism who continued to advocate his cause even after the World War II was over. Ilyin’s ideas propagated Russian exceptionalism, its spiritual and moral superiority over the West,

7 Stephen Kotkin, “Putin’s Perpetual Geopolitics: Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 3 (April 2016): 2-9.

and a creation of a national dictatorship that would rely on the church and military to defend itself against communism and liberalism. Hitler and Mussolini were Ilyin's models, two men who were both anti-communist and anti-democratic. Until his death in 1954, he retained his vision of a fascist Holy Russia led by a national dictator. It is this sort of the messianic Christian, Russian fascism that underpins Putin's world. In 2005, Putin was personally involved in moving Ilyin's remains from Switzerland to Russia and later had his grave consecrated.⁸

In the turbulent 1990s, Ilyin ideas fell on a fertile ground of hard core communists and nationalists who resented the collapse of the USSR. One of them was Alexander Dugin, the strongest advocate of Russian fascism who for many years has been urging the war against Ukraine. In 1997, Dugin attracted attention when he published an article, "Fascism - Borderless and Red." It was a call for a "genuine fascism" in Russia that would become the bulwark against the US hegemony and liberal West.

Later that year, he also published a book *The Foundations of Geopolitics*. It was a concoction of anti-Americanism, nationalism, neo-Nazism, and Eurasianism that announced that Russia was to become a great Eurasian empire that would form an axis with Germany and Japan to kick the US out of Europe and to destroy the NATO. The book became a bestseller and was adopted as the primer in Russia's military academies. Note that the time was the late 1990s, long before much made of the NATO expansion.

As always in Russian history, the Russian Orthodox clergy is fully on board vehemently supporting Putin's dictatorship and his wars. On March 6th, Kirill, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, gave a Sunday sermon in which he condemned the "false freedoms" of the West and blamed the war on the Gay Pride Parades, which he described as "imposing by force a sin condemned by God's law." Apparently, the

⁸ Anton Barbashin and Hannah Thoburn, "Putin's Philosopher: Ivan Ilyin and the Ideology of Moscow's Rule," *Foreign Affairs online* (September 20, 2015).

head of the Russian Church believes that the Gay Pride Parades justify Russia's savage destruction of Ukrainian cities and killing of the civilians, most of whom are also members of the Orthodox Church.

It seems that the majority of Russia's population also supports the war, although given information blackout in Russia, it is hard to judge. There is a silent majority and there are active supporters, who display the symbol Z, which, like a swastika in Nazi Germany, became a validation of support for the national leader and his policies.

The protests against the war in Ukraine seem limited and are unlikely to work in Russia. Over the years Putin built an enormous repression machine of hundreds of thousands of local and national police forces euphemistically called the National Guard. In the weeks since the war began, police units proved to be brutally effective in arresting thousands of demonstrators and quickly dispersing others.

A real problem with fascism that unlike other authoritarian regimes, it has no mechanisms for change from inside. There are only two ways which can bring the downfall of fascist Russia. The first is a coup, when the national dictator is removed in a manner tried unsuccessfully by the plotters against Hitler in 1944. The second is a sound military defeat.

In fact, major changes and reforms in Russian history took place only as a result of a military defeat. Russia's humiliating loss of the Crimean War in 1856 led directly to the abolition of serfdom, the loss to Japan in 1905 to the first Constitution and Parliament, the rout in World War I to the rise of the radical Bolshevik party, and less directly, the setbacks in Afghanistan to the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

The demise of the Soviet Union, in contrast to Yugoslavia for example, was accompanied by very little violence and was heralded as a peaceful transition from the Soviet empire to nation-states. Or this is what most believed until recently. It turns out that violence was only delayed for some thirty years and that Moscow never came to terms with its empire's demise. The collapse of the empires and emergence of nation-states was a typical historical process of the 20th century. In

only two cases, the imperial powers chose to restore their lost empires by brutal force: Nazi Germany and Putin's Russia.

Like all fascist regimes, Russia is an expansionist, messianic state bent on restoration of its perceived greatness and divine mission. Peace is antithetical to the very nature of such a society. It can therefore either be contained or confronted. With the war in Ukraine raging on, the current strategy in Western capitals seems to aim at containing Russian aggression there through economic sanctions and military aid to Ukraine. Such a policy is highly contingent on the bravery and sacrifice of the Ukrainian people, and it remains to be seen whether this approach will work.

One thing is clear a war in Ukraine has become an existential conflict between democratic societies governed by the rule of law and fascist societies led by the cynical and ruthless dictators. Ukraine, therefore, requires all the support it can get. We cannot allow ourselves to be blackmailed by a possible use of nuclear weapons. It is a road to nowhere and only gives green light to more aggression, not less.

Of course, there remain those who advocate nothing less than accommodating Putin's ambitions. The most notorious one is a political scientist John Mearsheimer who lays the blame for the current war in Ukraine on the West and NATO policies. Like Putin, he too is stuck in the old world of geopolitics and has been consistently arguing for the Cold War Kissingerian approach of accepting Russia's sphere of influence in East Europe and elsewhere.⁹ Hiding behind the theoretical sand castles, Mearsheimer is plainly an outspoken apologist for Putin's Russia. One wonders whether on the eve of World War II, Mearsheimer would be advocating to seek accommodations with Hitler by ceding to him various territories in Europe.

On another end of the political spectrum is a historian Timothy Snyder, who has written much and often about the fascist nature of

⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

Putin's regime.¹⁰ Somewhere between Mearsheimer and Snyder is a historian M. E. Sarotte, whose most recent archival study showed that Putin's claims that the West broke its promise not to expand NATO was completely without merit.¹¹ Yet she calls for a greater transparency in assuring Putin of NATO's non-aggressive intentions. The attitude seems to be naïve because it accepts the contention that Putin genuinely believes that Russia was cheated by the West and is not using this lie as a mere propaganda ploy.

I argue, in line with Timothy Snyder, that in Putin's Russia fascism is firmly grafted onto a traditional Russian imperialism. Despite past military defeats and reforms that followed, one thing in Russia remained unchanged - the empire's expansionist drive against its weaker neighbors. A decade after its debacle in the Crimean War, Russia began a conquest and annexation of Central Asia, within a decade of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, the Russian empire was reassembled as the USSR, and a decade after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Putin's Russia embarked on a restoration project.

Herein lies a challenge for both Russia and the West. For Russia to change, it requires not only a removal of Putin but a breaking of an old imperial pattern. Putin will be gone one day but whoever comes after him cannot be allowed to maintain traditional imperialist attitudes. Lip service to democracy can no longer be accepted and trade should not be normalized until Russia itself becomes a normal democratic country. For this to happen, Russian society has to confront both its imperial and Soviet past, and like Germany after World War II, to shed its *Sonderweg* for a membership in a community of equal nations. This is, in fact, a principal difference between today's Ukraine that was able to put its Soviet heritage behind in favor of democracy, and Russia that had never "de-Sovietize" and where the Soviet ambitions and values simply

¹⁰ Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

¹¹ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

became folded into nationalist and imperialist ones.

In 2005, Putin famously called the collapse of the USSR the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. In his effort to redress that, he has now created Russia's worst geopolitical disaster of the 21st century. But the effects of Russia's war in Ukraine are not limited to Europe alone. With China allying itself with Putin, India's main concern only with scooping up Russia's cheap oil, and world's other strong men and demagogues dismantling democratic institutions in their countries, Russia's war against Ukraine is also a war against modern democratic world and its values. From Americas to Asia, there is much at stake for any country that cherishes a democratic rule. Putin's success in destroying Ukraine would encourage Moscow for further aggression and set a precedent for others, including China's invasion of Taiwan. It is a duty of every democratic state to make sure that Putin's military adventurism indeed becomes a geopolitical disaster for Russia alone and not turn into a disaster for the entire world.

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Promoting Measures for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia: Conditions and Major Agenda¹

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Abstract

Peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia is necessary to resolve conflicts and promote cooperation in Northeast Asia. Peace and Cooperation will create an environment that will enable sustainable economic growth in Northeast Asia. Peace and Cooperation will enable a joint response to new security threats such as COVID-19, climate change, and disaster. And Asia Peace and Cooperation in the region will contribute to ease the U.S.-China strategic competition. Peace and Cooperation will also make a positive contribution to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.

Major agenda for Northeast Asia's peace and cooperation are peace issues, infrastructure issues, and human security issues. The peace issues in Northeast Asia are the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, military confidence building. The core of the infrastructure issues are the Northeast Asia Railway cooperation and energy cooperation. And human security issues are environmental cooperation and quarantine health cooperation. Northeast Asia's Peace and Cooperation should accumulate experience of trust and symbiosis by implementing pilot projects centered on these three issues.

Key Words: multilateral cooperation, peace agenda, infrastructure agenda, human right agenda, Northeast Asian peace and cooperation forum

¹ The draft of this article was presented at the Seminar by Association for International Security and Cooperation, October 14, 2021.

Introduction

Northeast Asia is a region of dynamic economic growth and geopolitical importance, but any kind of multilateral regional cooperation or dialogue organization does not exist in this region. The Northeast Asian region has yet to resolve long-standing conflicts such as historical issues, territorial disputes, and unification of divided nations. New security threats such as U.S.-China strategic competition, COVID-19, climate change and disaster are increasing the need for multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. However, the lack of experience in multilateral cooperation, gravity of bilateral relations, conflicts of interest between countries, and lack of trust between countries are factors that constrain multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia is necessary to resolve conflicts and promote cooperation in Northeast Asia. Peace and Cooperation will create an environment that will enable sustainable economic growth in Northeast Asia. Peace and Cooperation will enable a joint response to new security threats such as COVID-19, climate change, and disaster. And Asia Peace and Cooperation in the region will contribute to ease the U.S.-China strategic competition. Peace and Cooperation will also make a positive contribution to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.

South Korea puts significant meanings to peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia. South Korea intends to actively pursue peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, establish the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, create an international environment favorable for unification, and create a conducive international environment for inter-Korean economic cooperation.

Major agenda for Northeast Asia's peace and cooperation are peace issues, infrastructure issues, and human security issues. The peace issues in Northeast Asia are the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean

Peninsula, military confidence building. The core of the infrastructure issues are the Northeast Asia Railway cooperation and energy cooperation. And human security issues are environmental cooperation and quarantine health cooperation. Northeast Asia's Peace and Cooperation should accumulate experience of trust and symbiosis by implementing pilot projects centered on these three issues.

Conditions of Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia

Constraining Factors

There are several obstacles to Northeast Asia's peace and cooperation. The first obstacle is a lack of trust between countries in the region. In Northeast Asia, there is strong distrust of the other party's intentions and policies in relation to historical issues, territorial issues, and arms race. Northeast Asian countries have no experience in coordinating various views on regional joint issues and reaching compromises. Northeast Asian countries acknowledge the need for multilateral cooperation in principle, but doubt its intention if other countries lead multilateral cooperation. Competition and distrust between countries in the region are the biggest obstacle to multilateral cooperation.

Second, the legacy of the Cold War has not been completely liquidated in Northeast Asia. In Northeast Asia, there are problems of unification of the two Koreas and Taiwan issues derived from the Cold War. The North Korean nuclear and missile issues are also remnants of the Cold War. In addition, while South Korea, China and Russia have normalized diplomatic relations, but North Korea has not yet normalized diplomatic relations with the U.S. and Japan.

Third, it is difficult to establish a framework for multilateral consultation because Northeast Asian countries are large and have

strong national power. Geopolitical interests, economic interests, and security issues are complicated among countries in the region. Also, countries in the region are global powers. The United States is a superpower and a major player in the regional order, despite being a geopolitical offshore country in Northeast Asia. China is strengthening its diplomatic and security capabilities based on rapid economic growth. Japan is aiming for a normal state corresponding to its economic power, while Russia is attempting to restore its international status. Northeast Asian countries are trying to create a new order under their leadership and do not want their actions to be restricted by multilateral frameworks.

Fourth, the U.S.-China strategic competition is a factor that makes peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia difficult. The U.S. and China are at odds over trade, security, high-tech, healthcare, values, norms, and global governance. The United States and China are competing strategically by strengthening ties with allies and partners as bilateral competition intensifies. The U.S. is building a siege network against China through the U.S.-Japan alliance, the U.S.-ROK alliance, the Quad, and the Indo-Pacific strategy to prevent China's rise of hegemony. China is building a defense network through the One Belt and One Road Strategy, internalization of the South China Sea, and setting of Island Chain in the Western Pacific. The reality is that it is difficult to promote peaceful cooperation in Northeast Asia at a time when the U.S.-China strategic competition is intensifying.

Fifth, alliances and bilateral relations dominate Northeast Asia. In Northeast Asia, alliances such as the U.S.-Japan alliance, the U.S.-ROK alliance, and the China-North Korea alliance are forming an important order. Despite the growing need for multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia, Northeast Asian countries are focusing more on alliances and bilateral relations than multilateral cooperation.

Sixth, North Korea's attitude, an important part of Northeast Asia's peace and cooperation, is a stumbling block. In order for peace and cooperation on the region to be implemented, North Korea's nuclear

and missile issues and bringing a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula must be resolved. The future of Northeast Asia's peace and cooperation is not bright unless North Korea has a positive stance on the solutions of these issues.

Facilitating Factors

Meanwhile, there are certain factors that promote peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia.

First, there are issues to be addressed in Northeast Asia by multilateral cooperation. There are issues in Northeast Asia that cannot be solved only by bilateral relations, such as the North Korean nuclear issue and the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. There are also new security issues, such as environmental issues, trafficking, human rights, and disaster relief. To solve these problems, multilateral efforts of Northeast Asian countries are needed. Although various types of multilateral organizations are operating in Southeast Asia and Southwest Asia, there are no multilateral organizations formed in Northeast Asia. Multilateral mechanism are needed in Northeast Asia because bilateral relations are inappropriate to address these issues.

Second, the increasing economic interdependence in Northeast Asia also positively affects the need for multilateral security cooperation. Northeast Asia is the most dynamically growing economy in the world economy and the amount of trade in the region is increasing. The increase in regional economic interdependence serves as a buffer to ease military tensions and conflicts. As regional economic exchanges increase, the economic benefits of maintaining stable regional order increase. Economic interdependence acts as a facilitating factor to increase the need for security cooperation.

In order to expand economic cooperation in Northeast Asia, security concerns must be eliminated. Economic cooperation is unstable as long as security concerns and arms race exist in Northeast Asia. Therefore,

as economic cooperation increases, security cooperation is more important to create a stable environment for economic cooperation.

Third, COVID-19 is a new threat that is difficult for individual countries to cope with. Countermeasures for quarantine and health should be discussed jointly at the global level. In particular, it is necessary to establish a common quarantine and health cooperation system in Northeast Asia.

South Korea's Perspective for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia

South Korea recognized the importance of multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia and has sought various ways to achieve it. Given the geopolitical nature of South Korea surrounded by the powers of Northeast Asia, South Korea has been pushing for multilateral security cooperation as a way to expand South Korea's diplomatic and security autonomy. In particular, South Korea is seeking multilateral security cooperation in the process of establishing a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and seeking unification.

Due to its geopolitical characteristics located in Northeast Asia, South Korea is more interested in multilateral cooperation centered on Northeast Asia than the East Asian community. Of course, South Korea is actively participating in multilateral security dialogue covering all of East Asia, including the ARF, but it believes that Northeast Asian multilateral cooperation is necessary to resolve the Korean Peninsula issue and gain international cooperation in the unification process. However, South Korea's multilateral cooperation initiative does not only include China, Russia, and Japan, but also values the U.S., which has interests in the region and acts as a balancer of stability in Northeast Asia. In addition, South Korea's multilateral security initiative in Northeast Asia is aimed at open regionalism that seeks cooperative relations with other regional cooperatives such as ASEAN, APEC, and

the EU.²

South Korea's official interest in Northeast Asia Multilateral Cooperation has been raised since the late 1980s and diversified into various forms, and its purpose and driving structure gradually became concrete. In October 1988, President Roh Tae-woo proposed the creation of the "Consultative Conference for Peace in Northeast Asia" for six Northeast Asian countries in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly.³

The idea of "Consultative Conference for Peace in Northeast Asia" broadened the perception of the Korean Peninsula issue in that South Korea, a party to the Korean Peninsula issue, tried to solve it by linking it to the Northeast Asian region. The proposal was, in fact, South Korea's first official expression of its position on multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia, largely maintained by the government since then. The proposal, however, was not based on feasibility, but rather on improving relations with the Soviet Union and responding to Gorbachev's multilateral security initiative in Northeast Asia. Despite Japan and Russia's welcome, the proposal failed to materialize due to the U.S., China's lukewarm attitude and North Korea's explicit opposition.

The Kim Young-sam government sought to promote a multilateral security consultative body in Northeast Asia to the extent that it did not damage the U.S.-ROK alliance. In a keynote speech at the opening meeting of the 26th Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC) in May 1993, President Kim Young-sam announced that South Korea would promote multilateral security dialogue while deepening and developing

2 Keung-chan Bae, "An Era of Northeast Asia and Diplomatic Tasks of South Korea: Focusing on Regional Cooperation Strategies," *Analysis of Major International Issues*, The Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, July, 2004.

3 Hong-kyu Park, "The Six-Party Consultative Conference for Peace in Northeast Asia," *Analysis of Major International Issues*, The Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, 88-86 (1988); and Kuk-jin Kim, "A Study on the Implementation of Consultative Conference for Peace in Northeast Asia," *Series of Policy Studies*, The Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, 89-08 (1989).

bilateral security framework with the U.S.⁴ On May 31, 1993, Foreign Minister Sung-Joo Han suggested a mini-CSCE-type Northeast Asian Security Council, pointing out that it is easier to derive common security interests than wide-area security consultations such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation(APEC).⁵

Against this backdrop, South Korea proposed the Northeast Asia Security Dialogue (NEASED) at the 1st ARF-SOM in May 1994. South Korea hoped to discuss issues such as North Korea's nuclear and missile development, tensions between China and Taiwan, and the arms race in Northeast Asia through NEASED. However, the NEASED proposal was not implemented due to the indifference and lack of conditions in the countries concerned. The U.S. put priority on the bilateral alliance in Northeast Asia and expressed a passive stance on multilateral security dialogue. China also expressed skepticism about the multilateral dialogue in Northeast Asia led by South Korea.⁶

Roh Moo-hyun government set the Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative as a core policy and installed the president advisory body "Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative" to actively promote the Northeast Asia Multilateral cooperation.

Park Geun-hye government proposed a "Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative" as part of implementing "Trust Diplomacy." It operated 10 consultative bodies with 30 countries in areas such as environment, energy, nuclear safety, disaster relief, cybersecurity, and trafficking, which are soft issues. However, the plan failed to achieve results due to lack of specific plans and passive stance of related countries.

And Moon Jae-in government sets the "Northeast Asia Plus

4 Sang-kyun Lee, "Building a Multilateral Security Consultation System in Northeast Asia: European Experience and South Korea's Choice," *National Strategy* (Spring and Summer 1997): 200-1; and Kyu-deok Hong, "Prospects and Tasks of Northeast Asian Security Cooperation in the 21st Century," *Diplomacy*, no. 53 (April 2000): 15.

5 Sung-Joo Han, "Fundamentals of Korea's New Diplomacy: New Korea's Diplomacy toward the World and the Future," *Korea and World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 239.

6 Tae-am Eum, "The Revitalization of the Four-Party Talks and the Utilization of the Six-Party Talks in Northeast Asia," *Collection of Security Policies 2* (Seoul: National Security Council Office, 2002), 329-31.

Responsible community” as a key national goal, trying to link peace and cooperation on the Korean Peninsula to peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia. To this end, “The Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Forum” was formed while “The New Northern Policy” is cooperating with Eurasia and “The New Southern Policy” is cooperating with Southeast Asia.⁷

Although the main focus is different depending of governments, South Korea has generally recognized the importance of Northeast Asian multilateral cooperation and has been working on implementation strategies to implement it in detail. Overall, South Korea has the following perspectives on Northeast Asia Multilateral Cooperation.

First, it is recognized that Northeast Asia-level cooperation is necessary to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue and establish the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. The North Korean nuclear issue and the bringing the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula are related to the process of creating a cooperative order on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.

Second, Northeast Asian Multilateral Cooperation is expected to promote North Korea's entry into the international community, openness and reform. Northeast Asian Multilateral Cooperation could help ease North Korea's concerns about survival of the regime and adapt the North to international norms by ensuring its survival in a multilateral manner.

Third, Northeast Asian Multilateral Cooperation is expected to create an environment favorable for resolving problems on the Korean Peninsula through easing tensions in Northeast Asia. If the U.S.-China competition, China-Japan conflict, and tensions escalate due to territorial disputes or trade friction between countries in the region, South Korea's security situation will become unstable and create an environment unfavorable to peace on the Korean Peninsula. Northeast Asia Multilateral Cooperation is expected to contribute to peace and stability on the

⁷ Bong-geun Jeon, "Strategy for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia in the Age of U.S.-China Competition," IFANS Major International Issues Analysis, 2021-08 (2021), 5-7.

Korean Peninsula by easing conflicts and promoting cooperation among regional countries.

Fourth, Northeast Asian Multilateral Cooperation is also necessary to seek cooperation from neighboring countries in the process of unification. If Northeast Asian multilateral cooperation advances, an environment that is advantageous for unification of the Korean Peninsula can be created through cooperative mechanisms in Northeast Asia. And Northeast Asian multilateral cooperation can play a positive role in coordinating the external relations and seeking stability and development of the unified Korea.

Fifth, inter-Korean economic cooperation can also be promoted in the framework of economic cooperation in Northeast Asia. In order for inter-Korean economic cooperation to develop, it is necessary to cooperate with neighboring countries in Northeast Asia. Inter-Korean economic cooperation can be activated by establishing organic relations with Northeast Asian economic cooperation, and Northeast Asian economic cooperation can serve as a driving force for inter-Korean economic cooperation. In addition, inter-Korean economic cooperation can serve as a medium for institutional development of Northeast Asian economic cooperation. For example, a specific project of inter-Korean economic cooperation could promote multilateral economic cooperation projects involving multiple countries at the Northeast Asian level.

Major Agenda for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia

Peace Agenda

Resolving the North Korean Nuclear Issue and Establishing the Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula

The primary challenge of Northeast Asia's peace cooperation is the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. North Korea's

nuclear development is a threat to peace on the Korean Peninsula and stability in Northeast Asia. The North Korean nuclear issue should be resolved peacefully through dialogue. Military tensions that could arise in the process of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue have a negative impact on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asian order. In particular, a military solution would bring a devastating disaster to the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, the North Korean nuclear issue should be resolved peacefully through U.S.-DPRK dialogue, inter-Korean dialogue, and multilateral dialogue.

The transition to a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula is closely related to resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. It is necessary to establish a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula through the declaration of the end of the war and the peace treaty on the Korean Peninsula in response to North Korea's denuclearization. Four-party talks and six-party talks could be carried out along with inter-Korean dialogue to establish the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. The multilateral talks on the transition of the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula could serve as a stepping stone for peaceful cooperation in Northeast Asia.⁸

Building Military Confidence in Northeast Asia

The Northeast Asian Peace Cooperation is aimed at comprehensive security, including environmental issue and human rights, as well as traditional security. In addition, the Northeast Asian peace cooperation aims for cooperative security in which related countries cooperate for public interest, take preventive measures to prevent disputes in advance, and jointly seek ways to resolve conflicts. The European Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE), a multilateral security organization in Europe, is applying comprehensive security and cooperative security concepts to resolve post-Cold War conflicts and prevent conflicts.

⁸ Sung-yoon Jung et al., *Comprehensive Assessment of North Korean Nuclear Program and Strategies to Promote Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2018), 271-327.

In Northeast Asia, the absence of traditional multilateral security organizations, differences in interests of related countries, national power differences in related countries, positions of related countries focusing on bilateral relations, and distrust of the other party are limiting multilateral security cooperation. Therefore, Northeast Asian Multilateral Cooperation should focus on the following points.

First, considering the importance of bilateral relations in Northeast Asia, bilateral trust building and military cooperation should be advanced. In situations where bilateral relations are important and conditions for multilateral security cooperation are not established, as in Northeast Asia, bilateral security cooperation accumulates, creating conditions for multilateral security cooperation. Visiting mutual bases between the U.S. and China, the vice minister-level defense council, and South Korea-China security cooperation are measures to promote bilateral military cooperation.

Second, Northeast Asia multilateral cooperation should be promoted not to replace bilateral alliances but to supplement them. However, as multilateral security cooperation is pursued, it may be necessary to coordinate existing bilateral alliances. The bilateral alliance should focus on seeking common security interests in the framework of multilateral security cooperation, away from what was supposed to be a common enemy and aimed at an exclusive alliance.

Third, considering that it is not easy to operate official channels between governments in Northeast Asia, it is desirable to first push for a Track 2 approach that advances multilateral security dialogue centered on civilian organizations. Of course, security dialogue centered on civilian organizations has many limitations in terms of agendas and ways of discussing issues. Security cooperation through civilian organizations is difficult to escape from the level of exchange of opinions, and it is also difficult to come up with binding guidelines for action. And even if civilian-level security cooperation accumulates, political determination is needed for it to be upgraded to official intergovernmental dialogue. Nevertheless, given the different security

interests of Northeast Asia, civilian-level security dialogue can create an environment for multilateral cooperation between governments.

Fourth, confidence building measures should be taken into in Northeast Asia. Countries in the region should establish a system for exchanging data and information in soft issues such as environmental pollution, climate, agriculture, and other natural disasters.

In order to prevent accidental military conflicts and build military trust, confidence building measures should be implemented, including disclosure of military capabilities, disclosure of defense budgets, notification of major military drills and movements, and invitation of observers.

It is also necessary to use various communication channels such as satellite telephones, faxes and e-mails and jointly operate a crisis management center to secure communication channels in crisis situations such as accidental clashes.

In addition, a cooperative system for disaster relief such as disaster rescue and humanitarian support at sea are recommended. For example, a maritime accident prevention agreement involving six Northeast Asian countries could be pursued.

Infrastructure Agenda

Inter-Korean Railway Connection and Northeast Asian Railway Cooperation

The inter-Korean railway cooperation is a transportation network project that combines peace and economic cooperation in the sense of easing military tensions between the two Koreas and establishing infrastructure to promote economic cooperation. The connection between Gyeongui Line and Gyeongwon Line in order to promote the Mt. Kumgang tour and the Kaesong Industrial Complex project in the past had this complex meaning. For the connection of Gyeongui Line and Gyeongwon Line, mines in the Demilitarized Zone were removed and a corridor through which railways passed was constructed. It also

set a precedent for the UN to delegate administrative right of the area to South Korea in order to remove landmines and build corridors in the Demilitarized Zone. In this regard, inter-Korean railway cooperation is a core of borderline cooperation and inter-Korean economic cooperation, infrastructure creation project, and has ripple effects in many areas.

Along with the progress of inter-Korean relations in 2018, inter-Korean railway cooperation emerged as a key project. The implementation of the inter-Korean railway cooperation project was embodied in the April 27 Panmunjom Declaration and the Pyongyang Joint Declaration in September in 2018. In 2018, an inter-Korean railway cooperation subcommittee was held and implementation measures were taken to implement inter-Korean railway cooperation. In November 2018, the two Koreas conducted a joint survey of North Korean railways, traveling about 2,600 kilometers. In December 2018, the two Koreas held a groundbreaking ceremony for the connection and modernization of railways and roads along the East and West Seas Lines at Kaesong Panmunjom Station. In 2019, data on inter-Korean railway and road cooperation were exchanged. In April 2020, on the second anniversary of Panmunjom Declaration, a ceremony of constructing East Sea Northern Line was held.

The inter-Korean railway connection is related to Northeast Asia Railway cooperation. The inter-Korean railway connection is a project that not only develops inter-Korean relations but also promotes cooperation in Northeast Asia by connecting the infrastructure of the two Koreas. As the European railway network not only served as a transportation network, but also integrated Europe's economy, society, and culture to become the foundation of the European Union, the Korean Peninsula Railway and Northeast Asia Railway connection project can lead peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia by establishing a cooperative infrastructure in Northeast Asia. By connecting the TKR (Trans-Korea Railway) with the Trans-China Railway (TCR), the Trans-Siberian Railway (TSR), and the Trans-Mongolia Railway

(TMGR), infrastructure for Northeast Asian cooperation can be established through the Korean Peninsula, China, Eurasia, and Mongolia.

Three measures are needed to connect the Korean Peninsula and the Continental Railway. First, in order to connect the Korean Peninsula termination railway with TSR and TCR, it is necessary for South Korea to participate in the International Railway Cooperation Organization (OSJD), which consists mainly of former socialist countries and Eastern European countries, As South Korea became a full member of the International Railroad Cooperation Organization in June 2018, conditions for participating in continental railway operations were provided.

Second, railway cooperation between South Korea and Russia is needed to connect TKR and TSR. In December 2001, the South Korea-Russia Railway Cooperation Agreement and the South Korea-Russia Transportation Cooperation Committee Agreement were signed, and the Korea-Russia Transportation Cooperation Committee was held. In June 2018, the Russian Railway Corporation (RZD) and Korail signed an MOU to agree on the direction of railway cooperation.⁹

Third, railway cooperation between the two Koreas and Russia is needed. In March 2006, a trilateral railway operators' meeting was held in Vladivostok for the TKR-TSR linkage operation. Since then, the need for three-way railway cooperation between the two Koreas and Russia was discussed through inter-Korean dialogue and Korea-Russia dialogue.

Inter-Korean Energy Cooperation and Northeast Asian Energy Cooperation

A stable supply of energy has a profound impact on security as well as the economy. As the size of Northeast Asia's economy expands,

⁹ Jiwon Yun, "Politics of the TKR-TSR Linkage: Challenges and Cooperation," *International Political Research*, vol. 22, no. 3 (2019): 92-100.

vulnerability in energy supply is expected to worsen. Energy cooperation in Northeast Asia is divided into areas centered on individual issues and areas promoted on an institutional level.

First, energy cooperation centered on individual businesses is mainly about the distribution of gas and oil in Russia. In particular, Russia's energy network is related to Northeast Asian countries, including the Korean Peninsula. This is about the development of energy resources such as oil and gas in the East and the Far East, and the establishment of infrastructure for energy transportation. This includes the construction of oil pipelines, gas pipelines, integrated gas supply systems, power connections, and logistics and transportation networks.

Second, the Northeast Asia Super grid project is a long-term and large-scale energy cooperation project. The plan is to form an integrated power supply system by connecting the power grid between countries in Northeast Asia. In particular, due to climate change and exhaustion of fossil fuels, super-grid projects including renewable energy such as solar and wind power are being discussed.¹⁰

Third, for multilateral energy cooperation in Northeast Asia, strategic agreements should be made on the targets, scope, and contents of energy cooperation by narrowing the differences in related countries. By presenting clear goals and expected benefits of energy cooperation, it is necessary to induce relevant countries to participate and form an energy consultative body for resource development and smooth transportation in Northeast Asia.

As a primary step, projects that can be realized for each energy cooperation project should be carried out first, and suitable cooperation partners should be found for each project. Through this, they should share the benefits of bilateral cooperation and accumulate trust. Next, practical cooperation such as cooperation in Korea-China-Japan oil logistics facilities, the establishment of a joint price system in the Korea-

¹⁰ Jinsoo Song, "Status and Prospects for Super-grid in Northeast Asia" (Proceeding of the Conference of the Korean Association of Renewable Energy, 2018. 4), 5.

China-Japan oil market, and the formation of an energy consultative body in Northeast Asia should be pursued.

Fourth, it is necessary to link inter-Korean energy cooperation with Northeast Asia energy cooperation at mid- to long-term level. Energy cooperation should be pursued from a multilayer perspective that structurally connects North Korea's energy crisis, inter-Korean energy cooperation, and Northeast Asia energy cooperation. In particular, the project to pass Siberian oil and gas pipes through North Korea is a major challenge for inter-Korean energy cooperation. The oil and gas pipeline project will not only resolve North Korea's energy shortages but also create institutional mechanisms for inter-Korean energy cooperation.

Human Security Agenda

In a comprehensive sense, peace should focus on human security, which reduces the threat, danger and fear of individuals and enables safe daily life. Human security is to set the center of security off the national level and protect human survival and dignity from violence, human rights violations, social discrimination, disasters, and others as well as military threats.¹¹

Peace in Northeast Asia should also focus on human security in a comprehensive sense. The first issue of human security in Northeast Asia is environmental cooperation. Among the environmental problems in Northeast Asia, air pollution, water resource pollution, marine pollution and water resources problems, and natural disasters caused by climate change are especially serious.

Air pollution in Northeast Asia is a serious environmental problem affecting the entire region. The negative effects of yellow dust on the economy and health of China's Taklamakan and Gobi deserts are getting worse every year. Acid rain is also serious in Northeast Asia. Acid rain

¹¹ Edward Newman, "Human Security and Constructivism," *International Studies Perspective*, vol. 2, no. 3 (August 2001): 2-3.

caused by China's use of low-quality coal is affecting the entire region.

Water pollution and water resources in Northeast Asia are also at odds. Water pollution and water resource management issues on the Yalu and Tumen rivers, which pass through the border between China and North Korea, are sensitive issues between the two countries. In addition, the management and joint use of rivers passing through inter-Korean border areas such as the Bukhangang River and the Imjin River are also areas that require cooperation.

And marine pollution and fisheries resources are also pending issues in Northeast Asia. In East Sea, Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea, marine pollution and destruction of marine ecosystems are getting serious each year. Northeast Asia has the world's largest continental shelf and abundant fishery resources. Various wastewater and pollutants from China have flowed into the oceans of the region, causing serious damage. It is also necessary to jointly respond to the damage caused by overfishing of fish and marine pollution in the region.

Meanwhile, natural disasters caused by climate change such as global warming, ozone depletion, and biodiversity reduction are also serious in Northeast Asia. Increased consumption of fossil fuels due to rapid economic growth in Northeast Asia is negatively affecting climate change.

As a first step, it is necessary to form a consultative body to discuss environmental issues at the government level. The Northeast Asian Environmental Council should focus on sharing data, joint research, and finding joint countermeasures to understand environmental issues in Northeast Asia. The most urgent priority project should be selected and pilot project need to be carried out.¹²

¹² Jeno Ahn and Eun-joo Park, "A Study on the Possibility of Building a Peace Cooperation System through Environmental Governance in Northeast Asia: Focus on Case of Transboundary Air Pollution," *Collection of World Areas Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2016): 75-95.

It is also necessary to form a civilian environmental consultative body with NGOs, private enterprises, and research organizations in Northeast Asia. A civilian environmental consultative body can play a role in creating epistemic consensus on environmental issues and presenting policy alternatives to government-level environmental cooperation. It is also possible for NGOs and companies to jointly carry out pilot projects.

Second, as demonstrated by COVID-19, human security in Northeast Asia should focus on transnational cooperation to prevent infectious diseases.¹³ President Moon Jae-in proposed a “Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative for Infectious Disease Control and Public Health” at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2020. According to the proposal, an international conference was held in December 2021, attended by diplomatic and health officials and civilian experts from five countries, South Korea, the United States, China, Russia and Mongolia. At the meeting, officials and experts shared cases of responding COVID-19 and discussed regional cooperation and policy directions on the health crisis.

In the future, related countries, including North Korea, need to establish quarantine and health cooperatives in Northeast Asia. Measures such as sharing data among related countries, basic investigation, establishment of a joint quarantine system, and medical support shall be discussed. In addition, the government and civilians should form a 1.5 track consultative body to conduct research and advisory roles.

In addition, as a pilot project to establish governance of Northeast Asia's quarantine health cooperation, a plan to establish a cooperative system involving officials, medical experts, and pharmaceutical industry could be attempted.¹⁴

¹³ “President Jae-in Moon, Keynote Speech at the United Nations 75th General Assembly,” September 23, 2020.

¹⁴ Young-jin Choi, “The Outbreak of Pandemic, Countermeasures, System Risk, and Infections Disaster in East Sea Rim: A Case Study of COVID-19,” *Asia Study*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2020): 17-8.

Policy Suggestion: Revitalization of “the Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Forum”

It is necessary to revitalize “the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Forum,” which South Korean government is promoting, and develop it into a platform for Northeast Asia cooperation. The Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Forum will serve as a venue for discussions on the agenda's implementation strategy to form a consensus for regional peace and cooperation and set priority.

First, it is desirable that South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, Mongolia, the United States and North Korea participate in the forum primarily, while Australia, New Zealand and ASEAN participate later.

Second, the forum should prioritize joint countermeasures against transnational threats such as natural disasters, infectious diseases, cybercrimes and terrorism.

Third, it is needed to establish governance involving not only the government but also local governments, civil society, NGOs, local organizations, and international organizations.

Fourth, it is also desirable to promote joint research involving researchers, scholars and activists at the forum. Through joint research and study, it is expected to form a consensus on regional cooperation and find specific ways of implementation.¹⁵

¹⁵ Jeon, “Strategy for the Promotion of Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia in the Age of U.S.-China Competition,” 20-2.

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Russian Invasion of Ukraine and the Decline of the World Order

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Abstract

Few predicted Russia's invasion of Ukraine before February 24. Even when US President Biden warned of imminent aggression, many experts asserted that the massing of Russian troops along the border would not lead to an actual war. Pundits were being reasonable, rather than short-sighted. It means either that Vladimir Putin's revanchist historicism is absurd, or that the rest of the world's reasons are outdated, or both. This article will begin by examining the dangers posed by Putin's imperialistic ambition, and then explain how and why the world order is declining.

Two popular perceptions will be challenged. Firstly, many in academia find the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) guilty of causing Russia's security paranoia, thus creating pressure for an armed conflict. On the contrary, a declining order has created a power vacuum that might have tempted Putin's adventurism. Secondly, the invasion has seemingly united Europe to an unprecedented level. The Russian invasion is, however, partly an expression of the weakening of the power that bound Europe together, and it signals the further waning of Europe's unity.

While the arguments in this article are far from conclusive, the author hopes they could add new perspectives to the discussion.

Key Words: Russia, Ukraine, Europe, order, Putin

Introduction

On February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine, to the surprise of most pundits and indeed the world at large. This previously unimaginable war is now entering its fourth month. How this war will reshape Europe and how it will affect the rest of the world are still unclear. One can, however, try to make out the direction of the wind of change by examining the dust dancing in its wake. Events hitherto have sufficiently demonstrated that this war will alter many aspects of global affairs the world has taken for granted for over seven decades. We must now conjecture upon the scope and direction of such changes while constantly fine-tuning our sensors to developments as they unfold.

Russia's aggression has two concurrent yet contrasting aspects: It is both cause and effect of the decline of the international order. Chapter II will first examine how Russia is the cause of turmoil that reaches beyond Ukraine, as Russia's behavior accentuates a more general trend in which truth is considered relative and unimportant. Russia's messaging regarding this war is the manifestation of the increasing influence of postmodernism within the context of international affairs. If this aspect proves dominant, Putin will deserve his label as an anachronistic imperialist, as he often likens himself to Peter the Great.

Chapter III will take stock of the war in Ukraine and attempt to explain that Russia's invasion is both a direct challenge to the existing international order and, simultaneously, a sign of its decline. If this aspect of the war - its salience as a symptom of the international order's decline - prevails, Putin's aggression may be regarded more as opportunistic, albeit reckless, manoeuvring. The war in Ukraine would then serve as an ominous preview of what the world will have to suffer in the years ahead: the coming anarchy.¹

Whatever the war in Ukraine may seem to accomplish in Europe while the cameras are rolling will be eventually overshadowed by the

¹ Robert Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy* (New York: Vintage, 2001).

centrifugal force of the declining world order. Therefore, Chapter IV will examine how geopolitical competition has revisited Europe's doorstep. More specifically, it will outline how the on-going war in Ukraine will epitomize the beginning of Europe's division rather than unity.

Surely the consequences of this war's anarchy valence will have global repercussions to which all members of the international community, including the Republic of Korea, should vigilantly attend. Chapter V will focus on some of the challenge policymakers will encounter and suggest responses thereto.

Russia's Intentions

Marching Through Georgia

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the largest conventional invasion experienced by a sovereign country in Europe since the Second World War (WWII). Until February 24, most Russia experts predicted that Russia would not actually execute an armed incursion into Ukraine. Many believed that President Biden was unnecessarily overexaggerating the possibility of war. As such, when war did in fact break out, President Putin's intentions eluded many, if not Putin himself. Had this third-generation-war-style *blitzkrieg* successfully led to the occupation of Kyiv, then the Russian war aims might have evolved into a scenario where they quickly subdued Ukraine (either through annexation or installment of a puppet regime) and sought gains further west. It is no wonder Poland and the Baltic countries panicked. However, the current military situation in Ukraine illustrates that a more realistic Russian war plan is evolving around consolidating their gains in the eastern Ukraine before seeking possible concessions elsewhere.

Three aspects of this war plan come to our attention. First, the most recent operations of the Russian forces are clearly aimed at expanding

its occupied territory in the Donbas region. Second, Russia is making its rule over the Kherson Oblast a *fait accompli*, to link the Donbas and Crimea. Third, Russia continues to target Odessa with missiles. Threatening Odessa largely serves three further purposes: (1) making Ukraine a virtually land-locked country, isolating it from maritime logistical support (and depriving it of a major commercial port in peacetime), (2) holding hostage Ukraine's crop exports as a bargaining chip against Western sanctions vis-à-vis Russia, and (3) opening up the possibility of a future incursion towards Transnistria. In 1925, Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein produced "Battleship Potemkin," which marked the birth of "film as propaganda." The climax of this film includes a famous massacre scene at the Odessa/Potemkin Steps. This massacre scene depicted Tsarist oppression against revolution. It is, therefore, a tragic irony that Russia is pouring missiles into this city, victimizing its citizens in the 21st Century.²

From the onset of the "special military operation," President Putin has insisted that his *casus belli* were to protect ethnic Russians in the Donbas region. Notably, this is the exact same line of logic he used when he waged war against Georgia and annexed Crimea. He is using this same formula for the third time. If he does so yet again, which seems likely if he succeeds in conquering Ukraine, his next most likely target would be Transnistria. There, Moldovans are outnumbered by ethnic Russians, most of whom moved into the area during the Soviet era.

The absurdity of Putin's claim was best articulated by Ambassador Kimani of Kenya to the United Nations in his speech at the Security Council on February 21. He said, "At independence, had we chosen to pursue States on the basis of ethnic, racial, or religious homogeneity, we would still be waging bloody wars these many decades later ... Rather than form nations that looked ever backwards into history with a dangerous nostalgia, we chose to look forward to a greatness that

² "Russian Missiles Pound Ukraine's Port City of Odesa as Dozens of Bodies Discovered in Front-line Town to the North," *CBS News*, May 10, 2022.

none of our many nations and peoples had ever known.”³

There is a theory about Putin's “Georgia formula incursions” that looks beyond the nominal reasoning he gives in terms of ethnic affinity. It focuses on Russia’s population factor. Peter Zeihan argues that during the Soviet period, the Russians had 180-odd million Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians, East Germans, and other Central Europeans to use as cannon fodder to guard their western border, and commanded the 50-million-strong Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Tajiks to caulk up the southern frontier. Following the Soviet collapse, the population of the Russian state was diminished by nearly two-thirds and what's left is disappearing as the bottom fell out of the Russian birth rate, especially during the 1990s.⁴ Among many Russian needs, a younger population seems to be one of its most pressing issues. In fact, on May 25, Russia scrapped its age limit for professional soldiers, meaning people over 40 can enlist in the armed forces.⁵ Zeihan wrote that Ukraine should be Russia's single largest concern, on account of Ukraine's productive wheat belt, ability to check Turkey, large ethnic Russian population, industrial base, and oil & gas export infrastructure.⁶ *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, a Japanese newspaper, also reported that Russia's desire to absorb Ukraine's population might have been the source of Putin's ambition, introducing Putin's claim in July 2021 that Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are historically and commonly rooted in the Kievan Rus established in the 9th Century.⁷

Another theory suggests that the invasion is a clumsy alternative to Russia’s original plan, which was to prolong its suzerainty over Ukraine through political means. The Euromaidan Revolution overthrew the pro-Russian government in Kyiv in 2014. Immediately after the change in the Ukrainian government, Russia pursued very different courses in

³ The United Nations, “S/PV.8970” (February 28, 2022).

⁴ Peter Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower: The Next Generation of American Preeminence and the Coming Global Disorder* (New York: Twelve, 2014), 181.

⁵ “Russian Parliament Scraps Age Limit for Army Recruits,” *Reuters*, May 25, 2022.

⁶ Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower*, 184-5.

⁷ *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, May 29, 2022.

two regions of Ukraine. While Russia wrested Crimea away from Ukraine by annexing it, Russia insisted on the integration of the Donbas region into Ukraine under Russian “protection.” In fact, this used to be Russia’s key demand in the Minsk ceasefire agreements of 2014 and 2015.⁸ Supporting (or providing) the “little green men,” Russia pursued the preservation of the Donbas as a pro-Russian electoral foothold in Ukraine, because otherwise the rest of Ukraine would tilt towards a more radical pro-Western agenda. In other words, Russia wanted to deprive the Ukrainians of both their territorial integrity and their political independence. The continued resistance of the Ukrainian people to such objectives may have led Putin to use a “Georgia formula” invasion yet again in 2022.

Whichever explanation turns out to be more persuasive, the invasion seems to be bringing about the opposite effect of what Putin would have desired. Instead of Ukrainian absorption, the identity gulf between the two peoples has never been wider. Ukrainian revulsion towards Russia has deep roots. The Holodomor (1932 ~ 1933) and the subsequent political purges and massacres must have given the Ukrainian people a collective memory of antipathy towards Moscow⁹, but these things happened when Ukraine, like its name - meaning “borderland” - suggests, was within the Soviet empire. Also, it was unilaterally inflicted persecution as Ukrainians then were among the many tragic victims of Stalinist oppression. Michael Howard argues “Inevitably, nationalism was characterized almost everywhere by some degree of militarism. Self-consciousness as a Nation implies, by definition, a sense of differentiation from other communities, and the most memorable incidents in the group memory usually are of conflict with, and triumph over, other communities. It is in fact very difficult to create national self-consciousness without a war.”¹⁰ Russia's invasion

⁸ Mario Loyala, “What is the Ukraine Endgame?” *National Review* (June 9, 2022).

⁹ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

¹⁰ Michael Howard, “War and the Nation-State,” *Daedalus*, vol. 108, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 102.

in 2022 seems to be effectively building Ukraine as a nation-state vis-à-vis Russia, as it adds this last component of militarism. The resulting nation-state will be a version of Ukraine that is the most hostile to Russia in history.

Truth Is a Many-Splintered Thing¹¹

President Putin's narrative of Russia's destiny is a fiction, albeit a grandiose one. The ideologue with the greatest affinity with Putin's thoughts is Russian thinker Aleksandr Dugin. He claims that Orthodox Russia is neither Eastern nor Western, but a separate and unique civilization; a civilization engaged in a battle for its rightful place among world powers.¹² But this is not a new idea. "Eurasianism" can be traced back to Lev Nikolayevich Gumilyov (1912 ~ 1915), who crafted his ideas during the days of Imperial Russia. Their claims are reminiscent of "the Slav Epic (*Slovanska Epopej*)" of Czech painter Alfons Maria Mucha (1860 ~ 1939), which sought to evoke a primitive communal Slavism. In Mucha's paintings, the sufferings of Jesus Christ are an allegory for the tribulations of the Slavic people pining for the Millennium Kingdom. Just as German romanticism, which rose from the mystic forests of ancient Germania, provided Hitler with Wagner's epic Leitmotiv, the dramatic destructiveness of the historicism displayed by the likes of Dugin is embedded in Putin's regressive world view.

On top of the Slavic nationalism was added the humiliation of a nation that lost the Cold War. Post-Cold War Russia failed to achieve political reform and its economic strength shrank to a fraction of China's. To those who believed in Russia's greatness, the downfall of Mother Russia had to be the result of external conspiracies. The instigations of far-right nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky (1946

¹¹ This chapter is a summary of Yongmin Park, "Two Lessons from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine (in Korean)," *Diversity + Asia* (June 2022), <http://diverseasia.snu.ac.kr/?p=5702>.

¹² Gabriel Gatehouse, "The Russians Who Fear a War with the West," *BBC News*, October 25, 2016. Also see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGunRKWtWBs>.

~ 2022) turned out to be a preview of Russia's violent anti-Western foreign policy. Three decades ago, even Dugin would have hesitated to boast of his ideas as a “Fourth Political Theory,” which is in fact a mixture of Slavic mysticism, fascism, and Marxism fomenting domestic discontent into outward hostility. What gave Dugin a wide-open stage was postmodernism. He argues that “Post-modernity shows that every so-called truth is a matter of believing. So we believe in what we do, we believe in what we say. And that is the only way to define the truth. So we have our special Russian truth that you need to accept.”¹³

Alfred N. Whitehead wrote that European philosophical tradition consists simply of footnotes to Plato.¹⁴ He might have been right, as long as the majority believed in an absolute truth somewhere beyond Plato's Cave. However, postmodernism came along to put an end to such a belief. In October 2004, when French deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida passed away, the *Economist* sarcastically, but pertinently pointed this out in his obituary. Mentioning that there was a controversy on awarding him an honorary doctorate at Cambridge University, it wrote, “The academy is often fractious, but this was different. It is not that Mr. Derrida's views, or his arguments for them, were unusually contentious. There were no arguments, nor really any views either. He would have been the first to admit this. He not only contradicted himself, over and over again, but vehemently resisted any attempt to clarify his ideas.”¹⁵ Truth was no longer absolute nor objective. In 2016, the Oxford English Dictionary added the word “post-truth” to its pages. It is defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”

What existed in the enigmatic minds of philosophers was made reality by a tenacious innovator named Steve Jobs. Smart phones have become an inseparable part of the human body, as an organ that links

¹³ Gatehouse, “The Russians Who Fear a War with the West.”

¹⁴ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 39.

¹⁵ “Obituary,” *The Economist* (October 23, 2004).

the body to the World Wide Web. Social media wrought the “Arab Spring,” enabled the Euromaidan (*Євромайдан*) Revolution, and sparked candlelight vigils in South Korea. The effects of hyperconnectivity did not stop there. Social media reinforces confirmation biases. To maximize advertisement revenues, Facebook and Twitter adopted algorithms that connect people who surf or display similar interests, with little regard for the content's significance or ethical concerns. Social media users are increasingly radicalized. QAnon conspiracists, white supremacists, and racists gain a stronger sense of belonging. Social media even provides ample opportunities for terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda to easily recruit.¹⁶ The flood of information has brought down the authority of experts. Now everyone seeks one's own version of truth from quarters one sees fit.

“Men readily believe what they want to believe (*Fere libenter homines id quod volunt credunt*)” This is an enduring phrase uttered 2000 years ago by Julius Caesar. Communities could endure despite this tendency most likely because the selection of possible beliefs and channels for their circulation were limited. When the selection of truths available to each person has become more numerous than a list of ice cream flavors, how can communities persist? On top of this epistemological confusion, hyper-globalization exacerbated economic polarization, further fracturing communities. Will technology save us? In all probability, artificial intelligence and the metaverse will increasingly blur the lines between “virtual” and “real”; “truth” and “lies.”

This is the backdrop to the revanchist war Putin wages. From the perspective of Henry Kissinger, who considers legitimacy and the balance of power key components of order,¹⁷ the world has already entered the early stages of anarchy. The collapse of an order really

¹⁶ Charles Arthur, *Social Warming: The Dangerous and Polarising Effects of Social Media* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2021).

¹⁷ Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), 1-3.

begins within people's minds, as Kissingerian “legitimacy” is in fact a psychological status that is held within the minds of the leaders and citizens of major powers. The Russian invasion of Ukraine may be a bell that tolls for the demise of the existing international order.

Israeli historian Yuval Harari found in the appearance of fiction the key for humankind to building nations and empires beyond the scope of small communities. Homo sapiens alone went through a “cognitive revolution” other animals did not experience in their evolutionary processes, and thus gained the ability to communicate and imagine intangible, abstract concepts. This ability enabled humans to collaborate with strangers belonging to the same company, same nation, or same religion.¹⁸ Thus wars were waged in the name of tribes, ethnicities, gods, and ideologies. However, not all wars are equal. In modern times, the only wars with clear beginnings and ends were those between states, because the fiction of national sovereignty has a measurable feature in the form of territory delineated by geographic boundaries. Borders are not a fiction.

The highest level of human community with recognizable borders is the state. Wars begin with the crossing of borders and end with the drawing of borders. Of the three elements of the state (sovereignty, territory, and population), only territory is a corporeal substance with a lasting definition. Thus, states with their borders drawn on a map became the basic unit of international relations. Therein lies the reason the modern international system (which may be traced back to the Treaty of Westphalia) with sovereign states as its main actors lasted for almost four centuries. Therefore, borders are evidence that states are incarnations of sovereignty.

Aristotle's famous quote is often translated as “people are social animals,” or “people are political animals.” What he actually said was, “people are polis-dwelling animals (zoon politikon, ζῷον πολιτικόν).”

¹⁸ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 22-44.

The polis was the Greek city-state with geographic boundaries. For Aristotle, any individual person who could flourish outside the framework of a state must be either less or more than human. Therefore, Aristotle's statement is not merely an observation that people tend to form relationships through communal life or the fact that they engage in political behavior, but that they identify themselves with life within borders. Groups defined by religion, faith, ideology, or race are much more difficult to identify. Not because they are too passionate, but because it is difficult to identify a concrete boundary. These groups move like the wind and disperse like ghosts. States do not. Not as long as borders remain.

Borders are the result of a balance of power or are lines imposed by force, and are thus fundamentally conservative features that gravitate towards the status quo. In international relations, borders represent stability. They are the geographic phenotype of peace. When borders are hard, the states concerned are peaceful; when they are porous, states are unstable; and when they are violated, war breaks out. When two adjacent nations agree on a definition for their border through a political settlement, it constitutes international law. Even if there is no artificial settlement, if both countries have customarily acknowledged a border, there exists a border recognized by international customary law.

The Russo-Ukrainian border was a “hard” border which Russia explicitly recognized during the process of Ukrainian independence from the USSR. Excluding Crimea, the border between the two nations has its roots in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed in 1918 between the German Empire and the nascent Soviet Union. The Crimean Peninsula was ceded from Russia to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954, and Russia used this to justify their claim on Crimea during its annexation in 2014. It is true that a large portion of Crimea's population consists of ethnic Russians, and also that a referendum was held prior to the annexation. However, this does not mean such facts support Russia's historical claim to the territory. From the 1920s, the Soviet government systematically persecuted and forcibly deported the Tartars native to

Crimea. Over 150,000 Crimean Tartars died from famine caused by agricultural collectivization, and approximately 200,000 survivors were deported by train to Central Asia. Above all, the annexation of Crimea was a blatant contravention of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, in which Russia itself made a written commitment “to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine.”

All wars are different. Some wars occur to break the balance of power, while others are waged to restore the balance. Some wars are meant to prevent greater threats, while some are fought to punish a serious violation of international law. The Just War Theory is a contentious topic. It is inevitably difficult to draw a line between right and wrong amidst a conflict where human lives are at stake. However, under any and all circumstances, one who instigates an act of aggression in order to expand one’s territory at the expense of one’s neighbor must be denounced as a villain. Even in a world where innumerable versions of the truth exist - rather, because it is such an age - borders must be defended. If those observable lines are deemed “post-truth,” the world will descend into a Hobbesian struggle of all against all. This is why Putin’s logic regarding his invasion of Ukraine constitutes a profound challenge to the Westphalian system, the most fundamental foundation of modern “inter-national” affairs.

A Geo-political Volcano

A Mid-War Balance Sheet

The three-month-long war is already producing some visible outcomes and making certain predictions highly probable. Firstly, the war has resulted in the decline of Russian power - both hard and soft - and the geopolitical isolation of Russia. On May 16, retired Russian Col. Mikhail Khodarenok criticized his own country’s military operation in Ukraine on state television. He went as far as saying, “Let’s look at this

situation as a whole from our overall strategic position. Let's not swing missiles in Finland's direction - this just looks ridiculous. The biggest problem with our military and political situation is that we are in total geopolitical isolation. And the whole world is against us even if we don't want to admit it.”¹⁹ Samuel Charap, a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation also pointed out that Russia is going to be weakened regardless of what happens in the war. He said “Russia is going to be isolated, impoverished, surrounded by more NATO with a much weaker military, and a global pariah in a lot of ways.”²⁰

Secondly, a shared threat perception has seemingly reunited Europe - the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to be precise. On February 28, Ukraine signed its application for EU membership.²¹ On May 18, Finland and Sweden simultaneously submitted their official letters of application to join NATO.²² “The most striking aspect of Sweden and Finland's applications to join NATO is how little debate there is about whether it's a wise idea,” reported CNN.²³ Even Switzerland is considering options that include joint military exercises with NATO.²⁴ The EU has adopted five packages of sanctions against Russia pertaining to measures in finance, energy, transport, technology sectors, and other areas.²⁵ It also included a decision that, for the first time in its history, the EU would provide lethal equipment to a third party country. On May 30, EU leaders agreed to

¹⁹ Tim Lister, Anastasia Graham Yooll and Taras Zadorozhnyy, “Former Russian Colonel Criticizes the Country's Invasion of Ukraine on State Television,” *CNN*, May 17, 2022.

²⁰ Felicia Schwartz and Amy Kazmin, “What Is America's End-game for the War in Ukraine?” *Financial Times*, May 29, 2022.

²¹ “Ukraine Applies for EU Membership, EU Hesitant,” *The Brussels Times*, March 1, 2022.

²² NATO, “Finland and Sweden Submit Applications to Join NATO,” May 18, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195468.htm.

²³ Stephen Collinson, “The Most Striking Aspect of Sweden and Finland's Application to Join NATO,” *CNN*, May 19, 2022.

²⁴ “Analysis: Neutral Switzerland Leans Closer to NATO in Response to Russia,” *Reuters*, May 16, 2022.

²⁵ European Commission, “Sanctions Adopted Following Russia's Military Aggression against Ukraine,” https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/international-relations/restrictive-measures-sanctions/sanctions-adopted-following-russias-military-aggression-against-ukraine_en.

embargo Russian oil imports by year's end, which would “effectively cut around 90 percent of oil imports from Russia to the EU by the end of the year.”²⁶ At least on the surface, Europe seems more united than it ever was, and the extent of the unity gives the impression that it will remain a long-lasting trend. However, this paper will later argue that it will not.

Thirdly, the war in Ukraine is being waged in a manner never seen before. It is an odd mixture of clumsy third-generation warfare and future-oriented hybrid warfare. In the earlier phase of the invasion, Russia's 64km-long military convoy towards Kyiv that got bogged down has clearly demonstrated Russian logistical problems.²⁷ On the other hand, as can be seen in examples ranging from the American-made FGM-148 Javelin to the Russian-made hypersonic Kh-47M2 Kinzhal, the leading instruments of this war are missiles and drones. With the right kind of missile (in this case, the Ukrainian-made Neptune), the Ukrainian armed forces were able to sink the Moskva, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.²⁸ There are also futuristic aspects. In cyberspace, a fierce hybrid war is being waged.²⁹ Cyber-attacks on Ukraine widely range from DDoS attacks on postal services to data theft from nuclear safety organizations.³⁰ Had it not been for Elon Musk's SpaceX Starlink internet service, neither the civilians nor the military of Ukraine would have maintained their morale and resistance.³¹ Russia claims it is using a new generation of powerful laser weapons in Ukraine to burn up drones.³² When this war is over, military strategists the world

26 “E.U. Leaders Agree to Ban 90 Percent of Russian Oil by Year-end,” *NBC News by the Associate Press*, May 31, 2022.

27 “Ukraine: Why Has Russia's 64km Convoy Near Kyiv Stopped Moving?” *BBC*, March 3, 2022.

28 Ellen Uchimiya and Eleanor Watson, “The Neptune: The Missiles That Struck Russia's Flagship, the Moskva,” *CBS News*, April 16, 2022.

29 Joe Tidy, “Ukraine Says It Is Fighting First 'Hybrid War',” *BBC*, March 4, 2022.

30 “UKRAINE: Timeline of Cyberattacks on Critical Infrastructure and Civilian Objects,” *CyberPeace Institute*, May 12, 2022.

31 Michael Sheetz, “About 150,000 People in Ukraine Are Using SpaceX's Starlink Internet Service Daily, Government Official Says,” *CNBC*, May 2, 2022.

32 Guy Faulconbridge, “Russia Uses New Laser Weapons in Ukraine, Zelenskiy Mocks 'Wonder Weapon',” *Reuters*, May 19, 2022.

over will have to compare their pre-war projections with what actually transpired in Ukraine and reflect the new findings.

The Jungle Grew Back

According to Kenneth Burke's rhetoric theory, assertion implies counter-assertion. Analyzing Keats' poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Burke wrote that the line "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" really means that "Beauty is not truth, truth not beauty." He wrote, "It would be particularly exhilarating to proclaim them one if there were a strong suspicion that they were at odds (as the assertion that 'God's in his heaven, all's right with the world' is really a counter-assertion to doubts about God's existence and suspicions that much is wrong)."³³ In other words, one does not tend to say the obvious. Obama's "Pivot to Asia" really meant that the American presence in Asia was insufficient. Trump's "America First" was indeed a counter-assertion reflecting Americans' frustration that they are lagging behind. Xi Jinping's "common prosperity (共同富裕, *gòngtóng fùyù*, getting richer together)" highlights the fact that the polarization of Chinese society is becoming increasingly problematic. Much talked-about European unity of late may partially connote a sense of fear that it may not last.

On April 29, British Foreign Secretary Elizabeth Truss delivered a speech at London's Mansion House during the Mayor's Easter Banquet. She strongly argued for a reboot of the free world's approach to tackling global aggressors in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. The title of her speech was, nonetheless, "The Return of Geopolitics." In her speech, she admitted that, "The architecture that was designed to guarantee peace and prosperity has failed Ukraine. The economic and security structures that were developed after the Second World War and the Cold War have been bent out of shape so far, they have enabled rather

³³ Kenneth Burke, "A Symbolic Action in a Poem by Keats (1943)," *A Grammar of Motives* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 447.

than contained aggression.”³⁴

The return of geopolitics is a synonym for the decline of world order. There were a few prominent Cassandras who predicted that “anarchy is coming,”³⁵ that “the jungle will grow back,”³⁶ and that “the nations are disunited.”³⁷ Having been taken for granted for decades, the post-WWII world order, like any systemic order before it, has its own vulnerabilities. The international order was founded upon the global commons, the provision for which the US, as the hegemon, took the larger share of responsibility. This was the essence of what is known as the “Bretton Woods System.”³⁸

As one of the two superpowers in a bipolar world, the US’s primary strategic objective was to win the ideological competition against the Soviet Union. In other words, the end of the Cold War deprived the US of a major reason to maintain its role as the guarantor of this international order. What temporarily reversed this trend was the September 11 Attacks of 2001. In response, the US actively projected power against a new enemy: Islamic fundamentalism. The military power the US deployed was overwhelming, but the duration of this effort was not very long. With the 2021 withdrawal of US forces from Kabul, the post-9/11 era came to a close after 20 years. The signals of an American turn towards isolationism were already becoming clear in the 2010s. Of course, the reason there are no American boots on the ground in Ukraine is because Ukraine is not a NATO member state. However, it is also true that at more than any time since the end of the Cold War, the American public is skeptical of direct military interventions.

34 “The Return of Geopolitics: Foreign Secretary’s Mansion House Speech at the Lord Mayor’s 2022 Easter Banquet,” *Gov.uk*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretarys-mansion-house-speech-at-the-lord-mayors-easter-banquet-the-return-of-geopolitics>.

35 Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World* (New York: Vintage, 2019).

36 Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back*.

37 Peter Zeihan, *Disunited Nations: The Scramble for Power in an Ungoverned World* (New York: Harper Business, 2020); and Peter Zeihan, *The Absent Superpower: The Shale Revolution and a World without America* (Zeihan on Politics, 2017).

38 Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower*.

Another underlying factor that requires attention is the Shale Revolution. Energy has always been a decisive factor in international power politics. The fundamental importance of fossil fuel has made American engagement in the Middle East unavoidable for as long as anyone remembers. Contrary to Wilsonian platitudes, which were often referred to as “American values,” the US had to befriend and support authoritarian monarchies for decades. However, the Shale Revolution since the 2000s has dramatically reversed the situation. Since 2012, shale made the US a net energy exporter, and contributed to further decreasing American motivation to intervene abroad.

There are also more fundamental changes. The US-led liberal order operated under tacit cooperation between countries that consumed while accruing debt, and countries that produced while accumulating savings. The first most notable producers were Germany and Japan. Following the Plaza Agreement, the Four Asian Tigers grew as manufacturing bases. After the end of the Cold War, the most significant producer role has been assumed by China. During this time, American consumption and debt grew almost at the same pace as Chinese production and savings.

However, as the US experienced the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, its purchasing power decreased. As China focused on investing in advanced technology industries with its accumulated capital, it virtually ceased purchases of US Treasury bonds. This demonstrates that the tacit division of roles between the US and China during the 30 years following the end of the Cold War has reached a point of unsustainability. Since there is no clear alternative to China in terms of production capabilities, it is likely that this breakdown would not be a temporary phenomenon. Global value chains are unraveling and supply chains are being restructured. Economic interdependence is still extensive, but efforts to reshore or friend-shore are accelerating. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, making people everywhere naturally accept higher walls established between countries, psychologically preparing them to accept geopolitical competition.

Social disputes and partisan politics will drive the US to be further entrenched in domestic affairs. Most of what is left of its outbound attention will be used to carry out hegemonic competition with China. Biden may shake hands with Mohammed bin Salman, but the US-Saudi relationship will never go back to the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt shaking hands with Ibn Saud on the deck of the USS Quincy, forming a fundamentally system-defining, value-free, and mutually beneficial relationship that lasted many decades. In fact, American influence in the entire Middle East has visibly decreased.³⁹ The US will neither “abandon” nor “exit” Europe, but it will not exercise as strong a leadership role to bind Europe together as before. The US will continuously try to cut costs required to maintain the global commons, and to seek partners willing to shoulder a greater burden in upholding the rules-based international order.

Russia has been failing to play a meaningful role in shaping the world order since the end of the Cold War. That frustration and anxiety may have driven Putin to initiate an irrational war where everyone loses. The war in Ukraine has thus proven to be the first, albeit unexpected, volcano that erupted along the geopolitical fault lines of Europe in this century.

Deconstructing Europe?

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

During the first few months of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the rest of Europe mustered strong, unified solidarity. The fear that Russia might occupy Kyiv was genuine. Consequently, a number of unprecedented measures were taken in the name of Europe, ranging

³⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, “Biden and Mother Nature Have Reshaped the Middle East,” *New York Times*, October 26, 2021.

from sanctions, embargoes, and weapons provision. As the war continues, however, dissonance grows louder among EU and NATO members.

When Ukraine submitted its application for EU membership in late February, the media treated EU membership as if it were a lighter substitute for membership in NATO. Such a journalistic reaction was understandable, given that Ukraine's possible joining of NATO was cited as Moscow's primary *casus belli*. The EU is, however, an institution from which the United Kingdom took more than four years to exit, and only after much political turmoil. Even Turkey, which has been a NATO member since 1952, is yet to be an EU member. In the case of the latest EU member, Croatia, it took ten years from its initial application to final admission. The EU is not capable of admitting a new member that has not yet implemented tough but necessary reforms, considering that there are other countries at various stages of candidacy.⁴⁰ While Poland shows the strongest support for Ukrainian membership, France and Germany are making it clear that there will be no fast-tracking. On May 9, Macron even said that EU membership for Ukraine will likely take “many decades” in a speech to the European Parliament.⁴¹

Having spent the first few weeks of the invasion worrying about what Russia's occupation of Ukraine would entail, European leaders are now in the awkward position of having to worry about what might happen if Ukraine actually wins. Ukraine's recent successes in Kyiv and Kharkiv have made a once unthinkable Ukrainian victory, albeit remote, a possibility. The US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin delivered his assessment at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on April 26, stating, “Ukraine clearly believes that it can win, and so does everyone here.”⁴² On May 12, NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană told reporters, “The brutal invasion of Russia is losing momentum,” and that

⁴⁰ Marie Jourdain, “The Buzz in Paris: Thinking Realistically?: The Buzz in Europe's Halls of Power about Ukraine's EU Bid,” Atlantic Council, May 26, 2022.

⁴¹ John Psaropoulos, “Timeline: Week 11 of Russia's war in Ukraine,” *Al Jazeera*, May 12, 2022; and “Timeline: A Month of Russia's War in Ukraine,” *Al Jazeera*, March 23, 2022.

⁴² Quint Forney, “Austin: U.S. Believes Ukraine ‘Can Win’ War against Russia,” *Politico*, April 26, 2022.

Ukraine could win the war.⁴³

Major powers in Europe began to fear that a humiliating defeat might destabilize Russia in the long-run, making the political and energy future of Europe even more unpredictable.⁴⁴ French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, in particular, are emphasizing the need for a ceasefire and are calling for a diplomatic solution. After meeting with President Biden in Washington on May 10, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi also said it was time to start thinking about a peace deal, adding that the efforts to build peace must also include Ukraine.⁴⁵ On May 13, Olaf tweeted, “Three points from my long phone call with Putin today: There must be a ceasefire in Ukraine as quickly as possible. The claim that Nazis are in power there is false. And I also reminded him about Russia’s responsibility for the global food situation.”⁴⁶ A demand that Russia immediately retreat and withdraw all its forces from Ukrainian territory was notably not among these three points. Macron stressed, “We are not at war with Russia,” in an address at the European Parliament on May 9.⁴⁷ In a guest column in the *New York Times* on May 31, Biden echoed, “We do not seek a war between NATO and Russia,” and “We do not want to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia.”⁴⁸

While the major Western European powers stress terms like “ceasefire,” “negotiation,” and “considered strategy,” the temperature is quite different in Eastern Europe. Estonia’s Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said in an interview, “Gas might be expensive, but freedom is priceless.” She added, “For those big European countries that have much better

43 Agnes Szucs, “Ukraine Can Win War: NATO Deputy Chief,” Anadolu Agency, May 15, 2022.

44 Hannah Roberts, Nahal Toosi and Cornelius Hirsch, “Europe’s Leaders Fall Out of Key on Ukraine,” *Politico*, May 26, 2022.

45 Roberts, Toosi and Hirsch, “Europe’s Leaders Fall Out of Key on Ukraine.”

46 Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz, Twitter Post, May 13, 2022, 8:47 p.m., <https://twitter.com/Bundeskanzler/status/1525079306514440194>.

47 Georgi Getev, “Macron Says EU Is Not at War with Russia, Warns against ‘Humiliating’ Putin,” *EURACTIV.com*, May 10, 2022.

48 Joe Biden, “What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2022.

neighbors than we do, their main worry is migration, but they have to understand that if there is a weak peace, then the migration will continue because people will be afraid to live there.”⁴⁹ On May 22, Poland’s President Andrzej Duda addressed lawmakers in Kyiv, stating, “If Ukraine is sacrificed for... economic reasons or political ambitions - even a centimeter of its territory - it will be a huge blow not only for the Ukrainian nation, but for the entire Western world.”⁵⁰

This East-West fracture will not jeopardize Europe’s unity against Russian aggression as long as they share a common level of threat perception. Ukraine’s defeat is Scylla while Putin’s humiliation and long-term instability in Russia is Charybdis. In the end, the compromise will have to lean towards one of either direction, for both Ukraine and Russia have already shed too much blood to settle for an objectively balanced solution. Zelensky’s condition demanding a withdrawal of Russian forces to pre-February 24 borders would mean a meaningless defeat for Putin. As time goes by, the likelihood that Ukraine will end up losing parts of its territory guaranteed by the 1994 Budapest Memorandum is increasing because the major Western powers that have greater leverage over Ukraine than over Russia have begun to feel the economic pressures of the war.

If a Clod Be Washed Away, Europe Is the Less

On the surface, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has led Europe to unite to an unprecedented degree. Undercurrents, however, flow in another direction. The moral relativism that gave Putin and Dugin their podium in Russia is providing larger political platforms for right-wing populists and illiberal political parties elsewhere in Europe as well. Mason Richey pointed out that Putin’s war of aggression has encouraged Europe’s corrupt, populist illiberals such as President Andrzej Duda and Prime

⁴⁹ Alexandra Brzozowski, "Stop Calling Putin, Estonia’s Prime Minister Says," *EURACTIV.com*, May 16, 2022.

⁵⁰ "Ukraine Must Decide Its Own Future, Says Poland’s President," *CNBC*, May 22, 2022.

Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of Poland, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary, instead of causing them to feel pressure to undertake reform.⁵¹ Even in France, Marine Le Pen, who has in the past often boasted of her close relationship with Putin, won an unprecedented 41.5 percent of the presidential vote in April, the highest ever showing for the French far-right.

Although at present European unity is considered natural, years ago Timothy Ash had astutely pointed out, “If the division of Europe was ‘unnatural’ then what was Europe’s natural state? Unity? If yes, in what form? Or was it rather - and more plausibly - that this particular division was unnatural as compared with other past or putative forms of division: for example, the ‘Westphalia’ division, the ‘Vienna’ division, the ‘Versailles’ division, the division into ultra-national empires or the division into sovereign nation-states, each enjoying government of the people, by the people, for the people? Even if the last is what was meant, one is bound to say that Europe has never been natural yet.”⁵²

Indeed, what is the natural state of Europe? NATO is obviously an institution designed to withstand the security threats of the Cold War. However, the EU has different roots. Many forget that the EU is a descendant of the European Community (EC), which is itself a descendant of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), which are in turn descendants of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The Schuman Declaration of 1950 proposed the creation of the ECSC, which was the first in this series of supranational European institutions. The Declaration stipulates, “The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.”⁵³ The current

51 Mason Richey, “A Mixed Bag: Putin’s Ukraine War and the Fight against Europe’s Authoritarians,” *War of the Rocks, Texas National Security Review*, April 6, 2022.

52 Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe’s Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, 1993).

53 European Union, “Schuman Declaration May 1950,” <https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59/schuman-declaration-may-1950en>.

version of European unity was, in fact, born as an answer to the German, not the Soviet, Question.

The post-WWII solution to the German Question was the “Yalta division,” which transformed the European fault line along the Berlin Wall and the inner German border. Since the Napoleonic Wars, the balance of European security depended on the question of who dominated *Mitteleuropa*. The Yalta system was an arrangement that allowed the Soviet Union to control much of *Mitteleuropa*. Then came the end of the Cold War which put an end to the Yalta division. Judging from Putin’s words and writings, he seems to regard the collapse of the Soviet Union as the result of the USSR being cheated by the West. Whatever Putin may believe, the Soviet collapse was the product of an unsustainable system hitting its expiration date. In the early 1990s, the Soviet empire could peacefully acquiesce its influence over *Mitteleuropa* because Europe back then was sufficiently tamed. France and Germany, wearing an American straitjacket of collective security, posed no danger of becoming a breeding ground for the next Napoleon or Hitler.

Even though the liberal world order maintained its inertia for three decades following the Cold War, the world order began its slow but steady decline as I argued above (in Chapter III-2). Particularly, the West’s struggle against Islamic fundamentalism bled much energy from the collective security arrangement that has been maintained under the umbrella of the US. Swarming refugees from the Middle East and Africa during the last decade made Europeans intolerant and xenophobic, and skeptical about the wisdom of the Schengen Agreement. COVID-19 only exacerbated such an exclusive attitude.

As for the US, after its twenty-year-engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, it lost its appetite for foreign interventions. The “Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022” signed by Biden seems to symbolize American unwillingness to dispatch American troops to the battlefield, unlike when its predecessor Lend-Lease Act was authorized during WWII. Tactical concepts of modern warfare have been transformed, rendering massive military footprints less vital. Over

the horizon, the profound challenge of China is rearing its head. Having experienced a financial crisis, the purchasing power of the US decreased. Meanwhile, Europe suffered a massive influx of refugees, mostly from the Middle East and North Africa. Financial crises in some countries painfully divided Europe's richer North and poorer South.

The UK, the permanent balancer, finally exited the union. Like it or not, the union now has to be led by Germany and/or France. There is a possibility that joint leadership between these two powers could turn into rivalry. Macron's proposals for a "European Army" or a "parallel European community" has not attracted much enthusiasm. If indeed NATO's eastward expansion was an existential security threat to Russia as many experts say it is, then Russia's reaction might have been something subtler than a daring incursion into Kyiv. The unclear future of Europe, the US' renewed focus on the Taiwan Straits, and the increasing isolationist tendencies of American public opinion might have been construed as an opportunity for Putin to take an adventurist shot. Aristotle's axiom states that nature abhors a vacuum (*Horror vacui*). Geopolitics, too, it seems, abhors a power vacuum.

The might that prevented revisionist powers from forcefully changing the *status quo*, the might that prevented the defeated Axis countries of WWII from rearming, the might that peacefully bound Europe in a union, and the might that prevented nuclear proliferation are one and the same - a.k.a. the liberal international order. What we witness today is this order visibly declining. Germany's decision to increase its military expenditure to more than 2 percent of its GDP does not mean that we will witness great formations of German troops armed with a formidable arsenal any time soon, but it means the Yalta solution to the German question has finally reverted back to square one. (Presumably, Japan will soon try to follow suit.)

I would like to emphasize that this does not mean Germany is destined to become a revisionist power or a threat to peace. It simply means that the system which gave Europe its identity, forged in the aftermath of the deadliest conflict fought amongst the countries of

Europe in history, has been noticeably weakened. The Yalta system had restored balance to Europe after WWII. Since the end of the Cold War, the European balance of power has been a dormant question, mostly because nobody seriously raised it - until Putin did so with his delusions. For Europe to respond to this question with greater unity rather than division, a far greater crisis than the current one in Ukraine might prove necessary. The fact that this question resurfaced when Russia annexed Crimea, in which Yalta is located, is oddly symbolic. How the war in Ukraine ends is likely to decide the shape, scope, and character of the security structure of tomorrow's Europe. At this juncture, however, the undercurrents of division, rather than surface-level unity, seem poised to decide the destiny of Europe.

Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night

The ongoing war in Ukraine is a local incident with a regional impact and global repercussions. This war also divulges how far the world order has already declined. In prescriptive terms, it means that all members of the international community must: (1) try to restore the world order as best as their political situations permit, (2) resist, condemn, and prevent any attempt to delegitimize the existing order, and (3) take measures to prolong the remains of the days of order. Worst case, if the decay of the global order towards its complete decomposition is an irreversible process, God forbid, all must exert their best efforts to bathe in the last rays of the sun.

The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) system has been an important component of the world order. The major threats to the NPT system used to come from nuclear aspirants such as North Korea and Iran. Now there is an added risk that Russia, a nuclear power, is openly threatening the possibility of using its nuclear arsenal in Ukraine. Such an attitude breaches the trust and *raison d'être* of the NPT system. At this juncture, it is imperative that the NPT system be secured. Russia

must cease its rhetoric about possible use of nuclear weapons, and cooperate in increasing the break-out time of Iranian nuclear capabilities. Of course, North Korea must not be recognized as a de facto nuclear weapons state.

The world has yet to find out what China's general reaction to this war will turn out to be. Depending on the results of the war, and China's estimate of its outcome, China could take self-restraining, opportunistic, or adventuristic measures regarding its sphere of influence. A humiliated Russia will give China the upper-hand in the Sino-Russia relationship. A successful Russia will give China motivation to strengthen the axis of authoritarian regimes and to more actively pursue a revisionist course. The international community must remind the Chinese leaders that China has achieved its marvelous economic development based on the existing order and therefore it, too, has a huge stake in maintaining that order.

Rising commodity prices and food shortages caused by the war will hit the poorest countries the hardest, thereby amplifying the war's effects to a global level in the months to come. The skyrocketing crop prices of 2008 and 2009 had led to the "Arab Spring." Any country with weaker governance than the Arab countries of that time will have to brace for violent political impact. Countries with the requisite capabilities must cooperate in order to prevent a chain of political turmoil within their regions.

The fate of Ukraine sends a particularly telling signal to other countries located above geopolitical fault lines, such as the Republic of Korea. Ukraine's lack of a military alliance makes a peace settlement that includes Ukrainian territorial concessions likely. The era of a retreating world order and upcoming geopolitical struggle demands that Korea rediscover the value of the treaty alliance it has with the US. Korea must refrain from the temptation of "strategic ambiguity," and formulate its stance based on its identity as a liberal democracy. To reach the full potential of the US-ROK alliance, Korea also needs to galvanize its relationship with Japan.

If the international order declines, so will its recognized universality. If and when that happens, the liberal values representing the order may be scoffed at as merely “European values” by many. In fact, liberalism has its roots in the Enlightenment tradition of Europe. Even within Europe today, moral relativism and political populism are degrading liberal values and their significance. In such an atmosphere, the role of other pivotal states outside of Europe will become more important and meaningful than ever before. The Republic of Korea is one such notable example. Korea is well-positioned to demonstrate that liberal values are indeed universal and worth defending. That is why it is important for the rest of world to see Korea remain a healthy liberal democracy and protect its liberal institutions. If liberal democracy is to survive and thrive despite rumors of war, the torch of liberalism must brightly blaze outside the West as well.

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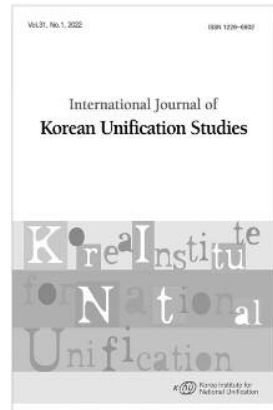
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