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Rethinking the Liberal International Order in Asia Amidst Russia's War in Ukraine.

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For 40 years, KEI has been promoting dialogue and understanding between the United States and the Republic of Korea through accurate and in-depth analysis. KEI draws on the expertise of its resident staff; provides a platform on which leading writers, thinkers and commentators from the United States, Korea, and third countries can share their research and opinions; promotes scholarship by commissioning and publishing original articles; and hosts public and off-the-record conversations among policy makers and opinion leaders. These activities are intended to ensure that policy decisions are soundly based within the context of the Korean Peninsula's complexity and significance.

KEI maintains connections with partner think tanks and with the academic community throughout the United States. Our "Academic Paper Series," "Academic Symposium," and "University Programs" ensure that the best in research and scholarship on Korea are shared among experts and are available to students and the general public. All KEI publications are accessible free of charge.

Although most of our activities take place at our Washington, D.C. headquarters, KEI is committed to going beyond the beltway—engaging with communities across the United States to discuss how the two countries are navigating shared major challenges of our time. Programs such as the "Future of Korea," held in partnership with the World Affairs Councils of America, and the "Ambassadors' Dialogue" bring Korean and American diplomats to venues across the country to discuss current events and the overall U.S.-ROK relationship. Participating officials and audience members alike value these opportunities to connect with relevant voices from both countries beyond Washington D.C.

In an increasingly digital age, KEI is committed to expanding our virtual engagement. Through our blog, "The Peninsula;" video series, "Korea in Five;" and livestreamed and recorded events on a wide variety of Korea- and transpacific issues; we are able to connect with people from across the globe who are interested in Korea. We invite you to explore our interactive website, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

The U.S. partnership with the Republic of Korea is built on enduring values and interests, but its strength cannot be taken for granted. The bonds between the two nations are maintained through the efforts of diplomats, service members, scholars, students, artists, and everyday Americans and Koreans. KEI is dedicated to contributing to this undertaking—helping to ensure a safer and more prosperous world.

KEI is contractually affiliated with the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP), a public policy research institute located in Seoul and funded by the government of the Republic of Korea.

Preface

The Korea Economic Institute (KEI) is pleased to issue the inaugural volume of its new flagship journal, Korea Policy. Our new journal carries forward the objective and spirit of KEI's previous publications, the Academic Paper Series' (APS) On Korea publication, and the Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies publication. Like our previous publications, Korea Policy identifies and explores the array of security, economic and political issues and policy trends related to Korea and the U.S.-Korea alliance. The journal offers academically rigorous and policy-relevant research.

Korea Policy papers are written by academic scholars and policy experts from the United States, South Korea, and around the globe. The objective is to provide opportunities for recognized specialists and new voices to present fresh research and innovative thinking on Korea, the region, and related international issues. Korea Policy will be published three times a year. Each volume covers a broad, unifying theme and is arranged into two sections: One section covering various regional states' perspectives and another section of more Korea-focused articles, all organized under the same broad theme.

Before publication, the articles in the first section are presented as working papers as a part of KEI's New Academic Symposium panel series, run as hybrid events in partnership with universities around the country. The Korea-focused articles in the second section are presented individually in hybrid events at KEI's Washington, DC office.

The papers in this inaugural volume exemplify the breadth and depth of policy issues relevant to Korea and the U.S.-Korea alliance. They are original pieces written exclusively for this volume over the last six months. KEI distributes the final publication to individuals in governments, the private sector, policy institutes, and educational communities around the world, and features the digital publication on the KEI website for the broader public.

Contributions in this inaugural volume of Korea Policy run under the broad theme: Rethinking the Liberal International Order in Asia Amidst Russia's War in Ukraine. The first section's articles explore the war's impact in thinking about the Indo-Pacific region from the perspective of the United States, U.S. allies Japan and South Korea, and U.S. rivals China and Russia. The second section's articles focus specifically on the effects of the war on: South Korea's economy; triangular relations between North Korea, China, and Russia; and South Korea's aspiration to become a Global Pivotal State.

For 40 years, KEI has produced objective and informative analyses and highlighted important policy research on Korea. I hope you find this inaugural volume of Korea Policy to be a useful contribution.

Kathleen Stephens
President and CEO
Korea Economic Institute of America
February 2023

Section 1

Regional Perspectives on the Liberal International Order in Asia

Rethinking the Liberal International Order in Asia under the Impact of the Ukraine War

By Gilbert Rozman

Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 posed the greatest shock to the international order established in Europe after WWII. It also reverberated powerfully in Asia. In the following four articles, we explore its impact in thinking about the Indo-Pacific region from the perspective of the United States, U.S. allies Japan and South Korea, and U.S. adversaries, China and Russia. Prior to the war how did these countries assess the order in the Indo-Pacific? What changed by 2023? The comparisons in this introduction put the five separate cases into a broader context.

Although big changes from the Russian onslaught occurred in Russia and the U.S., thinking in the other three countries actually registered more fundamental transformation. For Russia the liberal international order was demonized earlier and assumed to be on its last legs. Its decision to undertake a "special military operation" meant that it was acting on this worldview. For the United States, especially in the Biden administration, the overall threat to the U.S.-led order had been perceived earlier, and it remained to find answers to Russia's flagrant activation of this threat, not to rethink the defense of the order under way. In China, a more fundamental change occurred, backing Russia's war logic and misinformation at odds with its longstanding support for sovereignty and territorial integrity. If Xi Jinping had earlier begun a transition with his more aggressive "wolf warrior" thinking, a leap was still required to endorse Russia to such an extent. For Japan, there was also a transitional stage, driven by what is called the "Abe Doctrine," which gave stronger backing to the liberal international order. Yet, the contrast with the new "Kishida Doctrine" was huge, made greater by the lingering legacy of the "Yoshida Doctrine" far removed from responsible leadership in the face of a crisis to the order. Finally, the case of South Korea is particularly stark because Moon Jae-in's ambivalence about this order endured into the

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opening weeks of the Ukraine war before Yoon Suk-yeol emerged as a champion of it, albeit with some limitations that left Seoul trailing Washington and Tokyo as a full-fledged backer of the order.

Comparing the four countries other than China, we find that their behavior in 2022 had a lot to do with their preexisting views of China. Confident that China had its back and would welcome an assault on the liberal international order, Russia was emboldened to go to war. Cognizant of the danger of the PRC resorting to coercion toward Taiwan and increasingly critical of China's behavior, the United States was quick to link the invasion of Ukraine to the threat to Taiwan. A little less focused on countering China, at least economically, Japan swung far closer to the U.S. stance. Least prepared to confront China, South Korea proved less inclined to take strong action against Russia, but yielded ground over time. China insisted that Taiwan is totally separate from Ukraine, since it has no sovereignty although China was prepared to disregard Ukraine's, but the other states all saw parallels, Japan taking the lead in insisting that one leads directly to the other.

Russia has been itching to proclaim the old international order dead and to identity a starting date for a new order. It has a particular way of defining the old order, demonizing U.S. leadership and intentions. In turn, Russia places high hopes on China, as the critical force of transformation. In the picture too are U.S. allies, irrevocably tethered to the U.S. yoke, and the Global South, anxious for the emergence of a new order. Given Russia's categorical rejection of Europe, its obsession for constructing the new order is Asia, referred to as Eurasia but also as the Asia-Pacific region. Moscow has even identified the building blocks of the new order—the great powers at the core, the emerging institutions led by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and principles of the order. Problematic, however, are its assumptions about the speed and degree of U.S. collapse, the readiness of China to abandon the old order and agree with Russia, and the state of thinking in the Global South. In the first year after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, assumptions had to be seriously reconsidered, notably about U.S. weakness and Chinese readiness to proceed.

WWII stands as the dividing line between a past of fascism, imperialism, territorial power grabs, and internecine warfare, and an international order governed by respect for sovereignty, peaceful resolution of disputes, and economic integration that builds trust and tolerance. Although there was awareness that the international community did not include a small number of countries led by the Soviet Union, it was assumed that basic understandings greatly reduced the chance of any war spreading beyond a local area, leading to a direct conflict between the two superpowers.

U.S. normalization with Beijing in the 1970s, agreement to end the Cold War with Moscow by the beginning of the 1990s, and globalization of market economies by the 2000s gave confidence to Washington that the international order was improving. While debate persisted about how far democratization and human rights would be spread, the case for geopolitical stability appeared incontrovertible. Outliers North Korea and Iran were being pressed by broad multilateral forces. The U.S. was slow to awaken to the strengthening threats to the post-Cold War order it prized. Its allies, Japan and South Korea, were slower yet, particularly in recognizing Putin's aims.

Critical to the responses in 2022 were reconstructed memories of the existing international order. Chinese memories hark back to four distinct eras. First, there is the era of the "middle kingdom," when Sinocentrism reigned supreme, demanding a hierarchical, deferential order centered only on China. This worldview has revived. Second, Chinese recall a "humiliating" era of reduced sovereignty with no prospect of steering developments even in neighboring states. Recoiling from that fate is another driving force. Third. Chinese remember the "victories" of both 1945 and 1953 over Japan and South Korea as markers of a new era, when resistance succeeded, even as it left a foundation for Cold War great power and regional policy. Finally, the mainstream view the post-Cold War era as a time of advancement toward a desired goal, but handicapped by barriers that needed to be removed. The Ukraine war served to reenforce these four historical memories.

Russian narratives of Tsarist history, besieged from the west, Soviet history and WWII valiant in overcoming danger from the west and forging a sphere of control at risk from the west, and post-Cold War history rife with Western efforts to weaken Russia further, demonize the international order. They lay the groundwork for going to war to upend that order, In the first year of the war Russia doubled down on its critique of the preexisting order with claims it is now being replaced.

Below, I summarize four views of the impact of the war on shifting thinking about the liberal international order: Jacque deLisle on U.S. rethinking; Hosoya Yuichi on Japanese new thinking; Hannah Kim on a survey pertinent to South Korean rethinking; and Katie Stallard's joint article with me on Russian and Chinese new thinking on this order and their bilateral relationship. The full articles by these authors follow—each emphasizing the regional order in the Indo-Pacific.

Jacques deLisle, "Rethinking a Liberal International Order for Asia? The United States and the Impact of the Ukraine War"

The U.S. response to Russia's invasion affirmed a liberal international order in ways that extend to Asia, and demonstrated its potential for effectiveness in an era of mounting challenges, primarily from China and Russia. At the same time, the Western-centered efforts to address the conflict at Eurasia's western edge brought significant shifts in the content, or at least the focus, of the liberal international order—specifically toward an emphasis on sovereignty and coordination among like-minded states against threats and rivals—that extend to Asia. Any new-found optimism concerning a liberal international order for Asia must be tempered. The failure of deterrence reflected in Russia's invasion and early lessons from the response to the war point to an increasingly tough road ahead for a liberal international order in Asia.

The coordinated response to Russia's war in Ukraine that was led by the U.S. along with NATO and EU states has been celebrated as a signal success of (mostly) liberal-democratic states collaborating against an authoritarian aggressor acting against core rules of the international order—and rightly so. These developments had a range of positive implications for a liberal international order in Asia. They supported the idea that a similarly effective response might be mounted in response to analogous events in Asia, i.e., the prospect that China would attack or otherwise severely coerce Taiwan. The prospect has spawned a cottage industry of analysis addressing the "lessons" of the Russia-Ukraine war for a China-Taiwan scenario.

Beijing, like Moscow, has increasingly stridently challenged—including in an eve-of-Ukraine-War joint statement—principles of a liberal international order, and has been identified in key U.S. foreign policy statements as a principal threat to that order. It has repeatedly rejected the notion that the targeted entity is a separate state with its own sovereignty. China, like Russia, is governed by an increasingly personalistic and illiberal authoritarian regime. And Taiwan, like Ukraine, is a new democracy, emphasized in seeking support from other democratic states.

The collective international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and to China's position concerning Russia's actions, extended to Asia, which bodes well for a liberal international order in Asia in at least two ways. First, Asian states joined in the North Atlantic-centered response to Putin's war. Second, Europe's wariness toward China increased and the gap between the views of

China's international behavior and agenda in Washington and in many EU states (and the EU itself) narrowed considerably. Beijing's increasing pressure and coercion toward Taiwan fostered new solidarity between Europe and the U.S. on key Asia regional security issues. Unprecedented statements from the G7 and NATO framed peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait as a security issue for Europe, as well as the United States.

The war in Ukraine brought a renewed emphasis on one of the longest-standing norms of the liberal international order (and, indeed, one that predates liberalism in the international order): state sovereignty. A liberal international order embraces much—including liberal human rights, liberal-democratic governance, and economic liberalism—that is at odds with international relations realist-style conceptions of sovereign states. The renewed focus on the rule against the U.S. of force to change the status quo (of state borders, or of incumbent—and democratic—regimes) triggered by the war in Ukraine resonates with—and arguably amplifies—U.S. and allied statements concerning China and Taiwan. They also echo in China's other sovereignty-related tensions with liberal-democratic entities in the region.

The war in Ukraine has also sharpened the already-emerging focus on states' domestic liberal-democratic orders as a key pillar of the liberal international order and a dividing line between that order's supporters and its adversaries. The point is perhaps most succinctly captured by a favorite phrase of the Biden administration: the "like-minded states" that Washington seeks to rally to counter threats, or perceived threats, from China in Asia.

Russia was on the other side of the liberal-democratic/authoritarian divide. Russia's invasion and brutal actions are attributed to its autocratic system. The point was reinforced by the pattern that the shakiest members of the U.S.-European alignment against Russia were among its least liberal-democratic members, including Hungary and Turkey. Cooperation in Russia-targeting sanctions by significant Asian states (in terms of value of potential contribution to the collective effort) broadly tracked the extent to which they are liberal democracies. Japan and Korea were among the strongest collaborators and among the most democratic states in the region. India, where democracy is under stress during the Modi era, cooperated in imposing sanctions, but undercut the sanctions' effectiveness by making large purchases of oil from Russia, and made relatively muted or hedged criticisms of Russia's actions. The Asian region's rogue autocratic states (from the perspective of the U.S. and other supporters of a liberal international order)—Iran and North Korea—became Moscow's key sources of second-best substitutes for the weapons it could no longer produce, thanks in large part to trade and technology sanctions.

The Ukraine war has reinvigorated state sovereignty and related principles and has reinforced the centrality of states' internal liberal-democratic orders (or lack thereof) as focal points of the liberal international order. It has done so in ways that speak to some of the most contentious issues in Asia, especially ones involving China and increasingly adversarial U.S.-China relations.

Other implications of the war are less sanguine. Putin disregarded international rules and norms against aggressive warfare and the U.S.e of force to conquer or seize territory from a sovereign state, and his atrocity-committing troops flouted international human rights and humanitarian law. The alliance of predominantly liberal-democratic regional states failed to deter Russia. The UN Security Council was unable to condemn, or endorse action against, a veto-wielding permanent member. There is no "Asian NATO." The political and geopolitical underpinnings for such arrangements are lacking in the region. Unlike the vast majority of EU states, many Asian states, including several of the democracies in ASEAN and even some U.S. treaty allies in the region, seek to avoid "taking sides" (or doing so openly) in conflicts between Washington and Beijing, especially on Taiwan issues.

The liberal international order is vulnerable (in Asia and beyond) to challenges from China because it is to a significant degree an order based in international institutions. Many of those institutions are near-universal organizations in which each state has one vote. Others are Asian regional institutions that have similar arrangements or that decide matters by consensus. In both contexts, the gains that China has made with the Global South—and has sought, with some success, to preserve or reinforce through Ukraine war-related diplomacy—give it growing clout in those institutions, making them less liberal and less effective as means of constraining or influencing China. Moreover, China has been creating new, China-centered organizations giving Beijing new options to compete with and challenge—from the outside—the preexisting, largely liberal, rules-based international order. They do so in a period when the Ukraine war has made clearer—and perhaps deepened—Beijing's discontent with that order, openly acknowledging that Russia fights not simply against Ukraine but for a new international order.

Hosoya Yuichi, "Japan's Defense of the Liberal International Order: The "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" from Abe to Kishida"

In the Indo-Pacific region, as the liberal international order has increasingly come under threat, Japan, over the decade 2012-22, tried at least three strategies on behalf of this endangered order: 1) U.S.-centered but autonomous in targeting Russia as if its pursuit of China could be deterred; 2) U.S.-centered

but more flexible in appealing to China as if its economic interests, including in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), could prevail over its increasingly aggressive (wolf warrior) geopolitics: and 3) U.S.-centered with full strategic support for the existing order, marked by an about-face on its military posture and response to Russia.

If prior to 2022 Japan seemed wary about full-fledged commitment to the U.S.-led order, as seen in its response to Russia's 2014 aggression in Ukraine and to China's BRI plans for regionalism, its simultaneous fulsome backing for regionalism exclusive of China and, at times, vanguard role ahead of the United States speaks to a different conclusion. The approach of Abe Shinzo had some contradictory features, but it paved the way to the 2022 breakthrough of Kishida Fumio. Tracing the transition, Hosoya clarifies what are called the "Abe Doctrine" and the "Kishida Doctrine," which (viewed separately or together) brought to an end the postwar "Yoshida Doctrine."

Japan's response to the 2022 Ukraine war played a leading role in expanding the focus from Europe to Asia. Whereas the "Abe Doctrine" separated the two expanses, even to the point of divorcing Russia in Asia from Russia in Europe, the "Kishida Doctrine" united these arenas into a common challenge for the liberal international community. Further, it broadened Japan's geopolitical role in Asia, while agreeing with the U.S. that economic security is becoming the centerpiece in the deepening competition. Critical to this shift was the strikingly different response in Japan to Russia's aggression in 2014 and 2022. To explain this contrast Hosoya traces the evolution of thinking about the international order over seven decades from Yoshida Shigeru to Abe. Then, he analyzes factors that arose between 2014 and 2022 affecting Japanese thinking before focusing on shifts in 2022-23 linked to thinking about the international order.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine tested Japan's commitment to the international order unlike anything that had proceeded. Four challenges stood out. First, would it react to Russia in lock-step with the U.S. and its European allies? Second, would it recognize parallels with China's behavior over Taiwan and transform its military posture accordingly? Third, would Japan join in forging a multilateral framework with NATO for resisting both Russia and China? And fourth, given the nature of the China challenge and the thrust of the economic sanctions decoupling from Russia, would Japan prioritize economic security even at the cost of pain for some companies? If, in all these respects, Japan was following the U.S. lead, the question remained how would the "Kishida Doctrine" be unique in the way Japan backed the liberal international order at a critical turning point.

In responding to Russia, despite some wavering on energy projects in Sakhalin, Japan stood firmly with the West, where some European states also delayed over energy. On Taiwan, Japan played a leading role in drawing parallels and convincing other states that the crisis in Europe and China's support for Russian logic required a response extending to the Indo-Pacific. Kishida's decision to boost defense spending to 2% of GDP and acquire offensive capabilities was a gamechanger. On NATO, Japan in June 2022 joined its meeting for the first time and as a member of the G7 Japan led in linking the trans-Atlantic to the trans-Pacific. Finally, after the October 7 U.S. announcement of export controls limiting China's access to advanced semi-conductor inputs, Japan took quite similar measures.

Hannah June Kim, "Threats to the Liberal International Order: Attitudes towards Democracy among the Youth in South Korea"

Recent studies examining the liberal international order, despite their differences, have one thing in common: they all acknowledge that the liberal international order is facing more challenges than ever before. The threat of populism, the rise of new nationalism, declining multilateralism, the rise in protectionism, and intensified competition among major powers play critical roles in attempts to undermine the liberal international order. The rise of authoritarian countries has been at the forefront of this challenge. China continues to contest the existing order and attempts to take advantage of the current system to increase its influence. Russia's sudden and aggressive invasion of Ukraine was not only a direct attempt to challenge Ukraine's independence and deny Ukrainian statehood, but also to attack the democratic-ness of the liberal international order.

Hannah Kim examines how people perceive the liberal international order and whether these perceptions have changed since the start of the Ukraine War, observing perceptions of the order through support for autocracy and examining the case of South Korea in the post-Cold War era. She describes Korea's recent troubles with democracy and growing apathy towards liberalism and how this has increased during the post-Cold War era, contending that support for authoritarianism increased right after the start of the Ukraine War, particularly among the youth, due to both external and internal factors including declining satisfaction with the existing liberal order, disappointment with their own institutions, and anxieties about their own future. She also explains how these attitudes may have changed throughout the course of the year.

Democratic stability and support began to decline in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. According to the 3rd wave (1995-98) of the World Values Survey, 83.7% of the Korean respondents stated that it is fairly good or very good to

have a democratic political system. Five waves from 1996 to 2018 of the survey show that there has been a general decline of favorability of democracy, decreasing proportions of respondents believe that it is very or fairly good to have a democratic political system. Declining support for democracy is not strikingly unusual to Korea. Many consolidated democracies have recently followed the trend towards democratic decay, with support for democracy declining through withdrawal from democratic institutions and rising support for authoritarian alternatives. Yet Korea's democratic decay is unique because the country has been struggling with democracy both internationally and domestically.

While "the international community is seized by a deep sense of urgency, the mood in Seoul [was] one of apathy, bordering on nonchalance." Indeed, even though China continues to be the closest credible threat to Korea, the latter country continues to remain lukewarm towards China and its threats. Part of this may be because Russia's invasion of Ukraine does not feel urgent or tangible, yet attitudes towards authoritarianism and China remain somewhat ambivalent as well. Views of China have sunk "to their lowest since diplomatic normalization between the two countries." However, these sentiments seem separate from Russia's attacks and seem to stem from feelings of cultural imperialism rather than fears of authoritarian influence and changes in the international order.

Two surveys, one conducted before the start of the Ukraine War in January 2022 and one afterwards in May 2022 suggest that support for strongman leadership had increased among all age groups, but particularly among the young. While support for democracy declined, anti-Chinese sentiment simultaneously increased, with little difference between conservatives and progressives. Thus, perceptions of the liberal international order during the Ukraine War are difficult to define through attitudes towards these countries. Having a conservative party in power suggests that the administration will keep Russia at a distance and work to protect the liberal international order by leading by example, agenda setting, and mediating.

The fundamental reason as to why preferences for the liberal international order are decreasing in Korea stems from grievances among Korean citizens. There is increasingly less support for democracy among South Koreans, and particularly, among the youth. The idealization of democracy and the liberal order began to decline through harsh realities among the youth for several reasons. For one, the youth are frustrated with political and corporate elitism. Many young Koreans have been discouraged with the recent administrations and their alleged abuse of power, leading to increasing grievances towards politicians and growing

distrust of the government, regardless of party. In addition, young Koreans are frustrated with income inequality and the lack of employment opportunities and feel as though the government is not doing much to resolve these issues. And while views towards Putin may have changed throughout the past year through the struggle and challenges visible during the war, initial impressions of Putin's strongman leadership may not have been as negative relative to other countries, where people were much quicker to condemn Russia's attacks, since younger citizens may have initially seen some merit to strongman leadership. This study leaves open the possibility that this may have changed in the latter part of 2022 where many young Koreans saw the disadvantages of strongman leadership. According to a recent study, confidence in Putin has declined in Korea, with 69 percent indicating no confidence. This may in part be because Putin is facing numerous challenges in the Ukraine War, and through this, his strongman leadership capabilities are also being questioned. Seeing Putin struggle may further decrease support for this type of autocratic leadership over time. It is possible that, since the time of the second survey, favorability for this type of leadership may have changed among the youth and, in a roundabout way, Putin's failures may help democratic progress in Korea.

Katie Stallard and Gilbert Rozman, "Sino-Russian Relations Amid the War in Ukraine: Their Reassessment of the International Order"

The authors divide views on the international order into three dimensions: 1) the role of great powers with emphasis on Sino-Russian-U.S. relations; 2) the shape of the Indo-Pacific region, including U.S., Chinese, and Russian plans; and 3) the state of the Sino-Russian bilateral relationship. On great powers agreement was highest, on regionalism it was complicated, and despite prior talk of a possible alliance, on bilateralism, contrary to claims, it was troubled. By 2019, consensus on what to do about the Grand Strategic Triangle strengthened, divisions over regionalism came more to the surface, and troubles in the bilateral relationship surfaced in more obvious ways.

Confident that China had turned more sharply against the United States, Russia still faced two challenges in this all-important triangle: 1) would China treat it as a full-fledged partner? and 2) would China agree to an accelerated timetable for aggressive action? The Chinese eschewed the triangular framework that soothes Russia's ego, generally taking a bilateral Sino-U.S. approach. They also were wary of concluding that a cold war had begun, instead accusing the U.S. of a cold war mentality. Yet, blaming Washington for containing both China and Russia, even more so in 2022, they ascribed to triangular thinking conducive to strong Sino-Russian ties.

Unlike the Grand Strategic Triangle, where growing consensus against the United States establishes a firm foundation for challenging the existing order, Indo-Pacific regional ties have exposed serious divisions about what a new order should be. If consensus has easily been reached in opposition to U.S. designs for regional reorganization, such as the FOIP, it has been much more difficult to agree on India's importance in the new framework, on ASEAN's centrality and pursuit of balanced great power relations, on the role of freedom of navigation and the name of the Northern Sea Route, and on the functions of the SCO. That the "heartland" of Asia forms the core of an emerging order is a shared aspiration obscuring the persistent struggle—even cat-and-mouse game—to guarantee one's own plans take precedence. Regional consensus fell far short of the overall, great power consensus.

Both Russia and China have concentrated for a decade on reconstructing the architecture of Asia in line with their respective visions of transforming the international order. Xi Jinping settled on the BRI as the framework for a Sinocentric, hub and spokes, design, running west, south, and north. Vladimir Putin proposed a Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP), putting Russia at the fulcrum of a continental configuration but acknowledging two-headed leadership with China of the critical organizations to steer regionalism. They pledged to support each other's initiatives and claimed that the SCO could serve as the umbrella organization for coordinating the emerging regional architecture. Insisting that their joint endeavors were the crux of a new world order, Putin and Xi claimed to be building it in close harmony.

While the Sino-Russian bond appears strong on the surface and booming in overall trade, it is hollow on matters critical to forging a new international order together. Four signs of hollowness are particularly revealing. First, there is no shared vision of a future order except for platitudes and insistence on the UN Security Council as the decisive voice. This is a formula for Beijing. Second, history looms in the background with the potential to spark a clash should nationalist forces on either side so desire. Third, personal exchanges and non-formulaic linkages are minimal. The COVID-19 limitations on movement only obscured the failure to develop networks of meaningful integration. Finally, civilizational arguments reinforce separation, not commonalities apart from objections to the values championed in the West. Russians have not found Chinese civilizational claims appealing nor vis-versa.

China's response to the conflict has demonstrated both the clear limits of the Sino-Russian partnership, and the resilience of the relationship. There is no evidence that China has provided direct military support to Russia since the start of the conflict, and there is no prospect that Chinese troops will be sent to fight on Russia's side. Neither Moscow nor Beijing has any interest in cementing a formal alliance with the other. While the relationship is viewed by both countries as mutually beneficial, geopolitically necessary, and a crucial component of their shared contest with the U.S., this does not mean that either side is likely to sacrifice their own interests on the altar of the other's foreign policy ambitions. Beijing's response to the conflict across all these dimensions has been characterized by self-interest and the imperative to pursue existing grievances, such as the U.S.-led liberal international order and the expansion of Western security pacts, to the perceived detriment of China's own security and its claim to Taiwan.

The Ukraine War has showcased the Sino-Russian consensus on the Grand Strategic Triangle as the crux of the international order, overwhelming different thinking on the regional order and bilateral relations. The Sino-Russian alignment is stable and underpinned by complementary (although not identical) values, security concerns, and economic priorities of the top leaders, but both sides will continue to pursue their own separate interests. Differences over the regional order came to the surface as Kazakhstan resisted Putin's view of the post-Soviet sphere and found support in China for its defense of sovereignty. Meanwhile, tensions over bilateral relations are hidden by tighter censorship. The overall mood of agreement is not weakening for now, but it faces serious challenges ahead.

Rethinking a Liberal International Order for Asia? The United States and the Impact of the Ukraine War

By Jacques deLisle

The first year of the war in Ukraine taught mixed lessons about a liberal international order for Asia from a U.S. perspective (which, under the current administration, favors the term "rules-based international order"). In one fundamental respect, the war has shown less a need to rethink than an instance of reaffirmation: the response to Russia's invasion showed the vitality of a U.S.-supported international order in ways that extend to Asia and demonstrated its potential for effectiveness in an era of mounting challenges, primarily from China and Russia. In other ways, the conflict has led to a limited, if not always explicit, rethinking of that order's elements: the Western-led efforts to address the conflict at Eurasia's western edge brought shifts in the relative emphasis on elements of the liberal international order, and U.S. conceptions of it—specifically toward principles of state sovereignty and coordination among like-minded states. This phenomenon, too, extends to Asia. Looking ahead, more serious rethinking may be needed, in part because of the implications for Asia of developments related to the war in Ukraine.

Any new-found optimism concerning such an order's prospects in Asia must be tempered in light of the weaknesses of the established order exposed by the Ukraine war and the looming challenges ahead. The failure of deterrence reflected in Russia's invasion, and early lessons from the response to it, point to an increasingly tough road ahead for a liberal international order in a notably—and increasingly—difficult environment in Asia. Across several dimensions of the Ukraine war's meaning for a U.S.-backed liberal international order's prospects in Asia, China-Taiwan scenarios—the most obvious and prominent analogies to the Russia-Ukraine conflict—loom especially large.

"Liberal international order" is an imprecise and contested term, as is the now-U.S.-favored "rules-based international order."[1] The version of international order espoused by Washington is not thoroughly or highly demandingly liberal

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(in its economics or politics), nor is it fully rules-based (given tolerance for resort to ad hoc and unilateral measures). As the war in Ukraine and frictions between the U.S. and China in Asia underscore, its international reach is limited and, in some respects, threatened. Still, the term is far from meaningless or disconnected from the largely status quo international order that has been central to U.S. and broader efforts to respond to the war in Ukraine and that the U.S. and its partners and allies support for Asia. And that order is indeed liberal and rules-based in the limited and specific senses addressed in the remaining sections of this article.

Reaffirming, Not Rethinking: Collective Action by Liberal States against an Order-Challenging Authoritarian Aggressor

The coordinated response to Russia's war in Ukraine, led by the U.S. along with NATO and EU states, has been celebrated as a signal success of (mostly) liberal-democratic states acting collectively and collaboratively against an authoritarian aggressor that has violated core rules of a liberal international order (including prohibitions of aggressive warfare and war crimes)—and rightly so. The U.S. and European allies and partners imposed punishing trade and financial sanctions on Russia and enlisted significant if varying support from economically important states outside the region. They incurred considerable costs in arming and aiding Ukraine and in suffering the effects of inflation due to rising energy prices and loss of access to Russian energy exports. They bore worrisome risks, including prospects that the war would escalate, by expanding geographically or crossing the nuclear threshold.[2]

The means were expressly multilateral and in significant part institution-based (and, thus, rules-based), with NATO and the EU taking leading roles and a series of lopsided votes for invasion-condemning UN General Assembly resolutions offering a broader international institutional imprimatur. Despite some strains, the coordinated efforts across the Global North to pressure Russia and undermine its warfighting capacity and to support Ukraine largely held a year into the war, underscored by Ukrainian President Volodymir Zelensky's high-profile visit to Washington in December 2022 and U.S. President Joe Biden's surprise trip to Kyiv on the invasion's first anniversary in February 2023.[3]

These developments have several positive implications for a liberal international order in Asia. Most simply, they are a "proof of concept" that a similarly effective collective international response might be mounted to address analogous events in Asia. By far the most evident parallel is the possibility that China would attack (or otherwise severely coerce) Taiwan. The prospect has, understandably, spawned a cottage industry of commentary and analysis—both public and within policymaking circles—addressing the "lessons" of the Russia-Ukraine war for a China-Taiwan scenario.[4]

Especially when viewed from the perspective of the prospects for a liberal international order in Asia, the similarities between the two cases are striking. Beijing, like Moscow, has increasingly challenged—including in an eve-of-Ukraine-war joint China-Russia statement—the US-favored liberal international order,[5] and has been identified in key U.S. foreign policy statements as a principal threat to the existing international order.[6] China, like Russia, has pointedly and repeatedly rejected the notion that the target or potential target—Taiwan or Ukraine—is a separate state with its own sovereignty[7] and has asserted a right, and the will, to use force, if need be, to recover what it characterizes as (temporarily) lost sovereign territory.[8] China, like Russia, is governed by an increasingly personalistic and illiberal authoritarian regime.[9] And Taiwan, like Ukraine, is a (relatively) new liberal democracy, the leaders of which have emphasized liberal-democratic attributes in seeking support from the U.S. and other states.[10] While Russia appeared to have a decisive military advantage when it began its invasion of Ukraine, China has clear superiority in the military balance across the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan, like Ukraine, ultimately must depend on the promise of help from the United States and other powers for its security and, in the event of attack, survival.

There are, of course, important disanalogies (some of them addressed in later sections of this article). But many of these differences are primarily relevant to the contentious and, for now, not-definitively-answerable question of whether the international response to a China-Taiwan conflict would be as impressive and effective as the (still-unfolding) reaction to the Russia-Ukraine War. Such contrasts are less germane to whether the underlying events—including an invasion or attack by China—in the cross-Strait (or other regional) context would pose kindred challenges to a liberal international order in an adjacent region. The implications of the Ukraine war for a liberal international order in Asia also extend beyond the complex and contestable analogies between the conflict in Ukraine (so far) and a potential attack by China on Taiwan.

The collective international reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and to China's position concerning Russia's war, extends to Asia and links Asian and European security. These features bode well for a U.S.-favored liberal international order in Asia. First, Asian states joined in the North Atlantic-centered response to Putin's war. They did so to varying degrees. Asian states did not join the U.S. and several European states in providing arms and military-related assistance to Ukraine. But some—including Japan and Korea—did provide humanitarian or other non-lethal assistance. Because of their large markets, wealth of outbound investment capital, or prowess in key technology sectors, some Asian states were vital, even indispensable, cooperators if the sanctions regime targeting Russia were to be effective.[11]

Second, the Ukraine war contributed to greater wariness in Europe toward China and considerable narrowing of the gap in the views of China's international behavior and agenda held by Washington and in many EU states (and the EU itself). A signal event on this front was the China-EU summit held just weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. Beijing's apparent expectations that its interlocutors would be focused on the bilateral economic relationship, and that it would find a receptive audience for its calls for Europe to adopt an independent foreign policy detached from Washington's, proved to be badly misplaced. In the context of European alarm about Russia's invasion and Europe's support for Ukraine, China's alignment with Russia concerning the war (and more broadly) and its tone-deaf focus on economic ties played badly in Europe. Statements by top European Union leaders reflected the new—or newly prominent—divergence between China and Europe and the concomitant convergence between Europe and the U.S. (concerning China).[12]

A year into the war, China's substantial and evidently growing support for Russia reinforced these trends. China's growing trade and exports of militarily useful technology goods to Russia threatened the efficacy of multilateral sanctions and efforts to weaken Russia's fighting capacity.[13] Visits to Moscow by senior Chinese foreign policy official Wang Yi, to Beijing by Putin ally Belorussian President Lukashenko, and—potentially—by Chinese leader Xi Jinping to Moscow telegraphed a sustained and seemingly deepening alignment.[14] At the Munich security conference and in other contexts, Washington raised an alarm that Beijing was seriously considering providing lethal aid to Russia.[15]

These Ukraine war-related developments reinforced an already-emerging reorientation in Europe concerning China. Several years into China's Xi-era Belt and Road Initiative, skepticism already had grown in Europe about the net economic benefits of deeper engagement with China and Beijing's penchant to use economic leverage to political ends—often illiberal ones. Such concerns, along with rising bilateral tensions over China's human rights record, had helped stall the once much-touted EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment.[16] China's economic retaliation against Lithuania for Vilnius's limited upgrading of relations with Taiwan prompted a wave of EU support for Lithuania and criticism of China—including the EU filing a WTO case against China.[17]

Beijing's increasing pressure toward Taiwan encouraged a new solidarity between Europe and the U.S. on China-related Asian regional security issues. Issued against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, unprecedented statements from the G7 and NATO leadership framed peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait as a security issue for Europe, as well as the United States.[18] The Ukraine crisis thus reinforced already-tightening linkages among Europe's asserted

security interests across two key regions. Amid growing concerns about China, European powers already had been increasing their security presence in the Indo-Pacific, in alignment and cooperation with liberal-democratic states in the region, including the United States, Australia, and Japan. The establishment of AUKUS was the most formal and structured example.

Third, the Ukraine war contributed to a sharpened U.S. commitment to Taiwan's security, which was in turn linked to U.S. visions of a liberal, rules-based order in Asia. Biden's most pointed and impactful statement of the U.S.'s clearer and more robust commitment to use force to defend Taiwan from unprovoked Chinese military action tellingly came in response to a reporter's question—posed in Japan during Biden's Asia trip—concerning differences in U.S. policy on direct military involvement, which Washington had foregone in Ukraine but which Biden pledged to undertake in a Taiwan scenario.[19] That statement, and others concerning U.S. support for Taiwan, drew connections to support for a rules-based international order.[20]

Some Rethinking: The Ukraine War and a Shift in Emphasis within the Liberal International Order

The Ukraine war helped push to the fore two long-standing components of the liberal international order favored by the United States. Both of these elements matter much for Asia and regional security scenarios, including—not least—Taiwan contingencies.

First, the war in Ukraine renewed emphasis on one of the longest-standing principles of the status quo international order (indeed, one that predates liberalism in the international order, but that has remained foundational in the contemporary era): state sovereignty. The liberal, rules-based order, as seen from Washington, embraces many norms—including liberal human rights, democratic governance, and economic liberalism—that are at odds with international relations realist-style conceptions of sovereign states as "black boxes" or "billiard balls," nearly impervious to external demands and obligations (aside from those grounded in state consent).

Yet, the liberal international order remains—especially in its legal dimensions—a system based on sovereign states. An attack by one state that seeks to conquer another state (or annex portions of it) aligns vindication of the established order especially closely with defense of the principle of state sovereignty and the related prohibition of the use of force against the political independence or territorial integrity of another state.[21] This linkage is all the tighter when the

aggressor state denies that its target is a sovereign state, or claims that its own population and the citizens of the targeted entity are "one people." The latter assertion implicates the state-sovereignty-related and very-long-standing principle of the self-determination of peoples—which can entail rights of distinct groups that extend to a right to their own state under circumstances of severe oppression and a lack of meaningful political participation in a larger state.[22] Russia's positions on Ukraine tick all these boxes.[23]

The most recent precedent for Russia's war on Ukraine was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, which led to the "coalition of the willing"—mostly liberal-democratic states—waging the first Gulf War, with the quintessential existing-order-supporting authorization of a UN Security Council resolution authorizing the use of military force to expel Iraq's forces.[24] The post-Cold War entwinement of a liberal, rules-based international order with state sovereignty has deep roots. At the birth of the postwar version of the liberal, rules-based international order, the United Nations-centered regime gave pride of place to state sovereignty, and also embraced human rights, especially liberal ones and including the self-determination of peoples.[25] The wave of postwar decolonization brought additional emphasis on principles of state sovereignty (including for newly independent states that were sometimes ill-equipped to exercise or defend it). The principal still-earlier attempt at a liberal international order—manifested in the Wilsonian agenda at the end of the First World War—had also woven together ideals of liberalism and democracy, and separate sovereign states for distinct nationalities.

The Ukraine-induced renewal of attention to this dimension of the traditional liberal international order resonates for Asia, perhaps most strongly in the region's currently most likely flashpoint—the Taiwan Strait. Paralleling Moscow's assertions about Ukraine, Beijing rejects Taiwan's claims to sovereign status, argues that use of force to "prevent secession" would not violate international legal proscriptions on the use of force internationally (or against another state), and insists that the people in Taiwan are Chinese (and thus part of a larger Chinese people, with no right to separate self-determination).[26] In a backhanded acknowledgement of the weakness of Russia's claims to Ukraine, and in implicit recognition that international acceptance of the idea that Ukraine and Taiwan are analogous would be bad for China's claims to Taiwan, official Chinese sources have insisted that the two cases are "different in nature" (in that the Ukraine case is "complicated" and involves "two countries") and that U.S. or other foreign intervention in cross-Strait issues constitutes a violation of China's sovereignty and interference in its internal affairs.[27]

The Ukraine war-driven renewal of emphasis on the rule against the use of force to change the status quo (of state borders, or of incumbent—and democratic—regimes) resonates with—and arguably amplifies—recent U.S. and allied statements concerning China and Taiwan. The U.S. and major Asian and European powers have made newly pointed statements countering what they frame as China's growing multifaceted coercion of Taiwan.[28] Biden's repeated expressions of a commitment to use force to defend Taiwan have been accompanied by statements that resonate with self-determination and statehood: Biden's declarations that changes to Taiwan's status—the sovereignty-centered question of independence or unification—are for the people of Taiwan to decide, and the State Department's brief deletion of venerable website language that the U.S. acknowledges Beijing's view that Taiwan is part of China and that the U.S. does not support Taiwan independence.[29]

These aspects of the Ukraine war's implications for Asia—particularly for China-related regional security issues—extend beyond the Taiwan case. They echo across China's other sovereignty-related tensions with liberal-democratic entities in the region. Principal examples include: the PRC's territorial disputes in the South China Sea (with Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, as well as non-democracies Vietnam and Brunei), the East China Sea (with Japan), and the Yellow Sea (with Korea); the controversy over the erosion of autonomous governance, liberal rights, and progress toward democracy promised for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; and the recently (in 2020) reignited and ongoing border conflict with India.

Second, the war in Ukraine has sharpened the focus on states' domestic liberal-democratic orders as a key pillar of the liberal international order and a dividing line between that order's supporters and its adversaries. The point is perhaps most succinctly captured by a favorite phrase of the Biden administration: the "like-minded states"[30] that Washington seeks to rally to counter threats, or perceived threats, including threats from China in Asia.

This, too, is a well-entrenched element in thinking about a liberal international order. It is reflected in "second image" and "liberal" theories of international relations (which hold that a state's domestic politics, including its system-type explains its international behavior).[31] Such notions reached an apogee in the post-Cold War era and amid the "third wave" of global democratization in the late 1980s and 1990s.[32] Here, too, the origins lie much earlier, in the failed post-WWI effort to prevent war while promoting principles of liberal democracy within states, and, earlier still, to Kantian notions of the internal liberal-democratic foundations of international peace that later inspired the "democratic peace" theory of the post-Cold War years, as well as the obverse thesis of greater risk of conflict with illiberal, non-democratic states.[33]

The international response to the Ukraine war foregrounded this dimension of a liberal international order. Ukraine, of course, is a new democracy that has presented its liberal bona fides as a compelling reason for the U.S. and Europe to provide assistance. Zelensky regularly frames Ukraine's fight against Russia as an international fight for democracy everywhere.[34] Governments in the U.S. and Europe explain their support for Ukraine in similar terms. Conversely, Ukraine and its backers consistently emphasize that Russia is on the other side of the liberal-democratic/authoritarian divide, and attribute Russia's invasion and brutal actions to its autocratic system.[35] The point is underscored by the fact that the shakiest members of the U.S.-European alignment against Russia are also among its least liberal-democratic members, including Hungary and Turkey.[36]

Tellingly, in terms of implications for the character and trajectory of a liberal international order in Asia, cooperation in Russia-targeting sanctions by major Asian states (in terms of value of potential contribution to the collective effort) has broadly tracked the extent to which they are liberal democracies. Japan, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand are among the stronger adherents and the most democratic states in the region.[37] India, where democracy is under stress during the Modi era, has cooperated in imposing sanctions, but undercut the sanctions' effectiveness by making large purchases of oil from Russia, and has offered relatively muted or hedged criticisms of Russia's actions.[38]

China did not squarely defect from the sanctions regime, but it has upped its purchases of Russian energy, expanded exports of items that Moscow needed, and continued to express agreement with Putin's claims that the West was at fault for the war.[39] Beijing did issue a warning (implicitly but clearly to Putin) against breaking the taboo on using nuclear weapons, but China's proffered 12-point framework for peace in early 2023 drew criticism for being thin on details and tainted by Beijing's more broadly Moscow-supporting stance.[40] The Asian region's rogue autocratic states (in the view of the U.S. and other supporters of a liberal international order)—Iran and North Korea—became Moscow's key sources of second-best substitutes for the weapons it could no longer produce, thanks in large part to trade and technology sanctions.[41] And, a year into the war, Washington warned that China might soon provide lethal aid to Russia.[42]

On this ideational front, the pattern from the response to the Ukraine war aligns with broader developments in the international order for Asia, including cross-Strait relations. Drawing on elements from its predecessors' policies, the Biden administration has stressed the "democratic values" theme in its approach to Asia.[43] The major U.S. security policy statements concerning Asia depict China as a major threat to the liberal rules-based international order and as attempting to export its model of authoritarian politics.[44]

In many contexts, including perhaps most elaborately at its "Summit for Democracy" (which, notably, included Taiwan alongside uncontested states), the Biden administration has emphasized shared liberal-democratic values and governance as the glue that binds a coalition of like-minded states to support a liberal, rules-based order in Asia and to push back against corrosive actions by China in Asia as well as by Russia in Eurasia.[45] Biden's joint statements with the leaders of treaty allies Japan and South Korea have underscored shared values, and contrasts with authoritarian China, while pledging to resist China's pressure and coercion, including (but not limited to) efforts targeting Taiwan.[46] Recently established security arrangements in the region, including the Quad and AUKUS, bring together liberal democracies, and shared political system traits are touted as bases for cooperation to address challenges posed by a China that is increasingly powerful abroad and authoritarian at home.[47] Following a long-running strategy that parallels recent efforts by Ukraine, Taiwan, too, has continued to assert its strong record on democracy and liberal rights as reasons the U.S. and other democratic states in the region and beyond should back Taipei against Beijing's effort to marginalize Taiwan internationally and press toward political accommodation on the PRC's terms.[48]

In sum, the Ukraine war has reinvigorated state sovereignty and related principles and reinforced the centrality of states' internal liberal-democratic orders (or lack thereof), as core elements of the liberal international order. It has done so in ways that speak to some of the most contentious issues in Asia, especially ones involving China and increasingly adversarial U.S.-China relations.

More Rethinking Ahead? The Ukraine War's Implications for the Future of a Liberal International Order in Asia

While lessons from the Ukraine war (or, at least, its first year) have been heartening for supporters of a liberal international order for Asia (even as the war has affected the relative importance of some of that order's core principles), other implications of the war are less hopeful. Much of the impetus to the U.S. agenda of (re) invigorating a liberal international order in Asia is the belief that it will help achieve the goal of deterring China. But Russia's launching of the war was, after all, a failure of deterrence in a largely liberal international order. Putin disregarded international rules and norms against aggressive warfare and the use of force to conquer or seize territory from a sovereign state, and his atrocity-committing troops flouted international human rights and humanitarian law. The alliance of predominantly liberal-democratic regional states failed to deter Russia and indeed, on Putin's account, was part of the West's provocation of the invasion by expanding NATO to Russia's borders and then moving to bring Ukraine into the fold. The failure of the U.S. and Europe (or the wider international community and its institutions) to

deter, or react more strongly to, Russia's 2014 takeover of Crimea and its involvement in a prolonged insurgency in eastern Ukraine may have made the 2022 invasion more likely. The centerpiece institution of the postwar international legal-security order—the UN Security Council—has been predictably unable to condemn, or authorize action against, a veto-wielding permanent member.

Viewed through the lens of the Ukraine war, deterring analogous moves (or lesser ones)—principally by China—looks to be a difficult and growing challenge in Asia. The problem partly reflects hard power-related factors that are only indirectly related to the content and efficacy of regional norms and institutions. Large-scale economic sanctions against China would be far more painful for the U.S. and its indispensable partners than measures targeting Russia have been and would do less to weaken China's military capacity. The imbalance in capabilities between China and Taiwan (and, to a lesser degree, other regional parties to a possible conflict with China) is much greater than between Russia and Ukraine (where the gap has been much less than expected when the invasion began). Defending, supporting, and supplying the small island of Taiwan against a formidable Chinese assault are far more daunting tasks than in Ukraine—and all the more so, given the strain the Ukraine war has placed on Western stockpiles.

Concerns about China's future intentions are in the mix as well. At least for now, Xi's China is a much less reckless actor than Putin's Russia. China does not appear to be on the verge of invading or militarily attacking Taiwan and does not seem eager to risk the international opprobrium, economic costs, and prospect of direct conflict with the United States and allies that would accompany such a move.[49] But that relatively happy situation is not sure to endure, and other concerns loom. As with Russia's view of U.S./West-Ukraine relations in the period preceding the 2022, China's view of the relationship between Taiwan and the U.S. (and its allies) has become increasingly fraught. This issue took its most dramatic recent turn following U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's August 2022 visit to Taiwan and the PRC's subsequent large-scale military drills.[50] Despite talk at the 2022 G20 summit and elsewhere of efforts to put a floor under the deteriorating bilateral relationship, the multiyear downward spiral in U.S.-China interactions—including especially concerning Taiwan—seems to show few signs of near-term reversal a year into the Ukraine war, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken cancelling a visit to Beijing amid the political fallout of a Chinese spy balloon's passing over the United States, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy planning a Taiwan visit, and a Republican-led House Committee beginning work to address perceived China threats.[51] China's relations with other neighbors—and, of particular relevance here, concerning Japan's linkage of Taiwan's security with its own—have been on a generally, if less dramatically, negative trajectory.

U.S. efforts to support and sustain a liberal international order in Asia likely will face mounting—and Russia/Ukraine-resonant—challenges by China from within the order's framework. China has formidable capacity to replicate, and exceed, Russia in exploiting the vulnerabilities and limits of the norms and rules of a liberal international order (which has been weakened by the U.S. and others' inconsistent adherence to those norms and rules). That is the message of Beijing's Moscow-like framing (noted earlier) of Taiwan—and some Ukraine—issues, including international legal and normative ones: Beijing's skeletal peace plan's opening with a purported insistence on the sanctity of state sovereignty; China's assertion that military action to unify Taiwan would be an internal use of force, not transgressing relevant legal rules and systemic norms that limit permissible international behavior;[52] China's assertion that the U.S.—operating through concerted and coordinated efforts with aligned states, sometimes deceptively veiled as defensive treaty arrangements—is the aggressive actor, threatening China (and Russia) and international peace and stability.[53]

China, like Russia, wields a veto in the UN Security Council In the many one-state one-vote organizations—many of them built with U.S. support—that populate a vast international institutional landscape, Beijing can use the clout and leverage that it has accumulated with the Global South—and which has grown (and likely grown more than Russia's) amid the Ukraine crisis—to achieve its aims or stymie Washington's. There is little to no potential for the U.S. to counter with an Asian NATO or an ASEAN-plus EU in Asia—a robust institutional structure for coordination and collective action among "like-minded" states to counter the region's most likely authoritarian challenger to the status quo. The political and geopolitical underpinnings for such arrangement are lacking in region where many relevant states still seek to avoid "taking sides" (or, at least, doing so openly) in a contest and potential conflict between rival great powers.[54] Taiwan, like Ukraine, is a (mere) friend of the United States and its partners, not a security treaty ally. It thus does not benefit from the legally binding and politically salient commitments of the mutual defense treaties that the U.S. has with many of the states aligned with a liberal international order, including the NATO states, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines.

More "external" perils also confront a liberal international order for Asia. The partly Ukraine-driven renewed emphasis on domestic system type or "like-mindedness" in the liberal international order has coincided with a stronger repudiation of liberal democracy and related ideals by China and Russia (and a closer ideological alignment between Moscow and Beijing). China—like Russia—has been sharpening its rejection of U.S.-favored liberal

principles for illegitimately claiming universality, serving as tools in U.S. or Western efforts to change and undermine China (and Russia), and being unsuitable for China (or Russia) and its distinctive features.[55] China also has been taking a lead in creating new, thus far not seriously status quo-challenging, organizations that may provide future institutional foundations for promoting its vision of a non-liberal international order, particularly in Asia. Examples include the SCO, the AIIB, the RCEP, and the looser arrangements of the BRI.

At the same time, the U.S. has, in some important respects, retrenched its aims and efforts in support of a liberal international order in the region. The newly Cold War-evoking divide between the U.S. and China limits the liberal international order's prospective reach to China and some other parts of the region (even though it may strengthen that order's grip among liberal-democratic states). The Ukraine war and its fallout have further confirmed the death (at least for now) of the international relations "constructivist" dream—reflected in the U.S. policy of "constructive engagement"—that bringing China into the institutions of the largely liberal and rules-based international order would make Beijing a reliable supporter of that order (and perhaps even promote various forms of domestic liberalization).[56] Washington has made the challenges for a liberal international order in the region still more daunting through Trump-era moves—with roots in longer-term trends and only partly or not-wholly-convincingly reversed by the Biden administration—that shook key, largely liberal institutions (such as the WTO, and the TPP) and previously ironclad support for venerable security commitments.

Not all of these issues are new, but they are newly daunting in the context of a U.S.-China relationship that is more nearly between peers, and that is also more adversarial, and more ideologically tinged—and has become more so in the shadow of Russia's war in Ukraine and American, Chinese, and other international responses to it.

Endnotes

[1] See, e.g., Hans Kundani, "What is the Liberal International Order?" German Marshall Fund of the United States, May 3, 2017, https://www.gmfus.org/news/what-liberal-international-order; Ben Scott, "But What Does 'Rules-Based Order Mean?" Lowy Institute, Nov. 2, 2020, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/what-does-rules-based-order-mean; G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?" International Affairs vol. 94, no. 1 (2018): 7-23.

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Japan's Defense of the Liberal International Order: The "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" from Abe to Kishida

By Yuichi Hosoya

In the Indo-Pacific region, the liberal international order has increasingly come under threat. Multilateral initiatives inclusive of China have attempted to reinforce it, but they have been exposed as "talk shops" deficient in consensus or action-oriented agendas. In this environment over the decade 2012-22, Japan has tried at least three strategies on behalf of this endangered order: 1) U.S.-centered but autonomous in targeting Russia as if its pursuit of China could be deterred; 2) U.S.-centered but more flexible in appealing to China as if its economic interests, including in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), could prevail over its increasingly aggressive (wolf warrior) geopolitics: and 3) U.S.-centered with full strategic support for the existing order, marked by an about-face on its military.

The Ukraine war proved to be the catalyst for realization of the third strategy, although the first strategy had long since failed without being openly abandoned and the second strategy was dying a quiet death when Xi Jinping's planned state visit to Japan failed to materialize in 2020 and again in 2021 not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic but also as a result of cascading demands inside Japan to cancel it in response to China's actions. If prior to 2022 Japan seemed wary about full-fledged commitment to the U.S.-led order, as seen in its response to Russia's 2014 aggression in Ukraine and to China's BRI plans for regionalism, its simultaneous fulsome backing for regionalism exclusive of China and at times in the vanguard ahead of the United States speaks to a different conclusion. The approach of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo had some contradictory features, but it paved the way to the 2022 breakthrough of Prime Minister Kishida Fumio. Tracing the transition, this article clarifies what are being called the "Abe Doctrine" and the "Kishida Doctrine," which viewed separately or together brought to an end the postwar "Yoshida Doctrine."

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Japan's response to the 2022 Ukraine war played a leading role in expanding the focus from Europe to Asia. Whereas the "Abe Doctrine" separated the two expanses, even to the point of divorcing Russia in Asia from Russia in Europe, the "Kishida Doctrine" united these arenas into a common challenge for the liberal international community. Further, it broadened Japan's geopolitical role in Asia, while agreeing with the U.S. that economic security is becoming the centerpiece in the deepening competition. Critical to this shift was the strikingly different response in Japan to Russia's aggression in 2014 and 2022.

The invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 was a great shock to the international community. Japan was no exception. On February 27, Kishida strongly condemned the invasion, saying, "The recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia is an attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by force. It is an act that undermines the very foundation of the international order. It constitutes a blatant violation of international law. As such, it is unacceptable, and I condemn it in the strongest terms."[1] Kishida has repeatedly stated that the invasion greatly undermines "the very foundation of the international order." Implicitly or explicitly, he keeps drawing a link between what has occurred in Ukraine and what many fear will happen in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly around Taiwan. Thus, in his speech in Washington D.C., on January 13, 2023, Kishida correctly stated that "Japan's participation in the measures against Russia transformed the fight against Russia's aggression against Ukraine from a Trans-Atlantic one to a global one."[2] He added, "in this sense, it was a consequential decision with significance for the international community in my view." He stresses Japan's role in this transformation.

Japan's response to the invasion in 2022 significantly differed from its rather lukewarm response to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 coupled with Russia's invasion of eastern Ukraine that led to internecine warfare. Abe was eager for a rapprochement with Russia to enable Japan to conclude a peace treaty which would settle Japan's territorial dispute over the "Northern Territories." Rather than argue that the liberal international order was now under threat, the Japanese government viewed Russia's move as a European affair divorced not only from Asian geopolitics, but even from Russia's role in Asia. Agreeing half-heartedly to sanctions on Russia as a member of the G7, Japan left the impression it was doing the minimum possible in order to sustain diplomacy. The goal was not merely a peace treaty with Russia resolving the territorial dispute that had lingered since their 1956 diplomatic normalization, but also a bold agreement conducive to the regional order Japan sought in Asia. Abe was determined to forge a regional order, which he began in 2016 to call the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," and he feared that close Sino-Russian

relations would prove detrimental. Thus, to the end of his time in office in 2020, he kept wooing President Vladimir Putin, even as he increasingly prioritized values in pursuit of his Indo-Pacific framework.

To explain the contrast between 2014 and 2022 I first trace the evolution of thinking about the international order over seven decades from Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru to Abe. Then, I analyze factors that arose between 2014 and 2022 affecting Japanese thinking. The next section focuses on the shifts in Japan in 2022-23 linked to thinking about the international order. In the conclusion I summarize what has transpired from the context of Japan's longstanding search for national identity as both a member of the Western community and a leader in the transformation of Asia since the 1950s.

From the Yoshida Doctrine to the Abe Doctrine

Kishida's policy initiatives are being equated with those of only two other postwar prime ministers of Japan, Yoshida Shigeru and Abe himself. Even with Kishida out of the picture, analysts have argued that the critical shift was from the reluctant, reactive power of the "Yoshida Doctrine" to the more proactive contributor to peace and stability affirmed by the "Abe Doctrine."[3] The former defined the postwar era, and modifications under such prime ministers as Nakasone Yasuhiro in the 1980s and Koizumi Junichiro in the 2000s never uprooted its essential nature as "non-militarism to guide a nonaggressive, low-cost post-war Japanese security policy" based on the U.S.-Japan alliance diplomacy.[4] It is widely accepted that this foreign policy doctrine survived until Abe transformed its essence.

Japan aligned with the U.S. and relied on its Seventh Fleet and nuclear umbrella without fully subscribing to U.S. thinking about the liberal international order. It accepted most principles about democracy, free markets, and deterrence of the Soviet Union, but hopes rested on an expanding role for Japan in Asia based on the appeal of its peace-loving, non-nuclear ideals and its tolerance of greater political diversity with less pressure over human rights. Japan would overcome the legacy of its colonialism and win the trust of Asian nations, creating the conditions for a regional sub-order of the international order reliant on U.S. military power but increasingly welcoming of Japan's economic and moral leadership too. In this worldview, Japanese looked ahead to a growing role while setting aside concern for responsibility on geopolitical matters, which were left to U.S. handling.

The challenge of clarifying Japanese leadership in Asia grew much more complicated in the 1990s-2000s. Assumptions about a growing leadership role in Asia confronted the reality of China's pursuit of regional leadership, increasingly

questioning fundamentals of the liberal international order. Caught between Chinese and U.S. leadership claims, Japan increasingly embraced U.S. ones: freedom of navigation, the rule of law, inclusive regional organizations open to the U.S. as well as China. After a spurt of optimism about Japan leading Asia in a tripartite global order with the U.S. and the EU, China's rise and growing assertiveness refocused Japanese thinking on reinforcing the U.S. role in Asia.

Prior to Abe, one final burst of Asian idealism of doubtful compatibility with the U.S.-led international order occurred in 2009-10. Democratic Party of Japan Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio advocated an East Asian community, exclusive of the United States but welcoming to China. The notion that Japan could stand for different values than the U.S. in Asia drew more attention. This occurred against the backdrop of the unprecedented security challenges from China in the East and South China seas and from North Korea, having abandoned the Six-Party Talks. On the eve of Abe's return as prime minister in late 2012, as President Barak Obama was affirming the U.S. role with his "pivot to Asia," Japan lacked clarity on its role in both the international and the regional order.

The "Abe Doctrine" and Factors that Led to Japanese Rethinking

In December 2013 Abe issued Japan's first ever National Security Strategy. It stated that; "surrounded by an increasingly severe security environment and confronted by complex and grave national security challenges, it has become indispensable for Japan to make more proactive efforts in line with the principle of international cooperation."[5]

Around this time, Chinese public vessels frequently came to the Senkaku islands, and presented challenges to Japan's administrative right over these islands. Thus, it was declared in this document that; "Japan will continue to adhere to the course that it has taken to date as a peace-loving nation, and as a major player in world politics and economy, contribute even more proactively in securing peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community, while achieving its own security as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, as a "Proactive Contributor to Peace" based on the principle of international cooperation."[6]

It was necessary for Japan to reassure surrounding countries that Japan remained a peace-loving country, and upheld important historical statements such as the Murayama statement and the Kono Statement. These became the necessary foundation for the transformation of Japan's security policy and the security legislation.[7] The evolution of Japan's security policy under Abe needed to start with his statement on historical issues, which would reassure both

domestic and international public opinion.[8] Thus, the Lowy Institute, a leading Australian think tank, responded that "Japan has become the leader of the liberal order in Asia."[9] Although South Korea reconsidered its agreement with Abe on the "comfort women" issue lingering from WWII and China refused to let up in its insistence on playing the "history card," Abe's moves by the end of 2015 succeeded in removing historical concerns for assessments of Japan's support for universal values.

The Abe Doctrine put emphasis on value-oriented diplomacy. Ichihara Maiko wrote that; "being aware of the necessity of proactive diplomacy to support the liberal international order, values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law have been brought to the forefront of Japanese diplomacy as 'universal values' since the mid-2000s, especially under the Abe administrations."[10] By defending universal values such as democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights, Japan was playing an important role in consolidating the liberal international order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Abe launched a new foreign policy doctrine at the opening session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) on August 27, 2016, Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy, or FOIP, which stimulated a broader debate on the future Indo-Pacific regional order.[11] He stated that; "What will give stability and prosperity to the world is none other than the enormous liveliness brought forth through the union of two free and open oceans and two continents. Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous."[12] Abe emphasized on the importance of "the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans" as well as "of Asia and Africa in to a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion." This important new regional concept of the "Indo-Pacific" embraces two oceans and is supported by the U.S. government, as well as a large part of Japan's like-minded partners including those in NATO, the EU, and ASEAN.

Domestic and international observers recognized the significance of the evolution of Japan's policy in defending the liberal international order. At a time of the rise of populism in leading liberal democracies, Yoichi Funabashi and John Ikenberry wrote, "it is unsurprising that the world is turning to Japan to shoulder greater responsibility in shaping the liberal international order."[13] This shift was reflected in foreign policy as well. According to Christopher Hughes, "the rise of the 'Abe Doctrine' is undoubtedly generating a more proactive Japanese foreign policy."[14]

Perhaps the most globally influential Japanese diplomatic initiative since the establishment of Japan's foreign ministry at the end of the 19th century, FOIP was a refinement of ideas Abe raised earlier. In December 2012, Abe seemed to prefer a more limited grouping than called the "Quad," i.e., quadrilateral security cooperation among the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India. In an article entitled "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond," which appeared in Project Syndicate on the day after the start of his second administration,[15] Abe proposed what can be called the FOIP 1.0. It was clear that Abe intended to compete with China with "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond." He wrote, "increasingly, the South China Sea seems set to become a "Lake Beijing," which analysts say will be to China what the Sea of Okhotsk was to Soviet Russia: a sea deep enough for the People's Liberation Army's navy to base their nuclear-powered attack submarines, capable of launching missiles with nuclear warheads. Soon, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy's newly built aircraft carrier will be a common sight—more than sufficient to scare China's neighbours."[16]

Abe argued that it was necessary for Japan to form a counterweight to expanding China's military activities, leading him to "envisage a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific. I am prepared to invest, to the greatest possible extent, Japan's capabilities in this security diamond."[17] This became the original conception of the Quad. However, Abe would not use this phrase again in his long second administration. One reason, perhaps, was that a majority of the Southeast Asian countries seemed unwilling to choose either China's camp or the camp of "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond," as China had become their biggest trading partner. Japan could not match China in providing economic benefits as the BRI gained traction.

Aware of Southeast Asian state insistence on ASEAN centrality, Abe launched FOIP. This was the time when the British chose to leave the EU in their national referendum of June 23, 2016, and Americans chose Donald Trump as president on November 8, 2016, leaving the liberal international order in flux. "Japan would suffer the greatest of strategic losses" from "the self-destruction of the American-led order," Funabashi and Ikenberry wrote.[18] Abe moved to defend the liberal international order, which had benefited Japan over decades. Abe did not radically increase Japan's defense spending, nor did Japan begin to acquire nuclear weapons. Rather than competing militarily with China, Japan concentrated on enhancing the rule of law in the international order.[19]

In National Security Strategy 2023, it was written that; "Japan will continue to faithfully comply with international law as a guarding of the rule of law. In addition, in order to establish the rule of law in the international community,

Japan will participate proactively in international rules-making from the planning stage, so that Japan's principles and positions based on fairness, transparency and reciprocity are duly reflected."[20]

Japan's broad FOIP objectives foster inclusiveness, in part to balance against China's rising power.[21] This inclusive approach was essential, as Japan needed to embrace ASEAN, which preferred to avoid the division of the region into two opposing camps. Without ASEAN, it is impossible to connect the Pacific Ocean with the Indian Ocean. With this in mind, Abe declared Japan's willingness to support China's BRI for the first time in his speech on June 5, 2017, saying, "The 'One Belt, One Road' initiative holds the potential to connect East and West as well as the diverse regions found in between."[22] Furthermore, he stated that he "would expect that the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative will fully incorporate such a common frame of thinking, and come into harmony with the free and fair Trans Pacific economic zone, and contribute to the peace and prosperity of the region and the world." Therefore, he mentioned, "Japan is ready to extend cooperation from this perspective."[23] Then, at the Japan-China summit on July 8, 2017, Abe and President Xi Jinping agreed that "Japan and China will discuss how to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region and the world, including the One Belt, One Road initiative."[24] Thus, Abe sought to coordinate two diplomatic initiatives, namely China's BRI and Japan's FOIP.

From then on, Japan and the U.S. were taking different approaches to China. Trump had become more hostile to Xi's China. In the U.S. National Security Strategy published in December 2017, it was written that "China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity."[25] It was also mentioned that "China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests. China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor."[26] It was quite unlikely, on the contrary to Japan, that the Trump administration would support China's BRI under the strategic competition between the two giants.

Given Abe's continued wooing of Putin and accommodation of China on the BRI, along with wariness of taking as strong a line as the U.S. on intensified Chinese human rights violations, there was concern that he did not embrace the liberal international order to the same degree as American critics of Trump, who on a bipartisan basis agreed with the need for a tougher posture. As late as 2020, Abe was planning on a state visit by Xi, even as Sino-U.S. relations had sunk further and many in Japan were asking that it be cancelled.

The U.S. response to Japan was positive although the two had somewhat different notions of FOIP. The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy stated, "A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region."[27] With Trump pressing countries in Europe to boost their defense budgets as well as Japan and South Korea for more host-nation support, Japan's low defense budget drew some concern. Yet, the U.S. security community found much to appreciate in Abe's policies to reinterpret the Constitution in support of collective defense and to establish a National Security Council. Moreover, despite Trump's withdrawal from TPP, experts largely welcomed Abe's success in rallying eleven states behind CPTPP. As Mireya Solis wrote, "The relaunch of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) after the American exit from the mega trade deal showcased a very different Japan, willing to step up and bring to fruition delicate negotiations among the remaining members."[28] As for FOIP, the U.S. credited Abe with proposing it, stating "We welcome and support the strong leadership role of our critical ally, Japan."[29] Furthermore, the American FOIP was viewed as almost equivalent to the Quad, which is similar to Abe's earlier "security diamond" and relied heavily on Japan and its overtures to India. Thus, it was written that "We will seek to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India" to strengthen the FOIP.

Despairing of Trump's foreign policy, security experts gave credit to Abe for keeping ideals alive. Uncertain whether Trump would be willing to defend the liberal international order, some saw Japan as leading in defending it. Ikenberry wrote, "if the liberal international order is to survive, leaders and constituencies around the world that still support it will need to step up. Much will rest on the shoulders of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, the only two leaders of consequence left standing who support it."[30]

In September 2020, when Abe was replaced by his close political partner, Suga Yoshihide, concerns over the future trajectory of Japan's foreign policy were raised. Suga clearly stated that "I intend to strategically implement the free and open Indo-Pacific while also building stable relations with neighboring countries, including China and Russia."[31] Yet, it was precisely Japan's policies toward China and Russia in 2020 that raised concern about its commitment to the liberal international order. Suga promoted the Quad together with Biden, joining the two other leaders in a joint statement, "The Spirit of the Quad." It stated, "Together, we commit to promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond …We support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity"[32] One of the biggest legacies of

Suga's foreign policy was his strong will to defend and enhance Abe's foreign policy vision of the FOIP, together with his contribution to advance the cooperation in the Quad framework. On October 4, 2021 Kishida became prime minister as the U.S. began warning that Russia was preparing an all-out invasion of Ukraine. The response in Japan was delayed until war broke out.

The "Kishida Doctrine"

The year 2022 unfolded strikingly differently from Japanese expectations. Abe had set the agenda that was expected to prevail. This included an ever-closer security alliance with the U.S. and further institutionalization of the "FOIP" buttressed by the Quad, but also a cooperative approach to China in what would be the fiftieth anniversary of the 1972 breakthrough normalization and lingering support for the momentum left from Abe's repeated summits with Putin.

Surprises of the sort caused by COVID-19 in 2020-21 or Trump over four years were thought to be a thing of the past. While new challenges to globalization and a deepening confrontation between democratic and authoritarian systems, symbolized by the U.S.-China clash, were occurring, intensified dialogue was foreseen as Xi Jinping sought stability for validation at the fall 20th Party Congress and Biden proceeded more pragmatically than Trump had. As much as Taiwan was a hotspot, it was not an imminent threat to regional stability. This upbeat outlook had no mention of how Russian aggression, Chinese support for Russia, concern over aggression toward Taiwan, and new polarization over North Korea could derail these existing expectations. The "Abe Doctrine" seemed to have survived despite Biden's appeal for certain changes.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine tested Japan's commitment to the international order unlike anything that had proceeded. Four challenges stood out. First, would it react to Russia in lock-step with the U.S. and its European allies? Second, would it recognize the parallels with China's behavior over Taiwan and transform its military posture accordingly? Third, would Japan join in forging a multilateral framework with NATO for resisting both Russia and China? And fourth, given the nature of the China challenge and the thrust of the economic sanctions decoupling from Russia, would Japan prioritize economic security even at the cost of pain facing some of its companies? If, in all these respects, Japan was following the U.S. lead, the question remained what about the "Kishida Doctrine" would be unique in the way Japan backed the liberal international order at a critical turning point.

In responding to Russia, despite some wavering on energy projects in Sakhalin, Japan stood firmly with the West, where some European states also delayed over energy. On Taiwan, Japan played a leading role in drawing parallels and convincing other states that the crisis in Europe and China's support for Russian logic required a response extending to the Indo-Pacific. Kishida's decision to boost defense spending to 2% of GDP and acquire offensive capabilities was a gamechanger. On NATO, Japan in June 2022 joined its meeting for the first time and as a member of the G7 Japan led in linking the trans-Atlantic to the trans-Pacific. Finally, after the October 7 U.S. announcement of export controls limiting China's access to advanced semi-conductor inputs, Japan took quite similar measures.[33]

Russia's war in Ukraine aroused alarm about parallels with a possible war launched by China involving Taiwan and was a wake-up call for a new outlook befitting a new era for Japan. This earthshaking geopolitical event not only spelled the death knell of nearly a decade of hopeful diplomacy with Putin, it led to a reassessment of Japan's security posture, its preparedness for war in the Indo-Pacific, and its sense of separation of Europe and Asia.

Throughout the year after the massive invasion, Japanese put the spotlight on how the liberal international order was shaken and what is needed to restore it. For instance, it can be argued that the impact of the Ukraine war was a tectonic shift in world history, deeply impacting the postwar, international order, to which Japan cannot be a bystander.[34] This large-scale war among European powers has shaken the post-Cold War belief that such a conflict was impossible in Europe. As a firm supporter of a rules-based international order, Japanese foreign policy insists that Russia's behavior stop, and Japan must join internationally to apply more pressure. If this were not to happen, it would mean Japan would be denying the diplomatic principles it has professed to date.[35] Separately, I called Putin's war a "nineteenth century" and Zelensky's war a "twenty-first" century" view of the future international order.[36]

By the late summer of 2022, Japan's position had been clarified by the Kishida-Biden summit in May, the NATO summit in June, and the Chinese missiles fired into Japan's exclusive economic zone in response to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August. The message from the May 24 summit was Japan and the U.S. must lead, in diplomacy, security, and economics in opposition with China and Russia.[37] Just a month later, the Japanese prime minister journeyed to Europe to join the G7 and NATO summits.[38] Press coverage recognized the transformative nature of these meetings and of Kishida's responses. Three points were reaffirmed in the media reports. First,

the transformation under way is far-reaching and irreversible, a milestone comparable to the end of the Cold War. In Europe, the war will be long-lasting, and NATO will hold together. Second, Europe and Asia are indivisible, facing shared security challenges and recognizing that they need to face them together. Third, Japan faces unexpected uncertainties over energy ties to Russia and also economic security relations with China. These remain to be resolved to set an agenda for an emerging era.

It should be noted that Japanese companies need to take economic security seriously. An intense debate on it is needed in Japanese society. Southeast Asia is a key to networking for economic interests. Their fear of U.S. abandonment is great, but trust of the U.S. is not strong. Japan's loss of national power makes its existence less noticeable. We are entering an era with a mix of 19th century power politics and 20th century bipolarity. Japan has two missions: first, to strengthen the cohesion of the G7 and NATO, using its greater political stability and taking advantage of its different and more cohesive democracy; and to provide needed outreach to Asia and Africa. To do this, however, requires struggling at home with anti-American, pro-China voices, who would stand by in a "Taiwan contingency" and even let the Senkakus and Okinawa go. Reliance on the U.S. military has led to a spiritual vacuum, which must be addressed.

It is necessary to grasp the changing nature of the Japan-U.S. strategy toward China. Unlike the U.S. conflict with Russia, that with China is a competition over economic and technological power. Kanemaru traces the beginning of economic security thinking in Japan, differentiating knowing, protecting, raising up, and activating. Supply chain fragility in the pandemic and the Trump administration controls on technological outflow to China alerted a METI team to begin to call the alarm and an LDP team to begin to act independently. There was no economic group in the National Security Secretariat then, but a technological innovation advancement office began to meet and set the goals listed above. The defense ministry, METI, and big defense companies lacked an understanding of the problem. In 2022 under a new law a think tank was established to survey technology. As far as protection is concerned, responses to the 1987 Toshiba violation of COCOM regulations set a precedent. New restrictions were put in place under METI on the share of relevant Japanese companies under foreign ownership, meeting resistance in business circles and leading to exceptions.

Given that the Finance Ministry lacked security consciousness, the Kantei took charge. A CFIUS-like committee was established, placed under a new national economic security office. As for raising Japan up, proposals were taken for joint research from academic associations and enterprises, which had long opposed

cooperation on security. In the National Security Secretariat Kitamura Shigeru, a pro in dealing with Chinese, Russian, and North Korean espionage activity, became secretary general as the LDP under Amari Akira provided strong political leadership.

Kitamura Shigeru in *Yomiuri* on September 18 pointed to the importance of new areas linking economics and security, referring to them as gamechangers.[39] Advanced technology developed in civilian industries can be converted to military uses. This is leading both China and the U.S. to take steps toward decoupling and raising the need for security clearances in industry. Meanwhile, the *Yomiuri* editorial on the same day, which covered a Japan-U.S. defense ministers' meeting, noted that Japan is facing danger unprecedented since the postwar era. Japan and the U.S. are only beginning joint research on hypersonic weapons that China and North Korea are developing. Until now Japan has relied on the U.S. for attacking forces and concentrated on defense, but U.S. power has relatively declined, and defense alone is insufficient for Japan. The editorial warns that should intelligence leak from the defense ministry and defense industries, trust in Japan would decline.

Kishida at the UN made clear his thinking in opposing China and Russia. He stressed Japan's support for freedom, democracy, and the rule of law and called for the restoration of the international order shaken by Russia and China. He called for clarity that "Ukraine is tomorrow's East Asia" and sharing consciousness of the threats ahead with international society, particularly China's hegemonic behavior. It is advancing in the southern Pacific and the Indian Ocean and has the ambition to annex Taiwan, seen in August in its response to the Pelosi visit there.

On New Year's Day 2023 Kishida described 2022 as a "tumultuous year," citing the contagious omicron variant, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the assassination of former prime minister Abe Shinzo. He added that Japan is "facing the severest security situation" in the post-World War II era, and he projected leadership in rejecting attempts "to change the status quo by force" and responding to Putin's possible use of a tactical nuclear device against Ukraine. Japan's term on the Security Council and the G7 Hiroshima summit offer him opportunities. Revising three defense documents, Japan is poised to respond decisively to security threats.

What is unique about Japan's support for the liberal international order? In Kishida's speech in Washington just after meeting Biden on January 13, he drew attention to two distinct themes: a special role for Japan in the Global South, tempering its support for bipolarity and advocacy of universal values; and renewed advocacy for nuclear disarmament, as would be showcased when he

hosted the G7 in Hiroshima in May. In recognizing the reluctance of about 100 countries, notably in Southeast Asia and India, to join in sanctions against Russia, Japanese argued for assuming a bridge role to reach out to them for restoring the international order. The message conveyed was that on security Japan was sticking as closely as possible with the U.S., while on values and also on economic security, to a degree, Japan would find some space in the Global South to pursue its own interpretation of the liberal order.

Conclusion

When Biden was elected president, the Japanese government was quick to adapt to a new situation. The U.S. became more proactive in defending the liberal international order with like-minded partners such as Japan, and Japan agreed, although a turning point awaited the war in 2022. Four years before, Biden said, "In recent years it has become evident that the consensus upholding this system is facing increasing pressures, from within and from without... It's imperative that we act urgently to defend the liberal international order."[40] When Russia invaded in February 2022, Biden sought a greater commitment from Japan, and Kishida responded, labelling the invasion "an act that undermines the very foundation of the international order." By doing this, Kishida "transformed the fight against Russia's aggression against Ukraine from a Trans-Atlantic one to a global one."[41]

Japan is no longer a free rider in the international order without any role to play. The "Abe Doctrine" proved to be a critical transition, making possible Japan's moves in 2022.

As long as the focus is on Ukraine and possible coercion by China against Taiwan, there is little distance between the Japanese and U.S. conceptions of the liberal order. Yet, the legacy of Japan's inclusive vision of the international order is not dead, even if it has become less relevant under the current international situation. It applies primarily to the Global South, putting some distance between the Japanese and U.S. interpretations of FOIP and of how to deal with states wary about condemning the Russian aggression or standing up strongly against China's behavior.

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Threats to the Liberal International Order: Attitudes towards Democracy among the Youth in South Korea

By Hannah June Kim

The liberal international order has been defended by democracies for decades, yet it has continuously been challenged throughout that time. Some scholars argue that, despite these challenges, the liberal order survives by continuously overcoming these trials.[1] Some believe that the liberal world order will soon be replaced by a new order.[2] Others suggest that the liberal order will not collapse but may transform into one that is less hegemonic, less American-shaped, and less liberal.[3] All the recent studies examining the liberal international order, despite their differences, have one thing in common: they all acknowledge that the liberal international order is facing more challenges than ever before.

Some of these challenges include increasing discontent from both external and internal actors as well as imminent threats,[4] including threats related to populism, the rise of new nationalism, declining multilateralism, rise in protectionism, and intensified competition among major powers.[5] In particular, the rise of authoritarian countries has been at the forefront of this challenge. China continues to contest the existing order and attempts to take advantage of the current system to increase its influence[6] while deteriorating relations between Russia and the West have shown serious cracks in the maintenance of the international liberal order. Russia's sudden and aggressive invasion of Ukraine was not only a direct attempt to challenge Ukraine's independence and deny Ukrainian statehood, but also to attack the democratic-ness of the liberal international order.[7] In this way, the Ukraine War has become the first direct and explicit attack on democracy after decades of subtle and implicit attempts, and citizens worldwide are reacting to how this has shaken up the stability of the world.

This paper examines how people perceive the liberal international order and whether these perceptions have changed since the start of the Ukraine War. Specifically, it observes perceptions of the liberal international order through support for autocracy and examines the case of South Korea

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(hereafter Korea) in the post-Cold War era. This study describes Korea's recent troubles with democracy and growing apathy towards liberalism and how this has increased during the post-Cold War era. It contends that support for authoritarianism increased right after the start of the Ukraine War, particularly among the youth, due to both external and internal factors including declining satisfaction with the existing liberal order, disappointment with their own institutions, and anxieties about their own future. It also explains how these attitudes may have changed throughout the course of the year and how these attitudes may influence not only the future of democratic progress within the country but also the stability of the liberal international order in the region.

This study is important for several reasons. First, Korea is a middle power that has both contributed greatly to the stability of the liberal international order and has been significantly influenced by it, and as such, the country is highly influenced by the stagnation and decline of the Great Powers.[8] This is especially the case since Korea "plays a significant role in a wide range of important global issue arenas and supports liberal international order with its leadership diplomacy."[9] Second, support for the liberal international order and its main pillars, e.g. democratic governance, is critical in Korea since the country resides in a region that continually struggles with democratic consolidation. Korea is only one of three fully consolidated democracies in the region, and as such, the country's democratic status can greatly influence its neighboring countries and the overall region.[10] Third, the youth have always played a critical role in Korea's democratic progress, and as such, the youth's attitudes towards the liberal international order will have significant implications in both the country and the region's future. Fourth, support for the international liberal order is especially important to observe in 2022 since the order was challenged on multiple fronts, with the largest explicit challenge coming from the Ukraine War. Support, or lack thereof, may have significant repercussions on democracy and the stability of the world. This study fills in some gaps in the existing literature on perceptions of the liberal international order but also on how recent events related to it may unfold in consolidated democracies in East Asia.

Below, I provide background information on definitions and perceptions of the liberal international order as well as a description of how Korea has viewed the order during the post-Cold War era and how these views might have changed this past year. Then, I describe why these views have changed during the year 2022 and the role of the youth, supporting my argument with original data. I conclude with a discussion as to how perceptions of the liberal international order may change in Korea in the years to come.

South Korea, the Liberal International Order, and Democracy

The liberal international order has been defined in various ways. It can be defined as a system that was developed after World War II and managed by the United States to promote "democracy through building alliances and multilateral institutions."[11] In this line of thought, the dominant state in the liberal international order must be a liberal democracy and there must be a substantial number of liberal democracies in the system to spread democracy across the globe and create a world order consisting exclusively of liberal democracies.[12] This is because democracies are bound to cooperate with each other and develop a set of common rules. Through this cooperation, "an order will be largely free of war and will generate prosperity for all of its member states."[13]

The main pillars of the liberal international order include democratic governance[14] as well as the liberal ideology that emphasizes democratic values and norms; international cooperation through multilateral institutions; and a shared commitment to preserve liberal values, norms, principles, and institutions.[15] While the number of pillars may vary, the common theme focuses on democracy: democratic values, democratic governance, and democratic principles.

The liberal international order experienced an increasing number of countries democratizing in the aftermath of the Cold War between 1990 and 2004.[16] It was presumed that the order would become a single dominant one built on equality and freedom,[17] yet serious cracks started to appear in 2005 and steadily grew as liberal democracy began to lose its appeal and existing democratic systems began to struggle.[18] The number of liberal democracies began to decline, and scholars began to worry about the future of democracy as "soft authoritarianism" gained momentum as an attractive alternative, with some political leaders seemingly extolling the virtues of illiberal democracy.[19]

South Korea in the post-Cold War era

The supposed attractiveness of "soft authoritarianism" and illiberal leadership began to appear in Korea as well, despite the fact that the country was an exemplary case of democratic success in East Asia and one that represented the "most important and instructive" case of democracy just a few decades ago in the post-Cold War era.[20] Indeed, after experiencing a nearly three-decade reign of authoritarianism from 1961 to 1987, the struggle for democratization catalyzed in 1987 through people power movements among urban middle class white-collar workers, student activists, and journalists and

academics. This led Korea to transform into an electoral democracy in 1987 under President Chun Doo-hwan, who reluctantly adopted general elections through enormous popular demand.[21] Pressure from the people and this bottom-up approach to democratization indicated increasing political interest among the citizenry, with interest in politics increasing from 47.5 in 1982 to 72.8% in 1990.[22]

The late 1980s into the 1990s was a prime time for democratic vitality and stability in Korea. The public sphere grew through a rise of civil society groups and a diffusion of democratic political culture. As a successful new middle power, moreover, Korea remained uniquely situated geographically, economically, and politically: geographically located between China, Japan, and North Korea; economically growing rapidly with many large conglomerates, an educated workforce, and growing per capita income; and politically through successful democratization during the Third Wave. It was vital for Korea to remain stable and continue to make contributions to the liberal international order as a role model and promote democracy in the East Asian region.

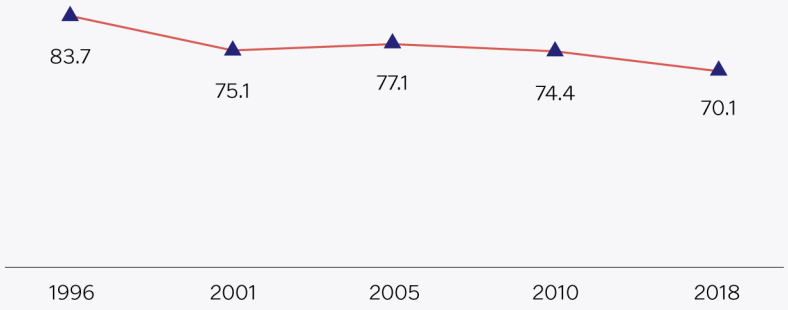
South Korea in recent years

Yet democratic stability and support began to decline in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. According to the 3rd wave (1995-98) of the World Values Survey, 83.7% of the Korean respondents stated that it is fairly good or very good to have a democratic political system. Five waves from 1996 to 2018 of the survey show that there has been a general decline of favorability of democracy. Decreasing proportions of respondents believe that it is very or fairly good to have a democratic political system. While 83.7 percent of respondents viewed having a democratic political system to be good in 1996, the most recent wave shows that only 70 percent of respondents viewed a democratic political system to be good as of 2018.

Support for the liberal international order rests on the pillar of democracy. The international order is often defined by an ideological struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, and according to Mearsheimer, "the most important requirement for building a liberal international order is to spread liberal democracy far and wide."[23] As such, democratic support is particularly important among democratic countries within regions that continue to struggle with democratic consolidation, since this can create a snowball effect. This includes support from countries like Korea, non-western middle powers that rose to prominence in the post-Cold War era supported the United States and its allies in building and preserving the liberal international order.[24]

Figure 1. Declining Support for Democracy 1996 - 2018.

HAVING A DEMOGRAPHIC POLITICAL SYSTEM



South Korea's International and Domestic Democratic Decline

Declining support for democracy is not strikingly unusual to Korea. Many consolidated democracies have recently followed the trend towards democratic decay, with support for democracy declining through withdrawal from democratic institutions and rising support for authoritarian alternatives.[25] Yet Korea's democratic decay is unique because the country has been struggling with democracy both internationally and domestically.

Internationally, there are constantly growing threats to Korea's democracy from neighboring autocracies, with China and North Korea as prime examples. As one of the largest and most powerful autocracies in the world, China continues to attack democracy promotion[26] and has the potential to change the existing international order through its alliance with other strong authoritarian countries, the growing salience of authoritarianism, and the possible retreat of liberal democracy all over the world.

The Ukraine War this past year has, in many ways, "set off a geopolitical storm that portends seismic shifts in the international order."[27] It has increased concerns about the implications the invasion may have on China, since the Sino-Russian partnership has continued to improve during the last decade[28] and the Ukraine War has suggested that Moscow and Beijing will strengthen their alliance through a struggle between authoritarianism and democracy.[29]

China recently offered rhetorical support for Moscow by objecting to calling the Russian invasion of Ukraine a "war" during the Group of 20 summit in Indonesia,[30] and this close alliance has led to concerns as to whether Russia's invasion of Ukraine would influence China's increasingly forceful attempt to absorb Taiwan[31] and/or influence neighboring countries.

While "the international community is seized by a deep sense of urgency, the mood in Seoul [was] one of apathy, bordering on nonchalance."[32] Indeed, even though China continues to be the closest credible threat to Korea, the latter country continues to remain lukewarm towards China and its threats. Part of this may be because Russia's invasion of Ukraine does not feel urgent or tangible,[33] yet attitudes towards authoritarianism and China remain somewhat ambivalent as well. A 2021 Pew study revealed that anti-Chinese sentiments in Korea were relatively high, with 77 percent of Koreans viewing China unfavorably.[34] An original survey further showed that feelings towards China averaged only 26.5 on a scale of 0 to 100, indicating that views of China have sunk "to their lowest since diplomatic normalization between the two countries."[35] However, these sentiments seem separate from Russia's attacks and seem to stem from feelings of cultural imperialism rather than fears of authoritarian influence and changes in the international order.[36]

As another credible authoritarian threat, North Korea also continues to fire missiles towards Korea even amidst the Ukraine War.[37] Yet even with the constant threat from both neighboring autocracies, Korea remained relatively lukewarm towards these threats during the past few years. The previous administration was criticized by democracies and international organizations for its illiberal practices towards North Korean defectors and its failure to denounce North Korean violations.[38] On the other hand, President Yoon, who took office in May 2022 has been much more confrontational with North Korea and recently raised the possibility of developing nuclear weapons and developing Seoul's defense.[39] While this is a first, it is still too early to observe whether Korea will actively considered nuclear armament or is instead planning to do more as a deterrent if North Korea continues to act out.[40]

Domestically, while Korea has been considered an exemplary case of third wave democratization, the country is struggling with democratic decay from within through eroding democratic norms, increasing polarization, and appealing to chauvinistic nationalism.[41] According to Shin, "the subtle subversion of democratic norms across multiple spheres could one day hit South Korea's young democracy with unbearable costs."[42] In addition, Korea continues to struggle from within through declining democratic values[43] as well as divisions stemming from gender,[44] generational divides, income and class, regional divisions, migration, and anti-foreign sentiment.[45]

These tensions manifest in two ways – the erosion of civil society and the illiberal youth – which can possibly dismantle democracy from within. For one, while Korea's democracy blossomed through civil society groups, there is now declining citizen engagement with democracy. While established democracies often show high engagement of democratic norms,[46] there is a growing erosion of political support for democracy in Korea. As Foa and Mounk contend, "even as democracy has come to be the only form of government widely viewed as legitimate, it has lost the trust of many citizens who no longer believe that democracy can deliver on their most pressing needs and preferences."[47]

The other domestic threat to democracy, and the fundamental reason as to why preferences for the liberal international order are decreasing in Korea stems from grievances among Korean citizens. There is increasingly less support for democracy among South Koreans, and particularly, among the youth due to growing disaffection with democracy and increasing preferences for strongman leadership, which may influence not only Korea's democratic future but also the liberal international order. To a certain extent, the two domestic tensions complement one another, since young people are often the powerhouse of civil activism.

Growing Disaffection with Democracy among the Youth

Support for democracy among the youth remains crucial for democratic consolidation,[48] especially since the youth vote emerged as a swing bloc in the previous presidential elections and by-elections in Korea.[49] Yet growing grievances among a vulnerable youth and their increasing dissatisfaction with the government may have changed perceptions of both democratic systems and authoritarian alternatives.

The idealization of democracy and the liberal order began to decline through harsh realities among the youth for several reasons. For one, the youth are frustrated with political and corporate elitism. Many young Koreans have been discouraged with the recent administrations and their alleged abuse of power,[50] leading to increasing grievances towards politicians and growing distrust of the government, regardless of party. In addition, young Koreans are frustrated with income inequality and the lack of employment opportunities and feel as though the government is not doing much to resolve these issues. In fact, these grievances and heightened anxieties based on economic insecurities have led young men to lash out on younger women who they feel are taking away their opportunities through gender quotas[51] and instead support politicians who display anti-feminist rhetoric.[52] Grievances and frustrations among the youth are understandable, as housing prices continue to soar, youth unemployment continues to increase, and stories about political scandals continue to increase

distrust.[53] In various ways, the youth continue to be the country's most vulnerable generation, with their needs not being met and their voices unheard,[54] partly due to lack of representation for the youth in politics.

Increasing Support for Strongman Leadership among the Youth

The youth seem to be at the forefront of the democratic backsliding process, with many more likely to support authoritarian alternatives. Since 2000, "the rise of the strongman leader has been a central feature of global politics" and this has not been solely within authoritarian systems but among elected officials in democratic countries as well.[55] Support for strongman style leadership can be found in both nondemocracies, such as Vladimir Putin in Russia, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey,[56] and Viktor Orban in Hungary. Yet it can also be seen in democracies, through Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland, Boris Johnson in Great Britain, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Andrews Manuel Lopez Obrador in Mexico, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, and even more recently, Donald Trump in the United States. In the Asian region, moreover, China and India have also "both fallen prey to strongman politics" with Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi in power indefinitely.[57]

Among the youth in Korea, strongman leaders may, to a certain extent, embolden this generation that has continuously felt the lack of representation in administration. While other forms of leadership seem less likely to directly handle their anxieties and concerns, strongman leadership may give off the impression that they are willing to help these younger generations and to get things done right away. The recent presidential election in Korea also showed how young voters took strongman leadership into account, with many preferring Yoon Suk-yeol's assertive approach over Lee Jae-myung's seemingly softer stance. Even Lee Jun-seok, the former chairman of the People Power Party, built his platform by showing this type of leadership and making taboo statements about gender and catering to groups of misogynistic young men by blaming feminism for their problems.

This is not new, as a rise of the alt-right movement, or "K-Trumpism," has increased support for strongman leadership during the past few years. Even prior to the Ukraine War, Koreans were less likely to view Putin unfavorably relative to other countries. In a 2020 study according to Pew Research Center, respondents in Korea held more positive views of Russia relative to other countries, with 39 percent showing favorable attitudes while only 19 percent in the United States and 18 percent in Japan showed favorable attitudes.[58] As a result, in the initial stages of the Ukraine War, attitudes towards Putin may not have been significantly unfavorable due to this favorable view of strongman leadership. And while views towards Putin may have changed throughout the past year through the struggle and challenges visible during the war, initial impressions of Putin's strongman

leadership may not have been as negative relative to other countries, where people were much quicker to condemn Russia's attacks, since younger citizens may have initially seen some merit to strongman leadership.

To that end, this study contends that perceptions of the liberal international order are changing rapidly in Korea. Specifically, this study argues that Koreans have become, to a certain extent, less liberal in their views and less likely to explicitly support the liberal international order, due to recently declining preferences for democracy. This is exacerbated by eroding democratic norms from within, and declining citizen engagement, along with growing authoritarian powers nearby. In addition, this study posits that this change is, in part, being led by younger generations who are less democratic and less liberal than those of the older generations. This study argues that younger Koreans have become more supportive of authoritarian properties such as strongman leadership due to disappointment with existing administrations, and the belief that strongman leaders stand up "for the common man."[59] This study focuses on the youth because support for strongman leadership among younger Koreans differs from support from older Koreans, where support may stem from authoritarian nostalgia. It is also different from support among those living in authoritarian countries who directly experience authoritarianism in everyday life. It is a new type of support that stems from those who seem less invested in democratic politics and instead for authoritarian-type leaders, which may have lasting effects on democratic deconsolidation and the liberal international order within the region in the years to come.

However, this study also leaves open the possibility that this may have changed over the course of the Ukraine War, particularly in the latter part of 2022 where many young Koreans saw the disadvantages of strongman leadership and by seeing Putin struggle during the war. With Putin recently unable to uphold his strongman leader image, it is possible that attitudes among the youth towards this may have changed recently as well.

Data and Methods

Data

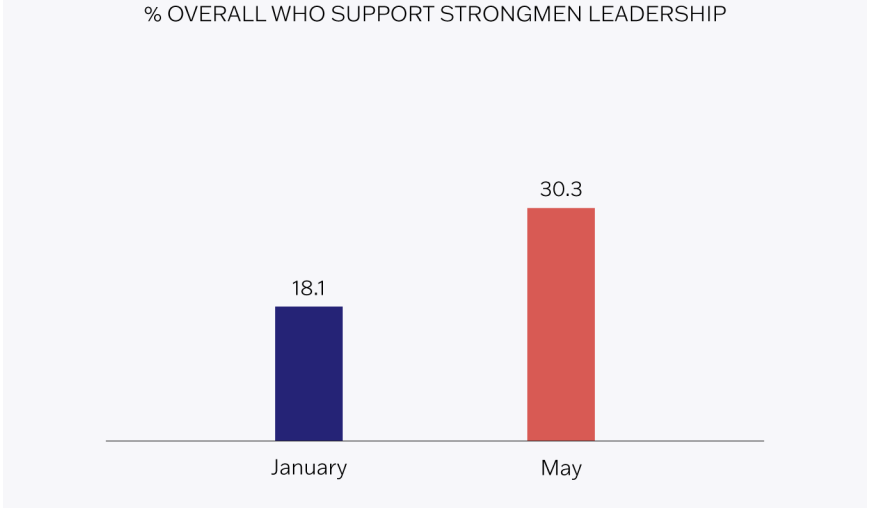
I conducted two surveys in Korea this year using Lucid Marketplace, once before the Ukraine War in January 2022 and once after the start of the war in May 2022. In both surveys, I asked respondents about their attitudes towards autocracy to see if support for autocratic properties and political preferences may have changed after the start of the Ukraine War. There were approximately one thousand respondents for each survey, and all of the survey questions were written in Korean for the respondents and then translated into English for the analysis.

Autocratic attitudes can measure preferences for the liberal international order in multiple ways. For one, the Ukraine War led to concerns about the growing salience of authoritarianism and the retreat of liberal democracy worldwide. As a result, measuring autocratic attitudes as the main dependent variable can show whether the growing salience of authoritarianism may become a true threat to the liberal order. Second, measuring certain characteristics of autocracy can show how respondents viewed Russia's invasion of Ukraine. For example, Putin's strongman leadership measures preferences for autocratic leadership and, by default, autocratic preferences.

In the January survey, the survey included the question: "We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things." Response options included strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and a neutral option. The May survey included a similar question: "A strong leader can disregard parliament and elections and decide things." Response options included very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important, and a neutral option. All the responses were reverse-coded and coded on a 0 to 1 scale.

The independent and control variables include age, education, gender, income, employment, marital status, and party affiliation. The age variable is grouped into tens (below 30, 30 to 40, 40 to 50, 50 to 60, and over 60 years of age). All the variables were coded on a 0 to 1 scale to examine descriptive statistics, difference of means, and multiple regression analyses.

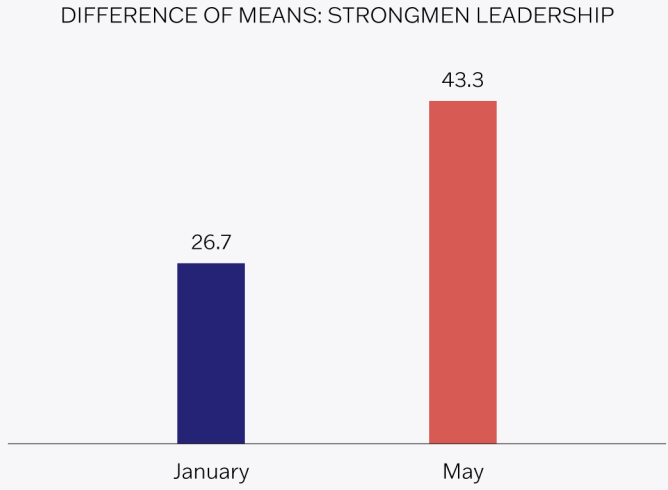
Figure 2. Percent of Those who Support Strongman Leadership



Methods

The figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents overall who showed support for strongman leadership prior to, and after, the start of the Ukraine War. Right before the Ukraine War, in January 2022, 18.1% stated that "we should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things." After the start of the Ukraine War, in May 2022, 30.3% of the respondents stated that it was very or somewhat important to have a strong leader who can disregard parliament and elections and decide things, indicating a substantial increase in support for strongman leadership.

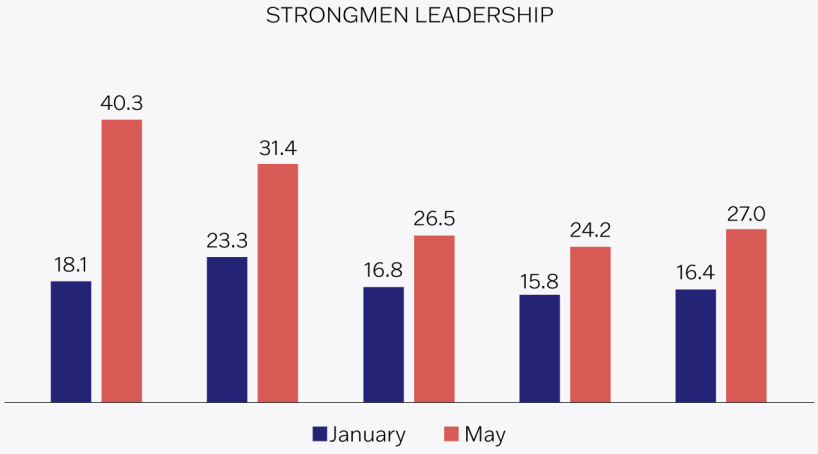
Figure 3. Difference of Means: Support for Strongman Leadership



Moreover, a difference of means between the two time frames shows that support increased significantly over time, from 26.7 percent in January to 43.3 percent in May, showing a 16.6 percentage difference. This further indicates that support for strongman leadership has substantially and significantly increased during the start of the Ukraine War.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of respondents, by age cohort, who agreed with the statement that a strong leader should disregard parliament and elections and decide things, As the figure shows, younger Koreans were much more likely to support strongman leadership prior to, and after the start of, the Ukraine War. However, a larger proportion of younger Koreans were more likely to support strongman leadership after the start of the Ukraine War, with 18.9

Figure 4. Support for Strongman Leadership in Two Time Frames by Age Cohort

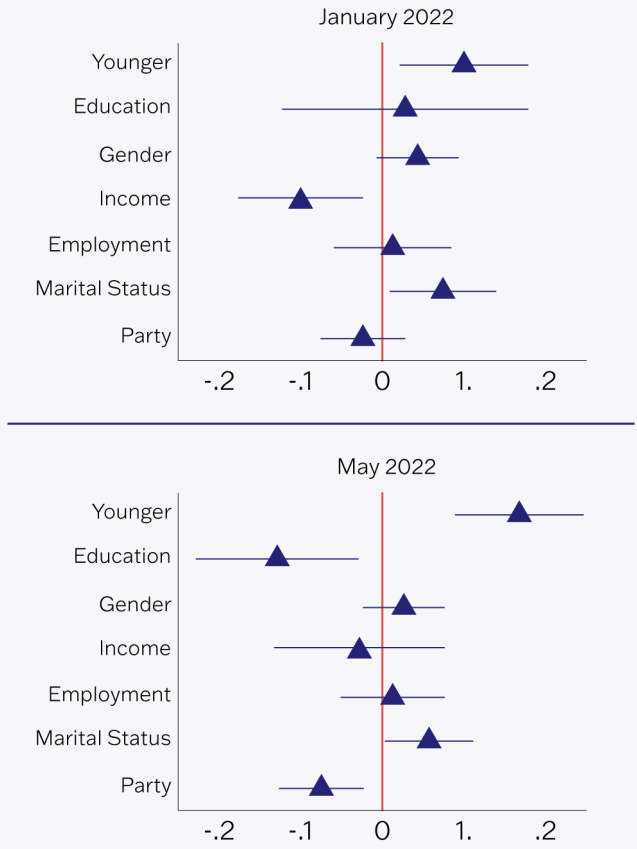


percent prior to the Ukraine War, and 40.3 percent afterwards among those below 30 years old. The second largest amount of support comes from the second youngest cohort, with 23.3 percent showing support prior to, and 31.4 percent showing support after, the Ukraine War.

In addition to descriptive statistics and t-tests, I also ran multiple regression analyses to analyze whether age can predict support for strongman leadership. The coefficient plots below show the regression analyses of young age and support for strongman leadership in both January and May 2022. The results show that younger respondents are more likely to support autocratic leadership. In the survey conducted before the Ukraine War, younger age predicted a 7.8 percentage point increase in support for autocratic leadership. After the start of the Ukraine War, the analyses show that younger people were more likely to show support, relative to older, for strongman leadership, with 14.6 percentage points. Both results were statistically significant (see Appendix for full regression table).

In addition, t-tests for both time frames by two age groups, younger and older (below 40 and 40 and above), all were statistically significant and show that, prior to the start of the Ukraine War, 30 percent of younger Koreans supported strongman leadership while 24.6 percent of older Koreans did. After the start of the war, 47.8 percent of younger Koreans supported strongman leadership while 39.6 percent of older Koreans did. Not only did support increase after the Ukraine war, but again, proportionally more young Koreans increased support for autocratic leadership (see Appendix for tables).

Figure 5. Coefficient Plots of Multiple Regression Analyses: January 2022 and May 2022



Discussion on Measuring Support among Conservatives and Progressives in South Korea

The results of this study show that, despite Russia's attack on Ukraine, autocratic preferences initially increased at the start of the war. Through two surveys, one conducted before the start of the Ukraine War in January 2022 and one afterwards in May 2022, results suggest that support for strongman leadership was higher among all age groups, but particularly among the youth. This increases concerns regarding the spread of authoritarianism and an illiberal international order. In the book Ill Winds, Larry Diamond warns that "the future of democracy will be

bleak if liberal democracies, including the United States, do not defend against China and Russia's sharp power."[60] Yet "democracy is in retreat across the world, and barriers to trade are on the rise."[61] In the case of South Korea, grievances among the youth seemed to be directed towards democracy, despite the current liberal order relying on democracy for stability.

Support for democracy can be measured in various ways, and support for the liberal international order has traditionally been measured through support for the U.S. and opposition to North Korea, China, and Russia. In the case of Korea, moreover, there has historically been a clear difference between conservatives and progressives in their support for, and opposition against, the United States, China, and North Korea, with conservatives often much more pro-U.S. and more opposed to North Korea and China. Yet the connection between support for the United States, and opposition towards China in regards to the liberal international order is not always clear. In fact, during the height of support for democratic values "Koreans did not embrace a pro-American attitude during the country's transition to democracy. Instead, South Korea [has] witnessed the rise and growth of strong anti-Americanism" during the democratization process.[62]

More recently, while support for democracy declined, anti-Chinese sentiment simultaneously increased,[63] with little difference between conservatives and progressives. Thus, perceptions of the liberal international order during the Ukraine War are difficult to define through their attitudes towards these countries. Indeed, while the United States has made its stance clear, China seems supportive of Russia but also remains very cautious in its support, especially on sanctions. Beijing continues to monitor events in Ukraine to determine their own likelihood to directly intervene in Taiwan,[64] and as such, support for the liberal international order in the case of Korea is difficult to define in terms of support for, and support against, other countries and the gap between conservatives and progressives regarding this aspect is not as significant as it used to be. Rather, perceptions of the liberal international order can be more clearly extrapolated through support for democracy among civilians, regardless of party affiliation and ideology. And the past few years indicate that, while generally both liberals and progressives indicate favorable attitudes towards the United States, they paradoxically also show more support for authoritarian characteristics more so now than in the past. When generally asked about the United States on a feeling thermometer, for example, many are willing to rate the country highly. Yet when it comes to preference for democracy over autocratic traits, the results significantly decline, suggesting that support for the United States does not indicate support for the liberal international order.

Conclusion

Mearsheimer (2019) stated that no international order lasts forever and that the distribution of power and the leading state's political ideology are the main factors that explain the demise and rise of new orders. Recent events suggest many challenges to the existing liberal international order, with much more democratic backsliding than democratic progress; growing illiberal leadership instead of liberal ones; increasing isolation among countries rather than cooperation; and even the pandemic has challenged the liberal international order. Amidst this long succession of tribulations, however, the liberal international order continues to hold its anchor. Despite these challenges, liberal democracies and the international order based on democratic prominence continues to endure.

While this study focused on examining support for strongman leadership right before and after the start of the Ukraine War, in January 2022 and in May 2022, it is also important to examine whether support has changed since then. This study incorporates public opinion data in early May, prior to Yoon taking office, and support for strongmen leadership was measured during a time of significant changes. Initially, both public opinion and the administration seemed ambiguous and noncommittal towards the Ukraine War.[65] The previous administration did not impose independent sanctions on Russia,[66] and some even faulted Zelensky's inexperience for starting the war.[67] There was also a lot of uncertainty and confusion among the public in terms of the war.

Yet soon after Yoon took office in May 10, his administration began to lead a significantly more hawkish stance on the war by focusing on values-based foreign policy and emphasizing rule-based order. Having a conservative party in power further suggests that the administration will keep Russia at a distance and work to protect the liberal international order by leading by example, agenda setting, and mediating.[68] Yoon's meetings with President Joe Biden and Yoon's new Indo-Pacific strategy, while tempering anti-China rhetoric, indicated that the administration was working closely with the United States.

A lot has changed during the past year and since the second survey in early May, and recent polls suggest that support for authoritarian leaders have declined. According to a recent study by Pew, confidence in Putin has declined in Korea, with 69 percent indicating no confidence.[69] This may in part be because Putin is facing numerous challenges in the Ukraine War, and through this, his strongman leadership capabilities are also being questioned. Seeing Putin struggle may further decrease support for this type of autocratic leadership over time. As such, it is possible that, since the time of the second survey, favorability for this type of leadership may have changed among the youth and, in a roundabout way, Putin's failures may help democratic progress in Korea.

The Ukraine War is not just a tragedy taking place in another country. It is influencing perceptions of the liberal international order worldwide. Korea's democratic progress continues to be influenced by both internal and external factors, and the Ukraine War has affected attitudes towards democracy as well. If Korea can overcome increasing illiberalism and support for authoritarianism, particularly among a young group of Koreans who have no strong recollection of Korea's historical democratic success, the troubles besetting the liberal international order may be overcome in Korea, the region, and beyond.

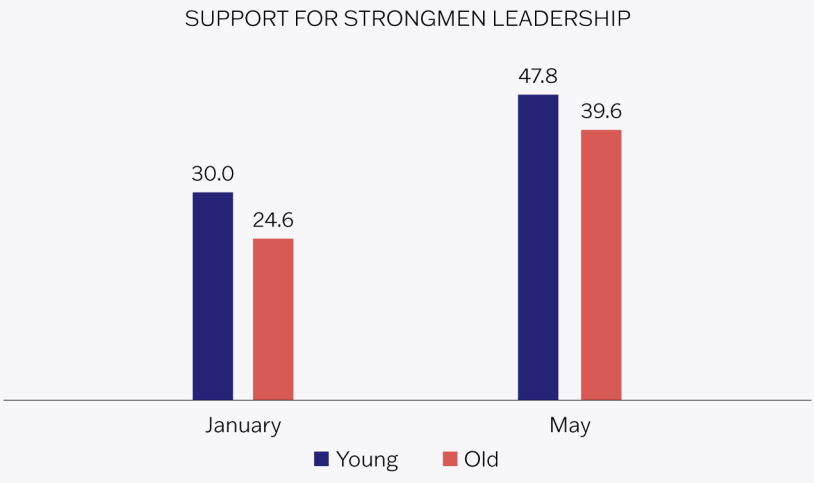
Appendix

Appendix A. Regression Results for Coefficient Plots.

	January 2022	May 2022
Younger	0.0078* 0.037	0.146*** 0.037
Education	0.021 0.064	-0.115* 0.047
Gender	0.029 0.022	0.029 0.021
Income	-0.086* 0.035	-0.025 0.049
Employment	0.011 0.028	0.012 0.028
Married	0.059* 0.027	0.048+ 0.027
Party	-0.022 0.021	-0.062** 0.022
Constant	0.215*** 0.047	0.408*** 0.047
N R^2	957 0.014	989 0.035

+p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Appendix B. T-Test Results for Younger and Older Koreans in January 2022 and May 2022.



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Sino-Russian Relations Amid the War in Ukraine and Their Reassessment of the International Order

By Katie Stallard and Gilbert Rozman

In a video meeting with Xi Jinping on December 30, 2022, Vladimir Putin declared, "We share the same views on the causes, course and logic of the ongoing transformation of the global geopolitical landscape."[1] But is this true? Do they really share the same view of the international order? To address this, we consider not only the state of the Sino-Russian relationship, but also compare their views on three dimensions of that order.

For the purposes of this study, we divide views on the international order into three dimensions: 1) the role of great powers with emphasis on Sino-Russian-U.S. relations; 2) the shape of the Indo-Pacific region, including U.S., Chinese, and Russian plans; and 3) the state of the Sino-Russian bilateral relationship. We argue that by 2019 basic consensus had been reached, but divisions remained. Indeed, on great powers agreement was highest, on regionalism it was complicated, and despite prior talk of a possible alliance, on bilateralism, contrary to claims, it was troubled.

The first year of the Russian war in Ukraine has tested the Sino-Russian relationship, as at no other time since the early 1990s. Relations have not proven to be unlimited, as the leaders declared just before the Russian invasion, but they have proven to be resilient. Critical to this resiliency is the considerable overlap in their assessments of the preexisting U.S.-led order. Yet, differences regarding the desired future international order and their respective risk tolerance could challenge future relations.

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Sino-Russian Relations and Their Thinking on the International Order Prior to 2019

The Chinese leadership was quick to insist in the early 1990s on the unjust nature of the unipolar world order the U.S. was building after the Cold War. They made their case repeatedly to the Russian leadership, who mostly sympathized, but a full meeting of the minds proved elusive. After all, grievances raised by China against the world order had long emphatically targeted the Russian empire and the Soviet Union as the biggest transgressors. Also, China's increasing integration into the global economic order and economic growth ran contrary to Russia's experience during this chaotic decade.

With Evgeny Primakov steering foreign policy in the late 1990s and China's leaders also angry over NATO's intervention in Kosovo, they found more common ground on the international order. The two sides signaled new closeness in their 2001 treaty of friendship. Both targeted Japan by the mid-2000s and coordinated against the U.S. approach on North Korea in the Six-Party Talks. If in the 1990s China was pressing Russia to challenge the international order more aggressively, in the 2000s they were pressing each other with neither clearly in the forefront. Indeed, in 2007-08 Putin was more outspoken and inclined to use force. That situation changed at the decade's end as Beijing cast aside Deng Xiaoping's policy of keeping a low profile and hiding China's growing strength, reacting sharply to the global financial crisis with new vehemence against the old order. Addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2009, both Vladimir Putin and China's then premier Wen Jiabao laid the blame for the crisis on Western dominance of the global economic system.[2] The relationship kept growing closer except for economic ties, and Russian demagoguery toward China—mainly from local officials—was stifled. Yet, trust was low, and Russians remained preoccupied with the West. Discontent with the West lacked a clear alternative, given low Russian self-confidence and hesitation to recognize how quickly China was rising as a power.

Four preconditions were essential for Russia to swing sharply to China and to draw linkages between that and Putin's determination to draw a red line in Ukraine against the West. First, it required a huge boost in Russian self-confidence, which followed from perceived economic and political success. Second, and relatedly, a belief in Western decline was necessary, which the global financial crisis and U.S. domestic political struggles conveyed, reaching its apotheosis during Donald Trump's presidency. Third, even before Xi Jinping became party chairman, Russians could discern a sharp break from earlier Chinese caution. Fourth, Putin cultivated a national

narrative that drew on historical landmarks that both raised the stakes for regaining control over Ukraine and provided a valuable source of common ground between Moscow and Beijing. All of these forces had come into play by 2012.

Already in general accord in their opposition to the U.S.-led order and on some vague principles for a replacement, China and Russia found a new level of coordination in 2012 when Vladimir Putin resumed the Russian presidency and Xi Jinping took the helm of the Chinese Communist Party. Putin announced Russia's "Turn to the East." Xi launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Each was envisaged as a platform for forging a new regional order, while both leaders also turned their attention to the bilateral architecture and the future great power order.

In 2013 Putin and Xi began repeated summit meetings. Given Medvedev's recent stress on modernization supplanting natural resources in spearheading Russia's advance in Northeast Asia, it was still unclear what Putin's sharper attacks on the international order would mean. Putin decided to ride China's coattails with three clear objectives: 1) to breathe new life into the Russia-U.S.-China triangle; 2) to become a force in reshaping the architecture of East Asia; and 3) to construct a new identity of Eurasianism to replace communism as a shared bond. In 2012 these goals had coalesced in what Putin called the "Turn to the East." As China took a harder line toward its neighbors, Russia could draw closer to it but also build ties to the others, but not the U.S., which he was demonizing. As North Korea's relations hardened with South Korea and others, Russia could both achieve a breakthrough with it and boost ties to the South. Talk of multipolarity overrode signs that Russia's options had been closing. While the mainstream held that a new cold war was already under way, also present was a multipolar school hopeful of relations with Japan and South Korea as well as India. Abe Shinzo's upbeat visit to Moscow in April 2013 led to talk that although the U.S. is Japan's first priority, closer ties with Asian neighbors were also a key goal. Park Geun-hye raised optimism further with her "Eurasian Initiative," as Russians assumed she needed Moscow for "trustpolitik" with North Korea.

Following's Xi's cordial meeting with Barack Obama at their June 2013 Sunnylands summit, and with suspicions rife in Russia about Xi's intentions in Central Asia after his launch of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB) in Kazakhstan later that year, Putin's "Turn to the East" hardly looked like an agenda to gang up on the U.S,, forge a new region together, and strengthen bilateralism. Dissatisfied with Russian attempts to exclude China from certain political, security, and even economic domains, Xi had decided to pursue

integration in a manner worrisome to Putin's plan for the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)—a customs union viewed as a counterweight to China's already growing presence. Putin had blocked China's proposal for an FTA within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and China was trying an end run. Regional ties seemed troubled, and bilateral relations were uncertain.

This changed with Russia's invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014. Putin's Cold War rhetoric put multilateralists on the defensive. His actions, and the Western sanctions they provoked, posed an immediate economic challenge. Despite the positive rhetoric about Moscow's relations with Beijing, in 2013 Russia's exports to the EU were at $256 billion in contrast to only $36 billion to China, with investments made in Russia even more skewed. Putin made a strong case during his May 2014 summit in China that massive Chinese funding would boost Russia's position as an energy superpower, compensating for its increasing isolation in the West. Putin had solidified ties with Xi Jinping, who was supportive of closer security relations, and had secured a massive boost to economic ties. Russia also agreed to link the EEU and the SREB, changing the framework for Central Asia, giving Xi a victory but pretending otherwise. At a July 2014 meeting of ambassadors, Putin insisted that China was staunchly against the U.S. due to its fears of encirclement, and that the environment was favorable for Russia to become the geopolitical balancer in a fast-changing region.[3] Equally, to build an Asian order exclusive of the U.S., Xi needed closer political and economic ties with Russia.

The deterioration of Sino-U.S. relations in 2015-16 gave renewed hope to Russia. China had joined in the pursuit of a multipolar world, and it was working with Russia in the SCO and BRICS to establish that world. Leaders heralded repeated Putin-Xi summits, closer military ties, and the reliability of China's hostility to the West. They reconceptualized geography to transform Eurasianism into a geopolitical and community identity symbol, giving the impression that China was cooperating in the reconstruction of the region rather than Russia being left on the margins. There was talk of becoming the third regional power after China and the United States—a balancer in the Asia-Pacific between the two powers-- as the two sides recognized each other's sphere of influence.

Anticipation in Russia mounted that a new era was arriving, and something called Greater Eurasia was emerging. More important than China's rise was the perception of U.S. decline. Russia foresaw gaining a major say in shaping the new regional framework. China joined in calling for the construction of an overall Eurasian partnership, broadening the scale of regionalism. Russia

accepted the core status of BRI, with Putin insisting that the EEU, SCO, and ASEAN could draw together apart from China's domination. Rather than admit that China was on a path to regional hegemony or that Russia's ties were not diversifying, the Russian narrative predicted triangularity with China and the U.S. and a balanced Eurasia in which Russia need not defer to China and would still lead its own geo-economic, geostrategic, and geo-cultural sphere. In defense of multipolarity, there was some talk of India or ASEAN as a center, but the U.S. was excluded, and Japan and South Korea had become objects of contestation rather than potential poles. It was unclear how China's vision for the BRI meshed with Greater Eurasia or if these were two competing conceptions. Clearer was the attempt to counter TPP, which Obama had advanced as an organizing concept as part of the U.S. pivot to Asia. Aware of its economic weakness, Russia also countered various schemes with stress on other dimensions of power. It gave great weight to the SCO as the incubator of a new world order.

Posing a rarified grand strategic triangle, putting Russia at the center of a vision of a new regional order, and holding summits with grandiose promises all sustained Russia's search for acceptance as a co-leader with its own autonomous model. China responded with soothing words about leadership but stringent conditions. Greater Eurasia, the new geographical construct, was given as reason for hope, but China's priority was a transport corridor via Central Asia, bypassing the Russian Far East to Russian chagrin. Eager to find compatibility, the two identified the SCO as the coordinating arena. With Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un rocking the world order, Putin eagerly put the spotlight on security, and Xi Jinping soon grew more assertive. A new era had dawned by the end of the 2010s.

Consensus on what to do about the Grand Strategic Triangle strengthened, divisions over regionalism came more to the surface, and troubles in the bilateral relationship surfaced in more obvious ways. In Russian publications by 2019, wariness of China on regional and bilateral issues was not hidden. The pressure from China was growing. For example, Dai Bingguo urged raising ties to a higher level but limiting the impact of obstacles by: 1) neutralizing Russian actors who do not welcome stronger relations, i.e, those who point to troubles due to Chinese behavior; 2) building trust (as if Russians of late have shown too little trust in Chinese moves); 3) orienting the relationship toward the progress of humanity and the development of civilizations, respecting one another as forces for this common good even when problems arise (i.e., accepting China's agenda as good); and 4) improving mutual images. This shows that China sought a closer relationship on its terms. China sought to forge a Sinocentric system of regional economies and security. China's tone shifted. "Wolf warrior"

diplomacy, which mainly concerns countries considered opponents in Beijing, began to touch even Russia. Instead of recognizing Russia's perspectives, China was demanding more complete support.[4]

Moscow struggled to lend substance to its notion of a Greater Eurasian Partnership. Beijing gave lip service to the idea as it put real resources behind its own BRI. The idea of a "troika" of Russia, China, and India served a few Russian aspirations: to construct a continental architecture, while others had a maritime orientation; to gain the pivot when the two others struggled to improve their relationship; and to prevent a Sinocentric regional order from emerging. Claims to have special closeness to India served to allay concern about getting caught in an asymmetrical dyad with China and averting India's warming ties to the U.S. and its allies. India served as a bulwark for Russian aspirations in Asia. It was seen as a force for Eurasianism, the critical piece in the BRICS, a vital addition to the SCO, a barrier to Sinocentrism and the BRI, and an obstacle due to its strategic autonomy to U.S. ambitions to contain China. Yet Moscow had little to offer except arms to India. Russia sought to popularize the term Eurasia as the crux of discussions about a new world order and emphasized Russia as its birthplace. If after five centuries when the West was temporarily recognized as the epicenter of modernization, China and India were to regain that role, Eurasia would rise to become the center of the world, according to this vision.[5] Yet, concerns about Russo-Indian relations in the context of the triangle with China were intensifying.

If Putin started the back-and-forth of the past decade by proclaiming the EEU, the initiative has increasingly been in Xi Jinping's hands. Russian moves have mostly followed Chinese ones or reflected concern that China's position is becoming increasingly dominant in Asia. It has been on the back foot in cross-border relations, responding to repeated plans for Northeast China reaching to the Russian Far East. It fought a rear-guard action in Central Asia, where China has sought to increase its influence. On India, Vietnam, and elsewhere in Asia's southern tier, Russia has retreated when China has pressed its case. At each point, Russia tries a mild rejoinder, hoping to keep its autonomy alive, before China takes its next move, putting Russia more on the defensive. Despite the pretense that each summit was bringing closer ties, in fact, rival claims for the BRI and the Great Eurasian Partnership as reinforcing visions of trans-Asian architecture conflicted in their notions of leadership, membership, and purpose.

The new Cold War was reason for optimism—Sino-Russian ties were better than ever, the U.S. position weakened, and Russia primed to exercise greater influence. Moscow took comfort from the thought that Beijing was turning more sharply against the U.S. and was ready to raise relations with Russia to a

much higher level. From 2014, having confronted the West militarily in Crimea, according to Moscow's desired characterization, Russia was the driving force in the relationship, urging China to agree that the divide with the U.S. was irreconcilable. Finally, by 2019, China appeared to be persuaded. Putin even dangled the possibility of a Sino-Russian alliance.

The Role of Great Powers in the International Order

The centerpiece of Sino-Russian relations over thirty years has been the triangle with the United States. Russia's calculus for the transformation of the international order starts with what Russian recognize as the Great Strategic Triangle, extends to regional architecture in Asia, and concludes with bilateral ties to China. If, ordinarily, the sequence would be reversed, this thinking reflects the uncertain state of relations with China and a roundabout approach to steering them in the desired direction. At times, one side has sought a more antagonist approach than the other, complicating the triangle. Russia was optimistic about China's desire to forge a strong stance against the U.S., but until 2018-19 some doubt existed that China would go as far as it desired. Dropping Deng Xiaoping's caution by 2008, then giving up on Xi Jinping's G2 division of the Pacific by 2016, and finally in anger over Trump's trade war and regional policies by 2019, China reassured Russia of its solidarity in the triangle, according to Russians.[6]

Confident that China had turned more sharply against the United States, Russia still faced two challenges in this all-important triangle: 1) would China treat it as a full-fledged partner? and 2) would China agree to an accelerated timetable for aggressive action? The Chinese eschewed the triangular framework that soothes Russia's ego, generally taking a bilateral Sino-U.S. approach. They also were wary of concluding that a cold war had begun, instead accusing the U.S. of a cold war mentality. Yet, blaming Washington for containing both China and Russia, even more so in 2022, they ascribed to triangular thinking conducive to strong Sino-Russian ties.

While the explicit ideological linkages of the Soviet era – for better and for worse – are gone, Putin and Xi share a set of values and a world view that has thus far proven to be remarkably compatible. As Rozman has argued, their "great power identities and relations are the principal driving forces in this partnership."[7] Moscow and Beijing share a common assessment of the disadvantages and the inexorable decline of the U.S.-led liberal international order, and an interest in pushing back against liberal democratic norms and Western definitions of concepts such as "democracy" and "human rights.[8] Both Xi and Putin have insisted that as founding signatories of the UN Charter, Russia and China

should be seen as the true guardians of the post-1945 international system, and in April 2022 China proposed a strategic framework for global security in keeping with this purported role, the Global Security Initiative (GSI).[9]

The "no limits" statement by Putin and Xi ahead of the war in February 2022 stressed the importance of upholding "universal human values," such as "justice, democracy and freedom" and insisted that each country had the right to choose its own "methods of implementing democracy."[10] This argument has gained little traction in the West, but it has proved an attractive model for other autocratic regimes and among some countries in the Global South, where leaders can insist they are adhering to their own form of democracy.[11] Unlike during the Cold War, Beijing and Moscow are not necessarily seeking to export their ideology, but they are working to popularize these values; to push back against Western definitions of fundamental rights and to insist on the primacy of sovereignty. As Jessica Chen Weiss has summed up Xi's approach, he is seeking to create a "world safe for autocracy."[12]

Beyond the incentive to pursue good relations with the major power on the other side of their long (and difficult to defend) land border, both Putin and Xi view the contest with the U.S. as their most significant contemporary challenge, and their partnership, therefore, as an essential strategy to safeguard their own security. "The United States is implementing a dual containment policy against China and Russia, while China and Russia support each other and jointly resist the strategic pressure of the United States," wrote Zhao Huasheng in 2021.[13] Alexander Lukin characterizes Russia's "pivot to China" as the "result of a long process of Moscow reassessing the nature of global processes and its own foreign policy." Thus, Russia has "abandoned its perception of China as a potential adversary" and come to understand the "need for closer cooperation with Beijing on both global and regional issues."[14] Such assessments on both sides have only been strengthened since the start of Russia's war against Ukraine in February 2022 and the rise in tensions between the U.S. and China in recent years, particularly with regard to the status of Taiwan. This does not mean that the growing asymmetry between the two countries has been erased – in fact, it has only increased since the start of the war– and there is no guarantee that past grievances cannot resurface. Instead, both will continue to function as limiting factors on the relationship, but for now, both Beijing and Moscow have good reason to minimize and manage their differences. Having associated himself so closely with Putin over the past decade, and on the eve of the war in Ukraine, Xi has an added incentive not to abandon the relationship as doing so would be an implicit acknowledgment that his judgement of the Russian leader was wrong.

The Indo-Pacific Region in the International Order

Both Russia and China have concentrated for a decade on reconstructing the architecture of Asia in line with their respective visions of transforming the international order. Xi Jinping settled on the BRI as the framework for a Sinocentric, hub and spokes, design, running west, south, and north. Vladimir Putin proposed a Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP), putting Russia at the fulcrum of a continental configuration but acknowledging two-headed leadership with China of the critical organizations to steer regionalism. They pledged to support each other's initiatives and claimed that the SCO could serve as the umbrella organization for coordinating the emerging regional architecture. Insisting that their joint endeavors were the crux of a new world order, Putin and Xi claimed to be building it in close harmony.

Unlike the Grand Strategic Triangle, where growing consensus against the United States establishes a firm foundation for challenging the existing order, Indo-Pacific regional ties have exposed serious divisions about what a new order should be. If consensus has easily been reached in opposition to U.S. designs for regional reorganization, such as the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP), it has been much more difficult to agree on India's importance in the new framework, on ASEAN's centrality and pursuit of balanced great power relations, on the role of freedom of navigation and the name of the Northern Sea Route, and on the functions of the SCO. That the "heartland" of Asia forms the core of an emerging order is a shared aspiration obscuring the persistent struggle—even cat-and-mouse game—to guarantee one's own plans take precedence. Regional consensus fell far short of the overall, great power consensus.

Growing advocacy of the concept of the "Indo-Pacific" within Asia and by the United States over the past decade has raised alarm in Russia. It defines the region in a manner deemed maximally unwelcome by a continental power hugging the Arctic Ocean but far from the Indian Ocean. In response, coupled with responses to warnings it has become China's "junior partner," Moscow has insisted that the concept is a U.S. scheme for polarizing Asia and containing China, while simultaneously trumpeting the alternative of "Greater Eurasia," a geographical construct that serves to confirm Russia's status as a great power stakeholder in the eastern half of Asia. On the surface, Moscow is in conflict only with the U.S. moves, but it is struggling with China too.

Russia seeks a sphere of dominance in Asia—Central Asia, Mongolia, the Northern Sea Route—and a balance recognized by China in areas from the Korean Peninsula to India. Multipolarity is its desired architecture with Eurasia a label for areas under Moscow's sway or shared influence. Moscow has tried to keep aloof from BRI investments and pushed back over Central Asia and the Arctic, but China, despite its rhetoric, offered what amounted to a Sinocentric regional order.[15]

Sino-Russian Relations in the International Order

While the Sino-Russian bond appears strong on the surface and booming in overall trade, it is hollow on matters critical to forging a new international order together. Four signs of hollowness are particularly revealing. First, there is no shared vision of a future order except for platitudes and insistence on the UN Security Council as the decisive voice. This is a formula for Beijing and Moscow to continue to exercise their veto, not for constructive decision-making. They seem more interested in constructing separate spheres of influence than in forging a common sphere. Second, history looms in the background with the potential to spark a clash should nationalist forces on either side so desire. They have joined in demonizing Western history and have agreed on the landmark significance of 1945-53 in laying a foundation for a new order, dismissing the end of the Cold War as a false milestone for transformation. Yet, their differences over history are so sensitive, they have to feign silence and fear that a single misstep could spark a firestorm.

Third, personal exchanges and non-formulaic linkages are minimal. The COVID-19 limitations on movement only obscured the failure to develop networks of meaningful integration. Finally, civilizational arguments reinforce separation, not commonalities apart from objections to the values championed in the West. Russians have not found Chinese civilizational claims appealing nor vis-versa. In the heyday of traditional communism to the 1980s, they denigrated each other's cultural heritage, and mutual respect has not recovered despite claims of growing affinity.

Xi and Putin also share an understanding of the importance of historical memory, and an interest in maintaining a firm grip on their respective national historical narratives, such as their experience during World War II, as they seek to stoke popular support for their rule and frame their countries' contemporary challenges.[16] The two leaders have been useful to each other in this regard – appearing alongside one other at wartime anniversary parades and shoring up their respective versions of history and their countries' contributions to the Allied victory.[17] Through such high-profile joint appearances, both men also help to reinforce their image as powerful global leaders to their own citizens.

Prior to the war, both Putin and Xi had described their increasing security co-operation as a "critical dimension" of their strategic partnership, and while their joint patrols and shared exercises have often captured the headlines, the sale of Russian military technology to China arguably comprises the more important element of this cooperation.[18] The vaunted modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) over the last quarter-century has depended heavily on imports of Russian weaponry, which has been estimated to make up

89 percent of Chinese foreign arms purchases between 1992 and 2006. The nature of those arms sales has evolved over that period, with China increasingly buying advanced weapons systems and jet engine technology.[19] While Russian defense contractors initially voiced concerns about China reverse engineering and replicating their designs, and senior officials were cautious about the sale of certain advanced weaponry that could present a threat to Russia's own security, some of these restrictions have been eased in recent years, notably following the international sanctions that were imposed after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014.[20]

Yet, China's economic rise, combined with lingering stereotypes on the Russian side of the border, has produced some unease in Moscow. "There is still talk in Russia of the 'China threat,' a holdover expression from past eras," acknowledged Fu Ying in 2016. Recent scholarship by Chinese and Russian researchers at government-linked institutions in both countries has acknowledged these difficulties. A dialogue in 2021, for example, agreed on the need to ensure that the partnership was not solely based on a "negative agenda" – for example, their shared opposition to the U.S. – but that they also developed a "positive agenda" that benefited their respective interests. "The goal of the tandem Russia-China global initiatives is not to confront the West, but to jointly shape a polycentric world order," concluded the report.[21] A 2021 paper by Sun Zhuangzhi similarly observed that the two countries have "different international political thinking," "different security concerns," and a "difference in economic power." Yet, he assessed that it was in both countries' interests to step up their partnership. "Since China and Russia are facing a complex international and regional environment with many uncertainties and real security threats," Sun wrote, "it is of special significance to strengthen cooperation."[22]

Alexander Lukin questioned in 2021 whether the Sino-Russian rapprochement had already peaked, stressing that while the two countries would continue to "pragmatically work together" as neighbors and partners in the fight against perceived U.S. hegemony, this did not mean that "Russia trusts China… or will come anywhere close to a more formal alliance." Rather, Lukin explained, "Russia understands that there are limits to its strategic cooperation with China," with Moscow reluctant to be seen to take sides in situations that could alienate other partners, such as India and Vietnam, which are both important markets for Russian arms sales and engaged in territorial disputes with Beijing.[23] China has similarly declined to recognize Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea or the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and shown no inclination to fight Putin's wars.[24] Probing the history of Sino-Russian military cooperation in a 2016 paper, Li Shuyin similarly identified a lack of "mutual trust" as a persistent impediment to the relationship. Li noted

that some in the Russian political elite continued to voice concern about the sale of advanced weapons and equipment to China, advocating for Russia to "hold back a few tricks" in the interests of its own long-term security.[25]

Frequent talk of putting aside differences hints at serious obstacles to bilateral relations, which were revealed in Russian articles most candidly in the years leading to the Ukraine War. Unlike the mainstream Russian position blind to problems, numerous writers raised issues associated with historical memory, cross-border networking, arrogant interactions, and indifference to the interests of Russia. They reveal an underbelly of difficult interactions below the summit level.[26]

Strategic Partnership with Limits: China's Response to Russia's War against Ukraine

Xi apparently believed that military intervention would be limited in scope, in the manner of the annexation of Crimea in 2014. If Putin had swiftly won, China stood to gain with the U.S. and its European allies distracted and the U.S. seen as in decline and unreliable as a partner by Taiwan and even South Korea and Japan. Moscow would be more dependent on China.

On March 5, 2022, during the second week of Russia's war against Ukraine, Hu Wei wrote an article detailing the possible outcomes and what he termed "China's choice." Putin's invasion of Ukraine was an "irreversible mistake," Hu said, which would drag down Russia's economy and see the U.S. "regain leadership in the Western world, and the West would become more united." He warned of a new "Iron Curtain" descending again "not only from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, but also to the final confrontation between the Western-dominated camp and its competitors." The correct strategic choice was clear, Hu wrote, "China cannot be tied to Putin and needs to be cut off as soon as possible."[27] Instead, references to Hu's article, which was published on an international platform – the Carter Center's U.S.-China Perception Monitor – were censored in China, and it soon became clear that, while Beijing would walk a careful line and avoid endorsing Russia's aggression, it would neither condemn the Russian invasion, nor meaningfully distance itself from Moscow.

China's response to the conflict has demonstrated both the clear limits of the Sino-Russian partnership, and the resilience of the relationship. There is no evidence that China has provided direct military support to Russia since the start of the conflict, and there is no prospect that Chinese troops will be sent to fight on Russia's side.[28] Neither Moscow nor Beijing has any interest in cementing a formal alliance with the other, regardless of Putin dangling the possibility, most recently in October 2020, with neither Beijing nor Moscow

keen to be entangled in the other's wars.[29] This is consistent with the approach that Beijing has long taken towards Moscow, and vice-versa, that their own self-interest comes first. Thus, while the relationship is viewed by both countries as mutually beneficial, geopolitically necessary, and a crucial component of their shared contest with the U.S., this does not mean that either side is likely to sacrifice their own interests on the altar of the other's foreign policy ambitions.

China has maintained its security cooperation with Russia in other areas since the start of the war, however, such as staging joint air patrols between South Korea and Japan during U.S. president Joe Biden's visit to Tokyo in May 2022, prompting both countries to scramble fighter jets in response.[30] Chinese troops also participated in Russia's annual "Vostok" military exercises in August 2022, which foreign ministry officials stressed was "unrelated to the current international and regional situation."[31] A small contingent of Indian troops also travelled to Russia to participate in the exercises, signaling that neither country was prepared to jettison its relationship with Moscow despite its invasion of Ukraine. Both Xi and India's prime minister Narendra Modi signed up to a joint statement with Putin, along with the leaders of Brazil and South Africa, at the BRICS summit of emerging economies in June, which stressed the importance of respect for the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states" and their commitment to the "peaceful settlement of crises," ignoring the fact that Russia troops were violating Ukraine's sovereignty at the time.[32]

While Chinese exports to Russia dipped markedly after the start of the war – dropping by more than 25 percent on the previous year by April 2022 – and Chinese companies are assessed to have broadly abided by export controls, the value of Russian exports to China surged, up more than 50 percent by April.[33] By December 2022, bilateral trade had increased by 32 percent on the previous year to reach a record high.[34] Beijing has approached the economic relationship with Russia after its invasion of Ukraine in a similar manner to its annexation of Crimea in 2014; condemning international sanctions in public, while quietly abiding by them and seeking to exploit the economic opportunities that come with Moscow's increasingly limited options. As Putin commented in September 2022 ahead of a meeting with Li Zhanshu, then the third highest-ranking member of the politburo standing committee, "Our Chinese friends are difficult negotiators, however, they are stable and reliable partners and the market is colossal."[35]

The economic relationship between Russia and China has become increasingly asymmetric – Russia accounted for just 2 percent of China's overall trade in 2020, while China accounted for at least 18 percent of Russia's trade – and the ongoing war will only further heighten this imbalance. Yet focusing solely on the

topline numbers obscures the nature of that trade and the importance of the advanced military technology, which has been previously discussed, and the energy resources, specifically oil and natural gas, which Russia provides to China. Neither can be easily replaced from another source, and Russian energy supplies are particularly valuable to China as they are transported directly across their shared border and therefore could not be interdicted by the U.S. in the case of a future conflict, unlike shipments from the Middle East, which must pass through the narrow Strait of Malacca to reach China.[36]

In the diplomatic sphere too, however, there were limits to the extent of Beijing's support for Moscow, with China abstaining from, rather than vetoing, high-profile votes to condemn the Russian invasion at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in February, and to establish a commission of inquiry into Russian war crimes at the UN Human Rights Council in March.[37] Evan Medeiros attributes China's diplomatic response to the war to its attempts to balance three competing interests: "alignment with Russia, commitment to long-standing principles in Chinese foreign policy [such as respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty], and China's ties with the United States and Europe." Medeiros calls this China's "trilemma," noting that the further it tries to pursue one interest, such as strengthening its alignment with Russia amid its atrocities in Ukraine, the more this undermines another, such as relations with the U.S. and Europe. The result is what he terms a "strategic straddle," with Beijing attempting to juggle all three interests, rather than choosing to prioritize only one, such as the Sino-Russian partnership.[38]

Beijing has also stepped up its outreach to the "Global South" since the start of the conflict, which it views as a crucial power base from which to contest the U.S.-led international order.[39] It also seeks to expand the role of the BRICS grouping, which currently comprises Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, but Argentina and Iran have applied to join, and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have said they may do likewise. China has learned from Russia's experience since the start of the war, write Bonny Lin and Jude Blanchette in August 2022, and is consequently "moving fast to both deepen and broaden partnerships to increase its immunity to crippling sanctions and to ensure that it is not alone in hard times."[40]

This fits with the new GSI unveiled by Xi at the Boao Forum for Asia two months into the war. Criticizing what he called the "Cold War mentality" and "hegemonism and power politics" – clear references to the U.S. although he did not mention the country by name – Xi proposed a new strategic framework comprised of six pillars including respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, taking the "legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously" and

upholding the "principle of indivisible security," which has been co-opted under Putin to mean a zero-sum sense of security, whereby NATO's eastward expansion threatens Russia.[41] Tian Wenlin invoked the war in Ukraine to explain the necessity of the GSI in an article published in May, asserting that the "world dominated by a traditional Western notion of security is facing unprecedented turbulence and uncertainty." On the surface, he wrote, the conflict in Ukraine "appeared to be initiated by a Russian attack, but it was actually the result of the U.S. promotion of NATO's eastward expansion and the squeezing of Russia's strategic space." As he characterized it, the war was "of a hegemonic and anti-hegemonic nature and is also a battle between the old and new systems in the bigger context of an international power transfer."[42]

The other key dimension in which China's response to the war has been notable, and perhaps most unequivocally supportive of Russia, is the informational sphere. As Maria Repnikova has shown, Chinese state media outlets and social media platforms have consistently amplified pro-Russian talking points since the beginning of the conflict, with an "emphasis on NATO, the West, and specifically the United States as the culprits or instigators behind the crisis." Repnikova further notes that Chinese state media outlets such as Chinese Central Television (CCTV) repeated false Russian claims about supposed U.S. biolabs in Ukraine and echoed Moscow's abhorrent claims that the massacre of Ukrainian civilians by Russian soldiers in Bucha had been faked.[43] Sheena Chestnut Greitens notes that Chinese media outlets have also tended to use passive language to describe the start of the war, such as "conflict broke out," a construction that has also been used for the Korean War to avoid laying the blame on North Korea.[44] She characterizes China's approach to the war as "[f]ull-throated rhetorical-informational and diplomatic support, combined with a consistent level of ongoing military cooperation and more self-interested economic behavior…" Thus, Beijing's response to the conflict across all these dimensions has been characterized by self-interest and the imperative to pursue existing grievances, such as the U.S.-led liberal international order and the expansion of Western security pacts to the perceived detriment of China's own security and its claim to Taiwan.

Conclusion

Even if it had been true that Xi was "played" by Putin and did not understand the scale of his planned offensive when the two men declared their "no limits" partnership 20 days before the war, the months since can have left little doubt about the nature of the conflict he is waging. China's approach to the conflict

has been consistent with its handling of Sino-Russian relations more broadly in recent decades: attempting to juggle multiple interests and extract maximum advantages for itself, while risking as little as possible.[45] For Beijing, one of these interests is the perceived need to preserve its alignment with Russia, regardless of its atrocities in Ukraine.

This should not be surprising. Given China's intensifying rivalry with the U.S. and focus on its own claim to Taiwan, along with the close personal relations and mutual obsession with regime security shared by Putin and Xi, it is clear that both view their alignment as necessary and beneficial. The long, complex history of Sino-Russian relations has taught both sides that it is better to have good ties with the power on the other side of their long border, freeing them both up to focus on their more pressing territorial disputes. Xi does not want to see Putin's regime collapse, perhaps to be replaced by a more liberal, pro-Western government in Moscow, which would reorient itself towards Europe and the U.S., leaving the latter free to concentrate on its contest with China. Similarly, while the economic relationship between the two powers has become increasingly unbalanced – a trend which has been exacerbated by the war – and Beijing has pressed for advantageous terms, both sides still benefit from the arrangement as Russia secures access to a valuable market at a time when its other options are receding, and China secures a direct supply of oil and natural gas, as well as advanced military technology.

Beijing's approach to the war has reflected its desire to preserve this relationship, even when doing so – or at least refusing to condemn Russia's aggression and war crimes – has incurred reputational costs in the West, as well as strategic costs, such as the upending of China's plans to make Ukraine a hub of its BRI network in Europe and strengthening Western groupings such as NATO, which have identified China as a new focus. However, Beijing has also strengthened its outreach to the "Global South," advancing its own narrative about the West's, and specifically the purported U.S. culpability for the conflict, and the need, therefore, for a new strategic framework, such as GSI. Chinese officials have amplified Russian disinformation and adopted a "both sides" approach to the conflict, which ignores Russian aggression. While claiming to be neutral, China's actions have demonstrated a clear, if careful pro-Russia stance.

Yet 2022 has also demonstrated the limits that have long applied to the Sino-Russian relationship and the compatibility of their view of a desired international order. Beijing's response to the war has been defined by self-interest and is consistent with its approach to Russia's annexation of

Crimea in 2014 or the Russo-Georgia war in 2008 in that it does not recognize secessionist claims – out of concern that the same logic could be applied to Taiwan – and while China vehemently criticizes international sanctions, it has largely tended to abide by them to avoid its own companies losing access to international markets. Thus, the Sino-Russian alignment is stable and underpinned by the complementary (although not identical) values, security concerns, and economic priorities of the top leaders, but both sides will continue to pursue their own separate interests.

The Ukraine War has showcased the Sino-Russian consensus on the Grand Strategic Triangle as the crux of the international order, overwhelming different thinking on the regional order and bilateral relations. Yet, differences over the regional order came to the surface as Kazakhstan resisted Putin's view of the post-Soviet sphere and found support in China for its defense of sovereignty. Meanwhile, tensions over bilateral relations are hidden by tighter censorship. The overall mood of agreement is not weakening for now, but it faces serious challenges ahead.

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Section 2

The Koreas Navigate the International Order Amidst the War in Ukraine

The War in Ukraine and its Implications for the Korean Economy

By Han-koo Yeo and Wonho Yeon

Korea and Ukraine are located on the opposite ends of the Eurasia landmass, thousands of miles apart, but one year into the Ukraine war, it turns out that the ramifications of the Ukraine war on the Korean economy are significant despite the sheer distance between the two.

Both countries are adjacent to Russia on its northern and eastern ends. Such geography has inevitably shaped their complex interactions throughout their histories. They have navigated the thin ice of the Cold War and afterwards explored newfound economic cooperation opportunities with Russia. During the turbulent modern history of Korea, the Soviet Union was at times a war adversary that had empowered the communist North's invasion of South Korea in 1950. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia emerged as a potential partner to collaborate with for peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. Against this backdrop, Korea has slowly, but cautiously forged a not-too-close, but not-too-far economic relationship with Russia and to a lesser extent with Ukraine. As a result, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is negatively affecting the Korean economy through direct and indirect channels.

This paper begins with an overview of Korea's economic relations with Russia and Ukraine and the immediate impact of the war, particularly on trade. Longer-run implications on global supply chains, Korea's export control system, diversification of energy supplies and arms exports are then discussed. The paper concludes with the implications for the future.

The Evolution of Korea's Economic Relations with Russia and Ukraine

During the Moon Jae-in administration, Korea took a more strategic view of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Ukraine, in order to build the "Northeast Asia Plus Responsible Community." Its

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long-term vision was to promote peace and prosperity in the region through engagement with North Korea. President Moon announced a so-called "New Northern Policy" in the early days of his presidency in 2017, making it a flagship foreign and international economic policy initiative, along with the "New Southern Policy" that aims to expand the comprehensive partnership with the 10 ASEAN countries and India as a new priority region.[1]

In the annual Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok held in September 2017, the Korean government announced the "Nine Bridges" initiative with Russia, the signature initiative of the New Northern Policy. The Nine Bridges strategy identified nine priorities for promising economic cooperation between the two countries, including gas, electric energy, railroad, shipbuilding, ports, Arctic shipping routes, fisheries, agriculture, and job creation. For example, the "gas bridge" aimed to expand LNG imports from Russia in part by building a trans-Korean gas pipeline covering thousands of kilometers to connect the Sakhalin with North and South Korea. This project is inconceivable from today's vantage point in the context of the gas pipelines connecting Russia-Ukraine-Europe, but at that time was hailed as a futuristic project worth developing. The "railroad bridge" focused on reconstructing the Trans-Korean Railway connecting South and North Korea and connecting it to the Trans-Siberian Railway. Other areas of significance were shipbuilding, ports, and the Arctic shipping routes, which each reflected the active business cooperation that had been developing between Russia and Korea. Russia wanted to modernize its ports and shipbuilding industry, and needed a partner to build high-tech, sophisticated LNG ships, especially ice-breaker LNG tankers to navigate Arctic shipping routes. Korea was a perfect partner to provide what Russia lacks. There have also been proposals for ambitious electric energy projects to exploit abundant renewable energy in Northeastern China, Mongolia and Russia by building transmission lines connecting all these countries and supplying clean energy across Northeast Asia.[2]

All in all, the New Northern Policy was a worthwhile effort to reset Korea's strategic relationship with the continental players surrounding the Korean Peninsula, in particular Russia, in relation to North Korea. However, despite the idealistic vision and ambitious ideas, most of the projects have not progressed because of broader geopolitical circumstances, especially western sanctions on North Korea as well as Russia. Since the launch of the New Northern Policy in 2017, bilateral trade (in USD value) picked up 41.3% and 31.0%, respectively in 2017 and 2018 (Table 1). However, with the pandemic, bilateral trade lost momentum, falling around 22%, except for a temporary spike in 2021.

Table 1. Annual Korea-Russia Trade in Goods (2012-2022)

(in million USD, %)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Exports YoY	11,097 (7.7)	11,149 (0.5)	10,129 (-9.1)	4,686 (-53.7)	4,769 (1.8)	6,907 (44.8)	7,321 (6.0)	7,774 (6.2)	6,900 (-11.2)	9,980 (44.6)	6,328 (-36.6)
Imports YoY	11,354 (4.6)	11,495 (1.2)	15,669 (36.3)	11,308 (-27.8)	8,641 (-23.6)	12,040 (39.3)	17,504 (45.4)	14,567 (-16.8)	10,630 (-27.0)	17,357 (63.3)	14,817 (-14.6)
Total Trade	22,451 (6.1)	22,644 (0.9)	25,798 (13.9)	15,994 (-38)	13,410 (-16.2)	18,947 (41.3)	24,825 (31)	22,341 (-10)	17,530 (-21.5)	27,337 (55.9)	21,145 (-22.6)

Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Global Economy

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent Western economic sanctions against Russia had a negative impact on the economies of both Ukraine and Russia, as well as the global economy, which had been recuperating from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although it appears that Russia has not suffered as severe an economic blow as initially anticipated, the effects of Western economic sanctions are expected to emerge gradually, resulting in a protracted economic downturn. Russia's Ministry of Finance predicted a 10% decline in real GDP at the beginning of the war,[3] but the International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook in April 2023 estimated that Russia's GDP had declined by only 2.1% last year.[4]

Given the size of the Russian and Ukrainian economies, it is difficult to conclude that they directly harmed the global economy. Russia's nominal GDP in 2021 of USD 1.8 trillion (11th in the world) accounted for 1.8% of world GDP, while Ukraine's nominal GDP of USD 0.2 trillion accounted for only 0.2% (54th in the world).[5] However, their significance lies in the fact that they export large amounts of food, minerals, and energy resources. The Ukraine crisis has had a significant impact on the global economy and financial markets, as evidenced by rising food and energy prices.

Before the Ukrainian crisis, the IMF predicted that the global economic growth rate for 2022 would be 4.4%, but in April 2023 it was estimated to be 3.4%. One percentage point was subtracted from the global real GDP growth rate compared to expectations before the invasion, though not all of the growth

slowdown can be attributed to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In 2022, global GDP was approximately USD 1 trillion less than expected. This is equivalent to the disappearance in one year of an economy the size of Indonesia or the Netherlands. The IMF projects that the global economic growth rate will slow further to 2.8% in 2023.[6]

The OECD's March 2022 *Economic Outlook* estimated that the Russian invasion of Ukraine would add 2.5 percentage points to the rate of inflation in consumer prices around the world.[7] In addition to the swift demand recovery that followed the decline of COVID-19, the Ukraine crisis resulted in high inflation and interest rate hikes, mainly by rising energy and food prices, both of which are detrimental to global economic growth.

Energy and food price fluctuations have a significant impact on the lives of the poor, particularly in emerging and developing nations. For instance, according to a recent IMF report, sub-Saharan Africa's dependence on wheat imports reached 85%, and food accounted for more than 40% of consumer spending, implying that a sharp increase in global food prices would harm these economies.[8] In addition, with the western sanctions on Russian crude oil, demand for crude oil from other regions soared and the price of crude oil skyrocketed, adding to the economic burden of many developing nations. As of December 2022, the price of Russia's Ural crude oil was approximately USD 50 per barrel, while Europe's Brent crude oil and the Middle East's Dubai crude oil were both approximately USD 80 per barrel, creating a significant price differential with Russian crude oil.[9]

The Ukraine War's Impact on the Korean Economy

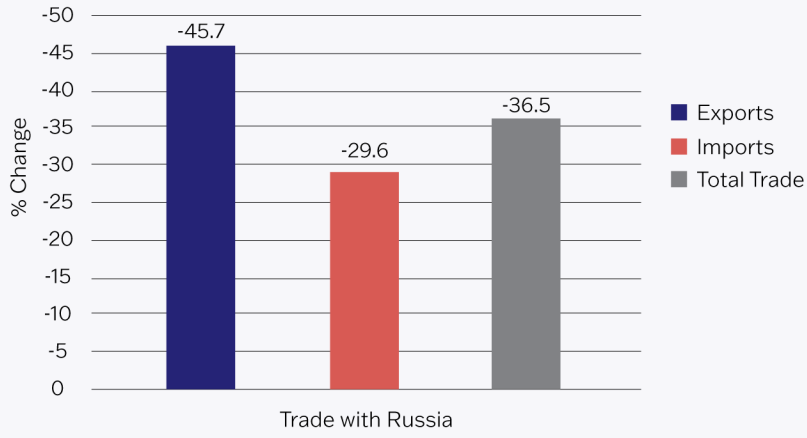
As an open, mid-sized economy, Korea is vulnerable to a global economic slowdown, which would have a negative impact on Korea's exports and imports. For Korea, one of the major energy importers in the world, rising energy prices impose a significant economic burden. Since April 2022, Korea's trade balance has been negative, recording its first annual deficit in 14 years since 2008 (USD 13.3 billion) during the global financial crisis. Last year, the annual trade deficit reached a record high of USD 47.2 billion primarily due to increased energy imports.[10]

Zooming in on Korea's bilateral trade and investment position with the two countries, trade with Russia and Ukraine comprised 2.2% and 0.1%, respectively, of Korea's total trade in 2021.[11] Although Korea's trade exposure to the two combined is minimal, still the war affects the Korean economy through diverse channels especially on the supply side. In this section, we focus on Korea's supply chain links to Russia and Ukraine through trade and investment.

Korea's Trade and Investment Exposure to Russia

Russia was Korea's 10th largest trading partner in 2021, compared to 21st in 2010. After the breakout of war, trade has contracted significantly. Comparing bilateral trade during the one year before the invasion (March 2021 – February 2022) and after (March 2022 – February 2023), Korea's exports to Russia contracted by 45.7%, imports by 29.6%, and total trade by 36.5%, respectively (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Korea's Trade with Russia One Year Before and After the War in Ukraine
(March 2022 to Feburary 2023 compared to the year earlier)



Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

Korea's ten largest export items to Russia consist primarily of manufacturing products, equipment, and intermediate goods. Automobiles and parts are the top export, together occupying approximately 40% of total trade in 2021, followed by steel products, machinery, etc. (Table 6 in Appendix). Most visibly, Korea's exports of automobiles and parts nosedived by almost 66% as Hyundai Motors' Russian factory stopped operations right after the war began, along with the old GM factory that it had acquired in 2021. As a result, Chinese carmakers' market share in Russia rapidly expanded from 9.5% right before the war, to 30.3% in November 2022, whereas the market share of Korean automobiles significantly decreased from 23.8% to 12% during the same period.[12] Machinery, equipment, and other manufacturing export items followed a similar pattern as well.

On the other hand, Korea's ten largest imports from Russia are heavily concentrated on energy resources, comprising almost 76% of total imports in 2021. If minerals and raw materials such as platinum, aluminum, and uranium are included, another 10% would be added (Table 7 in Appendix). As expected, Korea's energy imports from Russia have decreased overall, but in 2022 coal emerged as the top import from Russia with big increase of 122% mainly due to the steep price hikes.

It is worth noting that Russia had been the second-largest core supplier of platinum to Korea, but after the war, its supply stopped almost completely since July 2022. The supply void left by Russia was filled by South Africa, Japan, and the U.K., proving the importance of supply chain diversification in critical raw minerals and materials.

Korean investment in Russia was concentrated on manufacturing such as automobiles, electronics, steel, machinery, and construction from the 2000s and it slowly expanded to services such as hotels more recently. Korea's direct investment flows to Russia jumped 24% in 2021 to USD 130 million, recovering from the pandemic, but again declined 55% in 2022 due to the direct effect of the war (Table 2).

Table 2. Korea's Investment in Russia

(Million USD, %)

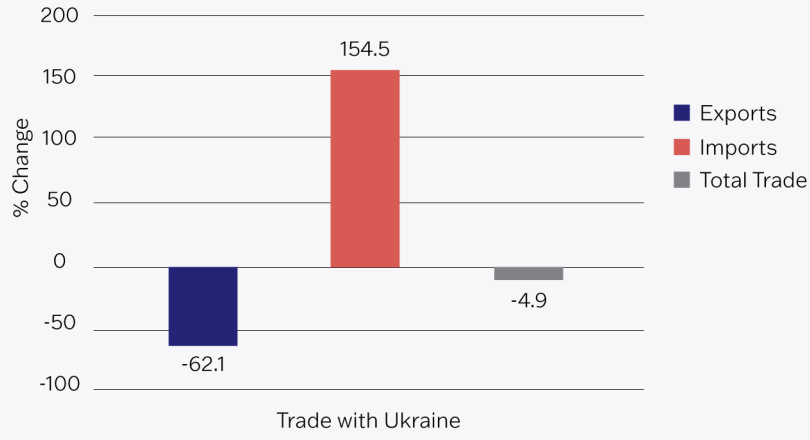
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Outbound FDI	81.8	94.5	98.9	105.2	130.2	59.1
% Change	-11.9	16	5	6	24	-55

Source: KOREA Eximbank (as of April 3, 2023)

Korea's Trade and Investment Exposure to Ukraine

Korea's trade with Ukraine remained small, as it is only its 68th largest trading partner. However, it is important due to specific links to the supply chains of some key raw materials and grains. During the year following the invasion, Korea's exports to Ukraine decreased significantly by 62.1% when compared to the year earlier. However, Korea's imports from Ukraine have increased by a whopping 154.5%. As a result, total trade only modestly decreased by 4.9% (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Korea's Trade with Ukraine One Year Before and After the War in Ukraine
(March 2022 to Feburary 2023 compared to the year earlier)



Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

Korea's ten largest export items to Ukraine prior to the war consisted of manufacturing products, notably automobiles and parts, steel products, cosmetics, machinery, etc. As for Russia, the top export item was automobiles and parts comprising 28.9% of total exports in 2021, but exports of these products have decreased since the invasion (Table 8 in Appendix). On the other hand, Korea's ten largest import items from Ukraine were mostly focused on a few agriculture items in 2021, such as wheat and meslin (27.2% of total imports), maize (19.1%), and sunflower seed and oil (11.3%) and critical materials such as hydrogen, rare gases (9.5%), iron ore (4%), ammonia (3.1%) and titanium (2.4%) (Table 9 in Appendix). The reasons for a sudden spike in Korea's imports from Ukraine after the invasion are due to the import of maize and rare gases. The import of maize for animal feed shot up by 755% emerging as the top import item in 2022. Also, the skyrocketing price of rare gases contributed to the import surge in value terms.[13]

Korea's investment in Ukraine has been minimal, but POSCO International's USD 63 million investment in the grain terminal located in the port of Mykolaiv, Ukraine is noteworthy.[14] It is the owner and operator of Korea's first overseas grain terminal, showcasing the increasing importance of food security as a strategic business area for Korean firms.

Key Areas of Direct Impact to the Korean Economy

As shown in the previous section, the overall exposure of the Korean economy to Russia and Ukraine is somewhat limited, but Korea is connected to the two economies through various direct and indirect links. This section will go into these links in more detail and analyze how the Ukraine war and its links to Korea affect the Korean economy, particularly in the following areas: 1) global supply chains in critical materials and key manufacturing sectors with Korean companies' investment; 2) Korea's imports of energy resources and energy price increases; 3) Korea's export controls against Russia along with allies and partners after the outbreak of the war; and 4) other strategic areas such as the defense industry.

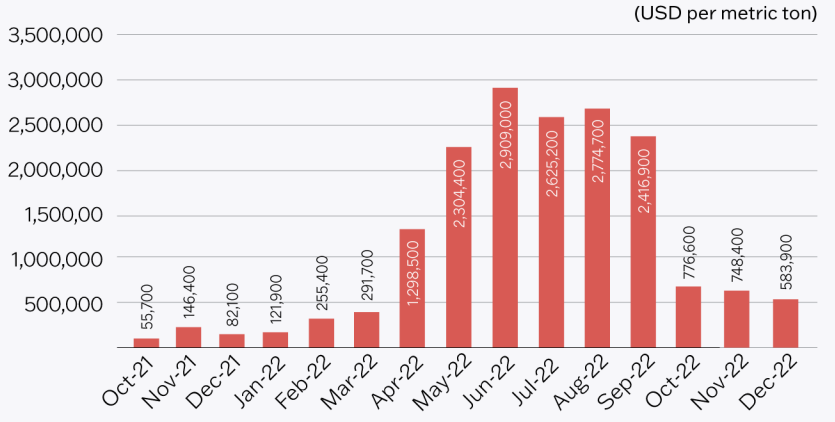
Global Supply Chain Disruption

Ukraine plays a key role in the supply chains of rare gases such as neon, krypton and xenon, the essential materials for high-precision semiconductor manufacturing. Because of the big presence of the semiconductor industry, Korea's reliance on Ukraine for rare gases has had an oversized importance. In 2021, Korea's imports from Ukraine of neon, krypton and xenon were 23%, 30.7% and 17.8%, respectively, of its total worldwide imports of such gases.[15] With the Russia-Ukraine conflict looming, Korean businesses were concerned about the possible disruption of rare gas supplies due to the war and had prepared for such a contingency by stacking up inventories and searching for alternative sources. The Korean government also cut the tariff on the rare gases from 5.5% to zero temporarily to minimize another supply chain shock.[16]

The supply chain disruption for neon caused by the war in Ukraine is especially illuminating. As the war dragged on, the concerns on the possible supply chain disruption of neon, which is essential for the lithography process in the semiconductor industry, materialized. According to a CNN report, prior to the war, Russia and Ukraine provided about 30% of the world supply of neon to semiconductor industries.[17] Russia collected raw neon as a byproduct in its steelworks, then sent it to Ukraine for purification. The two countries have been leading producers of rare gases and used them to build military and space technologies since the Soviet Union era. However, the war damaged the key industrial sites in Ukraine and made it extremely difficult to export goods from the region. To make things worse, Russia introduced export restrictions on rare gases, including neon, to "unfriendly" countries in May 2022, including the U.S., EU, and Korea, who had earlier joined export controls against Russia. This supply shock makes China a big winner, as its expanded capacity for rare gas production made it the largest producer. According to Korean Customs data, the price of neon continued to rise and by June 2022, had skyrocketed 52 times to USD 2.9 million per ton from USD 55,700 a year earlier, resulting in

imports of neon soaring almost 300 times to USD 396 million in 2022 from USD 1.3 million in 2021, (Figure 3). Due to supply difficulties from both nations, Korean semiconductor manufacturers began to shift their supply sourcing to Chinese firms, which have profited greatly from the current crisis.

Figure 3. Trends in Import Prices of Neon
(October 2021 - December 2022)



Source: Korea Customs Service

How Korean businesses and the government responded to this supply chain shock is worth noting. In fact, Korea had just gone through another supply chain crisis related to urea in November 2021 when China restricted the export of urea (see below). Realizing the vulnerability of supply chain dependence on foreign sources for critical materials, Korean businesses intensified their efforts to internalize such critical nodes of the supply chain by developing indigenous technologies with government support and were able to replace a significant portion of neon previously imported from Russia and Ukraine by domestic production over the course of the war in Ukraine.

Sweeping Measures of Export Control

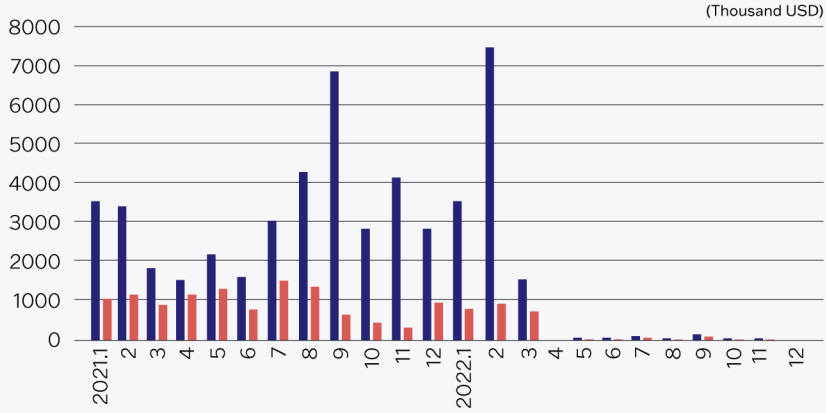
With Russia's invasion of Ukraine looming, Korea began to discuss ways to strengthen its export control regulations. After Russia invaded Ukraine, Korea and many other countries, including the G7, intensified sanctions against Russia. Russia was subsequently isolated from the international financial system and global economy.

Nonetheless, in the early days of the sanctions against Russia, Korea had some initial challenges. Korea's export control regime did not have any legal basis nor prior experience imposing an independent export control of non-strategic items outside the boundary of the four multilateral export control regimes - the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG); the Australia Group (AG); the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR); and the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA). While Korea contemplated its response, the U.S. and other allies and partners went ahead and announced sweeping export control measures, including the foreign direct product rule (FDPR) application, on February 24, 2022.[18]

The FDPR is a restriction that allows the U.S. government to prohibit exports of products manufactured by foreign companies outside the U.S. if they use U.S.-controlled software or technology. On February 24, 2022, the U.S. Department of Commerce imposed FDPR on Russia on 57 items under the categories of electronics and semiconductors, computers, telecommunications, information security, sensors and lasers, navigation and avionics, maritime, and aerospace. At the time of the announcement, 32 countries, including 27 European Union (EU) nations, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, which had agreed to impose similar sanctions on Russia as the United States, were exempt from the application of the FDPR, but Korea was not. The fact that Korea was not among the participating and the FDPR exception countries created a major controversy and outcry in Korea.[19]

A few days later, on March 8, 2022, an intensive discussion with the U.S. to align Korea's export controls against Russia to the similar level with the other countries was finalized. When the Korean government joined in with its own export control measures, the U.S. decided to exempt Korea from the FDPR. The Korean government is now using catch-all regulations to control the export of the 57 items to Russia. Taking semiconductors, the item that the U.S. is most concerned about, as an example, trade data shows that there was no export of semiconductors from Korea to Russia after March 2022 (Figure 4). Moreover, due to these export control policies, representative Korean companies operating in Russia have suspended their business. According to the Yale database, which only includes data on six major Korean companies, Hyundai Merchant Marine LG Electronics and Samsung stopped all production in Russia (Table 3).

Figure 4. Trends in Korea's Exports of Semiconductors to Russia



Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

Table 3. Number of Companies Leaving and Staying in Russia

	Suspension	Withdrawal	Digging In	Scaling Back	Buying Time	Total
Total	502 (31.8%)	520 (32.9%)	234 (14.8%)	148 (9.4%)	177 (11.2%)	1581 (100.0%)
United States	164 (35.9%)	164 (35.9%)	27 (5.9%)	55 (12.0%)	47 (10.3%)	457 (100.0%)
Germany	37 (25.2%)	43 (29.3%)	27 (18.4%)	19 (12.9%)	21 (14.3%)	147 (100.0%)
United Kingdom	43 (33.6%)	67 (52.3%)	7 (5.5%)	4 (3.1%)	7 (5.5%)	128 (100.0%)
France	21 (25.3%)	18 (21.7%)	27 (32.5%)	5 (6.0%)	12 (14.5%)	83 (100.0%)
Japan	36 (47.4%)	11 (14.5%)	14 (18.4%)	5 (6.6%)	10 (13.2%)	76 (100.0%)
China	5 (9.6%)	1 (1.9%)	41 (78.8%)	1 (1.9%)	4 (7.7%)	52 (100.0%)
South Korea	5* (83.3%)	(0.0%)	1** (16.7%)	(0.0%)	(0.0%)	6 (100.0%)

*Hyundai Merchant Marine, Korean Air, Hyundai, LG Electronics, Samsung
** Posco is operating through a Russian subsidiary
Source: Yale School of Management. https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/over-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain

As the current Russian war in Ukraine is prolonged, major countries such as the U.S. and EU are continuously expanding export controls against Russia. On February 24, 2023, the first anniversary of the outbreak of the war, the U.S. announced its 7th additional export control measures against Russia and the EU also strengthened export controls through the 10th sanctions package.[20]

In this regard, the Korean government, which has been closely coordinating export control measures against Russia with the international community, has also prepared for an amendment and announced an administrative notice to add 741 items to the existing 57 catch-all controls against Russia, such as industrial machinery, steel and chemicals, automobiles costing more than USD 50,000, oil and gas refinery equipment, and quantum computers, that can be diverted as weapons to the 'situational permission' items for international cooperation on export control against Russia.[21] Thus far, export control measures have had a limited impact on Korea's overall exports to Russia because the number of items under export control was limited. However, the recent expansion of export controls against Russia is expected to have a greater impact on Korea's exports to Russia in the future.

Korea has been seriously discussing further upgrading its export control system. The existing export control system in Korea does not take into account independent export controls beyond the boundary of the four aforementioned multilateral export control regimes for international peace and stability, nor does it include new export controls based on human rights issues. In the case of a multilateral export control system related to national security, it is likely a new international export control system would be established among like-minded nations, as the 1996 Wassenaar Agreement is insufficient to address the present security threat.

Diversification of Energy Resources

Immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine when the energy crisis-hit EU sought help from its partners, Korea swiftly responded by diverting some of its LNG imports from the Middle East to the EU Korea also joined international efforts to cool surging oil prices by releasing a record 11.65 million barrels of strategic petroleum reserves.[22] The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a consequential impact on the overall energy and climate change circumstances in the EU, sparking an existential energy crisis, but also accelerating unprecedented green energy transition in the EU.

But, in the case of Korea, the impact of the war on the energy sector has been more indirect, manifest in rising energy prices and a soaring trade deficit. As shown in Table 4, the price of crude oil, LNG and coal spiked 39%, 128% and 161%, respectively, in 2022. Imports of crude oil, gas and coal combined increased by USD 78.4 billion, amounting to USD 190 billion in 2022, which is 26.1% of Korea's total imports. As a result, Korea recorded a record high trade deficit in 2022 despite increasing exports, as noted above.

Table 4. Changes in Energy Prices and Korea's Energy Imports by Energy Sources, 2021-2022

	Crude Oil (Dubai Crude Oil)		LNG (JKM)		Coal (Australian Coal)	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022.1.1~12.25
Prices* (YoY)	69.41	96.41 (39%)	15.04	34.24 (128%)	138.33	361.18 (161%)
Imports** (YoY)	670	1,058 (57.9%)	308	568 (84.4%)	145	281 (93.8%)

*Units: $/bbl(Crude Oil), $/Mmbtu(LNG), $/ton(Coal)
**Units: 100 million $
Source: Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Republic of Korea

Korea imports almost 92% of energy from overseas, but its exposure to Russia is somewhat limited (Table 5). Before the war in 2020, the import of crude oil from Russia made up 4.8% of Korea's total crude oil imports, which made it the 8th largest importer of Russian oil in the world. After the war began, imports of Russian oil decreased to 2% of Korea's total crude oil imports in 2022, dropping it to the 10th largest importer of Russian crude. LNG imports from Russia made up 5% of Korea's total LNG imports before the war but decreased to 4.2% in 2022, yet in both instances it remained the 7th largest importer of Russian LNG. Among energy resources, bituminous coal was the most substantial import. Coal from Russia accounted for 20.2% of Korea's total coal imports, making it the world's 2nd largest importer of Russian coal. Yet even after the start of the war, and despite concerted efforts by the government to secure coal imports from other sources such as Australia and Indonesia, Korea's imports of Russian coal remained at a similar level, making up 20.7% of its total coal imports.

Korea's dependence on Russia for enriched uranium is of greater concern. Korea depends on Russia for nearly 41% of its enriched uranium imports, which is greater than it was prior to the conflict.[23] However, Korea has recently begun to consider diversifying its procurement of enriched uranium to mitigate the

vulnerability of the supply chain for such critical raw materials necessary for nuclear power generation. In summary, Korea's energy dependence on Russia is quite limited except for coal and uranium, but the Korean government has taken actions to diversify energy imports away from Russia.

Table 5. Korea's Energy Imports in Russia

	2020			2022		
Energy Source	Imports**	Share (%)	Rank	Imports**	Share (%)	Rank
Crude Oil	46,928	4.8	8	20,984	2	10
Coal*	23,285	20.2	2	24,390	20.7	3
LNG	2,019	5	7	1,962	4.2	7
Enriched Uranium	224	30.9	1	184	40.9	1

*Units: $/bbl(Crude Oil), $/Mmbtu(LNG), $/ton(Coal)
**Units: 100 million $
Source: KOREA Eximbank (as of April 3, 2023)

Emergence of Defense Industry Exports

In an unexpected turn of events, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and ensuing escalation of military tensions around the world are boosting new opportunities for Korea's arms exports. According to the Korea Institute for Industrial Economies and Trade, the global defense budget is expected to increase by additional USD 2 trillion during the next ten years, and the global arms procurement budget by USD 600 billion.[24] As the Ukraine war fundamentally shifts geopolitical dynamics around the world, countries in Eastern Europe, the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East are vying to build up their defense capability. Despite the exploding global demand, there are not many countries capable of expanding their arms productions in a short period of time.

Against this backdrop, Korea is uniquely positioned to ramp up its arms production rapidly building on its sophisticated technology and robust manufacturing eco-system developed over time with steel, machinery, automobile, chemical, semiconductor and IT industries. The seven decades of military confrontation with North Korea has maintained the edge of Korea's defense industry. In 2022, Korea's arms export hit a record USD 17.3 billion, making it the 8th largest exporter with 2.8% of global arms exports, compared to 13th and 1% in the previous five years, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.[25]

Such opportunities come with challenges as well. Korea is prohibited from the export of arms except for a peaceful purpose, which does not allow direct export of arms to countries engaged in military conflicts. Korea is facing international pressure to aid Ukraine directly.[26] Korea has supported the U.S. and its allies by selling them arms to replace their arms supplied to Ukraine. Although Korea's alignment with the U.S. and the West has been unequivocal, its armistice status with North Korea and Russia's potential sway over its northern neighbor creates complicated issues for Korea, which hopes to avoid antagonizing Russia in case of any future contingency.

Lessons Learned: Ramification for the Future

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement signed on July 27, 1953, bringing a halt to the Korean War. Two months later, the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea was signed on October 1, 1953, which was the starting point of a seven-decade long military alliance. Indeed, it is an irony of history that some experts look to the Korean War for lessons as parallels to the war in Ukraine, especially in this special commemorative year. By geographical standards, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a regional conflict. However, its economic and geopolitical ramifications are truly global and leave some important lessons for Korea.

The Accelerating Fragmentation of the Global Economy

There are concerns the war in Ukraine will accelerate the fragmentation of the world economy, which has continued to progress in recent years. The fault line between the democratic world led by the U.S. and G7 that had swiftly imposed sweeping economic sanctions against Russian aggression, and the authoritarian world that strengthens their solidarity manifested by the "no limits" partnership between China and Russia keeps widening and deepening. Amid strong economic sanctions by the West, the flow of goods and energy to and from Russia continues with China, India, and others. The war, international sanctions and their aftermath have significant ramifications in Northeast Asia where tensions surrounding the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula are still alive and real.

Recent discussion in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is a revealing case. In the digital trade area, the common concept widely adopted through the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the United States, Mexico, and Canada Agreement (USMCA), "free flow of cross-border data," was replaced by a new value-driven term, "trusted and secure cross-border data flows" in the IPEF Ministers' Statements

in September 2022.[27] This can be seen as a symbol of the transition to an era of trade based on "trust and values" rather than on "free trade" alone. In a report published last summer, the WTO predicted that if a full-scale division and decoupling of the world economy occurs, the flow of not only goods, but also information, knowledge, technology, and ideas will be blocked, which would decrease world GDP by about 10% annually.[28]

As noted above, Korea joined the U.S. and the West in imposing export controls against Russia. It was an unprecedented move for Korea because its existing export control regime does not consider taking independent export controls outside of the four multilateral regimes. Targeting the historic great power and center of the "New Northern Policy," which could influence North Korea to the disadvantage of South Korea, was not an easy choice, but the brutality of the aggression was so grave that Korea was able to bring itself into alignment with the West swiftly with strong support from the public. It was completely different from the Russian aggression in Crimea in 2014 when Korea did not join the West-led export controls against Russia.

This is an important case for Korea as it took a more assertive posture on this kind of geopolitical matter and lived up to the demands and expectations from the West with its enhanced international standing as a top 10 economy and G7+ invitee. This precedent will serve as a new benchmark when Korea explores its suitable place as a trusted global leader in other international affairs.

Supply Chain Resilience and Economic Security

Korea is one of the countries that is most vulnerable to the risks related to geopolitical tension and supply chain disruptions. Korea's participation in the global value chain and the proportion of manufacturing in its GDP are one of the highest among developed countries. Korea's trade with China is bigger than that of the U.S. and Japan combined.

Against this backdrop, Korea experienced its first major supply chain crisis with urea in November 2021. In Korea, urea is used as a diesel exhaust fluid and is required in diesel vehicles to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Korea depended on China for more than 95% of its supply of urea. When China tightened its export restrictions on urea, Korea faced a sudden supply shock in which millions of truck fleets could stop at any moment and the daily lives of Koreans could be severely affected. It was a big wake-up call to Korea, demonstrating the risks of depending too heavily on one country for a large share of a product or a material, even if it is a low-tech commodity with no sophisticated technology required.[29]

The Russian war in Ukraine offers additional lessons to Korean businesses that they need to factor geopolitical risks into their investment and supply chain management. Korean companies that were more active in investing in and cultivating post-Soviet markets have now realized that Korea could be at the forefront of internationally coordinated actions when any geopolitical events of this scale and magnitude occur. Although the supplies of rare gases from Ukraine and Russia accounted for approximately 17-31% of Korea's total supply, well below China's 95% of urea, it would have been significant enough to deal a severe blow to the semiconductor industry. Despite initial concerns by the businesses and government alike, they were able to weather the storm relatively better than the urea crisis only a few months before.

The challenge is that such a transition from supply chain "efficiency" to supply chain "resilience and security" will inevitably accompany additional costs and inflationary pressure across the supply chains with the buildup of domestic production facilities, more stockpiles and inventories and redundant sourcing, which may not necessarily fit naturally well with profit-maximizing businesses. The question is how the government can intervene and to what extent in areas that have been left to the "invisible hand" of the market to make sure that resilience in the supply chains is secured for national and economic security.

Moreover, beginning with the urea crisis and then the case of rare gases from Ukraine and Russia, Korea has been awakened to the importance of international cooperation to strengthen supply chain resilience. Korea actively joined the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework from the very early stage of discussions in November 2021 while going through the urea supply crisis and made discussions on IPEF's supply chain pillar a high priority.

Energy Security and Energy Transition

The impact of the war in Ukraine on the energy sector differs between Korea and the EU Given the EU's large exposure to Russia for its energy supply, the urgent energy crisis sparked by the Russia's gas cut-off has been an unprecedented motivation across Europe to push forward with desperate efforts to achieve energy independence and accelerate renewable energy. Korea's relatively small reliance to Russian energy was insufficient to spark the big energy transition to renewable and green energy for energy security seen in the EU.

With that said, the renewed interest in Korea and Europe in nuclear power generation offers promising new opportunities for collaboration. The Yoon Administration puts one of highest priorities in its energy policy on the revival and renaissance of nuclear power generation.[30] The UK and many countries in

the EU, including France, Poland, and the Czech Republic, are exploring a greater role for nuclear power as part of their transition to green energy and energy security. The big momentum created for renewable energy and nuclear power around the world is one of the unexpected positive effects from the war.

Enhanced Role as a Global Leader

One of the key lessons from the Russian aggression of Ukraine is that Korea stepped up to play a larger role on the world stage, thus taking a more serious responsibility in line with its growing influence in the international economic and geopolitical arena. It reflects the new economic reality as well as that export controls on critical industries and technologies would not be as effective without the substantial participation of Korea, particularly in the areas of semiconductors, batteries, and shipbuilding.

As such, the world should consider including Korea in more suitable multilateral and mini-lateral platforms for closer coordination and alignment with like-minded allies and partners. IPEF is a good example. Korea has a unique role to play by linking the U.S. and other partners in the region building on its eleven years of experience in implementing the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. However, it can go beyond the trade and economic field. For example, the G7 and QUAD can be good platforms to expand their membership to include like-minded partners like Korea, which would be critical for collaboration on supply chain resilience, sensitive technologies and their technology standards and export controls.

Appendix

Table 6. Korea's Top 10 Exports to Russia
(at the 4-digital HS Code Level)

Rank	2021		2022		
	Goods	Value	Goods	Value	% Change (YoY)
1	Motor Vehicles	2,550,305	Motor Vehicles	894,036	-64.9
2	Parts and Accessories of Motor Vehicles	1,367,732	Structures, Parts of Structures of Iron or Steel	601,877	23.6
3	Structures, Parts of Structures of Iron or Steel	486,914	Parts and Accessories of Motor Vehicles	453,544	-66.8
4	Self-Propelled Bulldozers, Graders, etc.	336,888	Self-Propelled Bulldozers, Graders, etc.	304,016	-9.8
5	Cosmetics	228,752	Petroleum Oils	232,622	66.2
6	Flat-rolled Products of Iron or Non-alloy Steel (of a Width of 600 mm or more)	186,421	Costmetics	221,344	-3.2
7	Machinery, Plant, or Laboratory Equipment	160,960	Polymers of Ethylene (in Primary Forms)	196,869	30
8	Polymers of Ethylene (in Primary Forms)	151,463	Vessels	132,621	5.8
9	Petroleum Oils	139,947	Instruments and Appliances Used in Medical, Surgical, Dental, or Veterinary Sciences	124,890	28
10	Vessels	125,330	Plates, Sheets, Film, Foil, and Strip of Plastics	95,551	-1

Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

Table 7. Korea's Top 10 Imports from Russia
(at the 4-digital HS Code Level)

(Thousand USD)

Rank	2021		2022		
	Goods	Value	Goods	Value	% Change (YoY)
1	Refined Petroleum Products	4,657,281	Coal	5,695,286	121.9
2	Petroleum Oils	4,269,166	Petroleum Oils	2,314,472	-45.8
3	Coal	2,566,238	Refined Petroleum Products	1,652,326	64.5
4	Petroleum Gases	1,715,065	Petroleum Gases	1,480,889	-13.7
5	Platinum	592,882	Fish (frozen)	741,621	28.4
6	Fish (frozen)	577,603	Crustaceans	486,533	5.9
7	Crustaceans	459,215	Unwought Aluminium	407,765	35
8	Unwrought Aluminuim	302,060	Ferro-alloys	189,627	-20.5
9	Ferrous Waste and Scrap	267,097	Radioactive Chemical Elements and Radioactive Isotopes	187,905	-26.1
10	Radioactive Chemical Elements and Radioactive Isotopes	254,164	Ferrous Waste and Scrap	172,844	-35.3

Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

Table 8. Korea's Top 10 Exports to Ukraine
(at the 4-digital HS Code Level)

(Thousand USD)

Rank	2021		2022		
	Goods	Value	Goods	Value	% Change (YoY)
1	Motor Vehicles	135,481	Motor Vehicles	35,659	-73.7
2	Flat-rolled Products of Iron or Non-Alloy Steel (of a Width of 600 mm or more)	67,658	Motor Vehicles for the Transport of Goods	28,073	698.3
3	Cosmetics	40,644	Cosmetics	25,431	-37.4
4	Parts and Accessories of Motor Vehicles	32,745	Flat-rolled Products of Iron or Non-alloy Steel (of a width of 600 mm or more)	11,089	-83.6
5	Pneumatic Tires (of rubber)	28,354	Orthopedic Appliances	9,023	3.2
6	Self-propelled Bulldozers, Angledozers, Graders, etc.	26,768	Parts and Accessories of Motor Vehicles	8,504	-74
7	Instruments and Appliances Used in Medical, Surgical, Dental, or Veterinary Sciences	19,767	Telephone Sets (including Smartphones)	8,119	387.8
8	Polymers of Propylene or of Other Olefins (in primary forms)	17,367	Pneumatic Tires (of rubber)	8,080	-71.5
9	Human Blood; Animal Blood Therapeutic	15,906	Instruments and Appliances Used in Medical, Surgical, Dental, or Veterinary Sciences	8,037	-59.3
10	Polymers of Ethylene	13,578	Human Blood; Animal Blood Therapeutic	6,670	-58.1

Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

Table 9. Korea's Top 10 Imports from Ukraine

(at the 4-digital HS Code Level)

(Thousand USD)

Rank	2021		2022		
	Goods	Value	Goods	Value	% Change (YoY)
1	Wheat and Meslin	83,975	Maize (Corn)	505,096	754.8
2	Maize (Corn)	59,086	Hydrogen, Rare Gases, and Other Non-Metals	60,607	106.5
3	Sunflower-Seed, Safflower, or Cotton-Seed Oil	34,856	Wheat and Meslin	34,067	-59.4
4	Hydrogen, Rare Gases, and Other Non-Metals	29,345	Sunflower-Seed, Safflower, or Cotton-Seed Oil	28,415	-18.5
5	Electric Instantaneous or Storage Water Heaters and Immersion Heaters	17,941	Electric Instantaneous or Storage Water Heaters and Immersion Heaters	26,106	45.5
6	Iron Ores and Concentrates	12,414	Titanium Ores and Concentrates	8,790	20.6
7	Wood	11,237	Ferro-Alloys	5,263	659.8
8	Ammonia, Anhydrous or in Aqueous Solution	9,500	Residues of Starch Manufacture and Similar Residues	3,971	0.6
9	Titanium Ores and Concentrates	7,290	Wood	2,702	-76
10	Wadding of Textile Materials and Articles Thereof	4,191	Bran, Sharps, and Other Residues	1,807	-

Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

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Restitching the Triangle? North Korean Relations with China and Russia After Ukraine

By Andrei Lankov

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 heralded the dawn of a new era – not so much for Russia, but for the entire world. Or, perhaps it was the outbreak of the new Sino-U.S. conflict which should be seen as the major turning point? At any rate, the post-1991 certainties which only a few years ago seemed nearly eternal, are gone. Globalization is in retreat, and hope for what Ferguson and Schularick once described as "Chimerica" has disappeared, too.[1] For the near future, we are likely to live in a world of rival blocs where even the taboo on territorial acquisitions through conquest is seemingly broken. However, North Korea is one of a handful of countries which clearly benefited from the ongoing change.

Background: From the Dawn of the Cold War to the Rise of Donald Trump

The North Korean state emerged as a Soviet experiment in social engineering: it was designed by the Soviets as a "people's democracy," whose expected destiny was to remain dependent on and controlled by the USSR. The Chinese decision to dispatch a large expeditionary force to Korea in 1950 led to the increase of Beijing's influence over Pyongyang. Thus, a triangle de-facto alliance was born, with the USSR acting as the senior partner, China being second in command, and North Korea being a subordinate.

However, this triangle was unstable and existed for less than a decade. Chinese leaders were not happy about their subordinate position toward the Soviet Union, while in North Korea Kim Il-sung harbored a grudge about its dependency on both patron states. Around 1960 this configuration was torn apart by the Sino-Soviet schism. The schism not only killed the USSR-China alliance, but allowed North Korea to position itself between Moscow and Beijing, using their contradictions to advance its own interests.

On the whole, North Korea's equidistance policy of 1960-90 worked well – at least, for the North Korean elite. North Korea was liked by neither Beijing nor Moscow, but its diplomats found ways to extract aid from both sponsor states,

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giving little in return. At the same time, Kim Il-sung and his people were extremely wary of any attempts by the USSR or China to interfere in North Korean domestic politics and ruthlessly purged officials suspected of excessively close relations with China or the USSR.[2]

After the collapse of the communist bloc, in the early 1990s, both Beijing and Moscow were sure the days of the Kim family regime were numbered, hence it should be left to its own fate. Aid was reduced (by China) or discontinued (by Russia), and relations with Pyongyang were nearly frozen. Tellingly, however, China continued to provide North Korea with food aid even when the two counties' relations hit a nadir – a useful reminder that stability in the region is one of China's constant priorities. According to the WFP database, from 1996 to 2010 China was the second largest provider of food aid to North Korea: it shipped a cumulative 3.0 million metric tons, slightly less than South Korea and much more than other major donors.[3]

This period of relative neglect lasted until the late 1990s when it began to dawn on decision-makers that North Korea, contrary to the earlier predictions, was likely to survive for a long time. This prompted a gradual revival of the relations between North Korea and its two giant neighbors.

In regard to China, the revival of trade was most prominent. Throughout the 2000-2015 period, the volume of the official trade between the two countries increased nearly 14-fold, from $0.5 billion to $6.9 billion. In 2000 China controlled 20.4% of North Korea's foreign trade volume. In 2015 the figure increased to an impressive 69.0%.[4] The economies of the two countries were quite complementary: North Korea's export to China was first dominated by seafood, but soon coal and other minerals became North Korea's major export product.[5] The Chinese exports to North Korea were dominated by consumer goods – the sale of food and fuel was largely subsidized and hence, being counted as "aid," was not represented in the official statistics.

There was an improvement in political relations as well. In 2000, after a long break, Kim Jong-il visited China. From then until 2022, Kim Jong-il and his successor Kim Jong-un met the top Chinese leaders 14 times.[6] It reflected the new position of China: leaders realized that North Korea is not going away, so it could not be ignored any more.

The Chinese policy toward the Korean Peninsula throughout the 2000-2020 period is best characterized by the well-known "three no's" formula: "No war, No instability, No nukes" (buzhan, buluan, wuhe).[7] The order is important: denuclearization, while present in this wish list, was merely a third objective

(a distant third, one would say). Far more important, the central Chinese goal in the region was to maintain the status quo – nicely described as "peace and stability maintenance." Christopher Twomey aptly observed in 2008: "Beijing has wielded a number of coercive tools aimed a North Korea, while avoiding excesses that might lead to [downward] spirals on the peninsula or regionally."[8] As Glaser and Yun Sun correctly observed in 2015, "Beijing strongly opposes Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions […], but it only supports strategies of denuclearization that do not threaten peace and stability on the Peninsula."[9]

In practice, however, such a stance meant that China would be reluctant to do anything meaningful to curtail Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions – such drastic measures would be wrought with a danger of starting Twomey's "spirals".

Obviously, instability included two possible scenarios: an implosion of the Kim family regime and the absorption of the North by the triumphant South, likely as a result of such an implosion. Presumably, the former was a greater concern. It is partially confirmed by the willingness of well-connected Chinese scholars in 2008-2010 to talk about conditions Beijing would accept for a South-driven unification of the peninsula. For example, in 2009 Shi Yinhong wrote: "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; and it must not damage China's territorial and national integration by any irredentist and ''pan-Korean'' aspirations driven by extreme nationalism."[10] Similar views were then often expressed by the Chinese scholar-officials in private talks.

Russia's policy towards North Korea underwent a similar transformation – almost simultaneously. For Russia, the turning point was Vladimir Putin's visit to North Korea in July 2000 when he stopped over at Pyongyang on his way to the G-8 summit in Okinawa – the first head of the Soviet/Russian state to ever set foot in Pyongyang. In 2000-2019 period Putin and his alter-ego Medvedev met Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un five times.[11]

In Russia, the resurgence of interest in North Korea also reflected some changes in public opinion. In the late 1990s, the hitherto positive attitude towards the West in Russia was changing for the worse. For Western observers, this change is often embodied by Vladimir Putin, but there are reasons to believe that the strongman was more a sign than the reason for this transformation. In the new atmosphere, North Korea was increasingly seen not as a Stalinist "living fossil," but as a brave David, challenging the American Goliath. Still, at the first approximation, Russia's goals did not differ much from

the Chinese "no war, no instability, no nukes" formula, with nukes being a distant third. The difference, if any, was in the strategic value attached to Korea: for Russia, it was far less valuable than for China.

At the same time, in spite of ostensibly warmer relations, the Russian government has remained reluctant to spend money on assisting North Korea. Tellingly, throughout the 1996-2010 period, Russian food aid equaled a paltry 51 thousand metric tons – about 1/60th of the Chinese level.[12]

The talks about economic interaction intensified in 2014, when deteriorating relations with the West prompted Putin's government to consider re-orientation towards Asia. Russia's trade with North Korea declined dramatically in the early 1990s and in the early 2000s stabilized at the $100-150 million level, well below North Korea's trade with China.[13] In 2014 a Russian minister said that Russian trade with North Korea would increase tenfold by 2020, reaching the $1 billion mark.[14] As many observers predicted, this much publicized statement was a pipe dream: instead of growing, the trade volume continued to shrink even before the outbreak of a nuclear crisis in 2017 which made the trade with North Korea almost impossible. In 2014, the trade volume was $92.2 million; in 2016 it went down to $78.9 million and in 2018 it was merely $34.1 million.[15]

The reasons for failure are structural in nature. The Russian and Korean economies are not complementary: Russian companies have little if any interest in nearly all the major items for which North Korea has a competitive advantage in the world market: minerals (especially coal), seafood, and textiles. The only exception is labor: the Russian government and Russian businesses would welcome North Korean workers – cheap, obedient, and hard-working. By and large, trade between Russia and Korea is possible only when it is backed by subsidies that the Russian government is willing to provide due to some extra-economic, strategic reasons – as was the case in the Cold War days.

The New Era: China

The late 2010s and early 2020s put an end to the post-Cold War era. When it comes to North Korea, three events are of the greatest significance: the "Trump shock," the Sino-U.S. conflict, and, finally, the Ukrainian war. All these events heralded globalization's retreat, and it was much felt in Northeast Asia where, to quote Daniel Sneider, it "has reinvigorated the Cold War architecture."[16] Indeed, it seems that we are sliding back to the confrontation of two hostile blocks, similar to what one could observe for a few years in the 1950s: the Moscow-Beijing-Pyongyang bloc vs. the Washington-Tokyo-Seoul bloc. However, the hierarchy of the new alliance, as well as its underlying logic, are very different from the 1950s.

This dramatic and, presumably, long-term rift followed a short period of intense cooperation between would-be opponents. This short-lived period of cooperation between Beijing, Moscow and Washington was provoked by the actions of Donald Trump whose 2017 bellicose rhetoric ("fire and fury," "bloody nose," and other tweets) caused much anxiety in Moscow and Beijing. Many observers were afraid that the crisis would escalate with the U.S. delivering a preemptive strike against North Korea's nuclear facilities. As the International Crisis Group report, released in January 2018, said: "The threat of a war on the Korean peninsula is higher than at any time in recent history."[17]

This looming threat of war caused Russian and Chinese diplomats to side with the U.S. at the UNSC in 2016-2017. They approved the new harsh UN sanctions regime, suggested by the U.S. side. China and Russia obviously believed that such concessions would appease Trump who, presumably, could be persuaded to wait for the sanctions' results instead of ordering a pre-emptive strike. For China, such a show of solidarity with the U.S. also might have been seen as a way to postpone the looming confrontation with Washington. Russia, in turn, was ready to follow the then Chinese line – Moscow's decision to support sanctions on the use of North Korean labor is a good example of such willingness to do that.[18] It also helped that North Korea's nuclear adventurism was not seen in Moscow and Beijing favorably: like the other five "legal" nuclear states, Russia and China had no reason to welcome nuclear proliferation. Thus, a sort of joint Russia-China-U.S. position on the North Korean issue emerged for a brief while.

However, this unity proved to be short-lived. The U.S.-China "trade war" began in the spring of 2018 and soon developed into a comprehensive confrontation between the world's first and second economic powers, likely to last for a long time. The outbreak of the Ukrainian war delivered the second blow. It largely freed North Korea of its longstanding status as a bizarre and eccentric "rogue state," transforming it into a useful "my enemy's enemy" not only for China but also for Russia (even though some dislike and mistrust, arguably, stayed).

China's attitude towards North Korea, expressed by the "no war, no instability, no nukes" formula, remains ambivalent. On the one hand, China might be irritated by many actions of Pyongyang, which for a long time has been perceived by Beijing as a capricious, unpredictable, and ungrateful semi-ally. Like other nuclear powers, China is unhappy with North Korea's nuclear program, which indirectly threatens China's military and strategic superiority. Furthermore, this program as well as frequent North Korean provocations create reasons or excuses to maintain or even increase the American presence in Northeast Asia. At the same time, China needs North Korea to stay afloat,

and this goal, always important, became tantamount after 2020, when China's relations with the U.S. moved towards a Cold War, while chances of North Korea's denuclearization had withered away.

There are valid reasons why China is afraid of a North Korea's crisis. A serious internal crisis in North Korea, if left uncontrolled, is likely to lead to the disintegration of the Kim family regime and the subsequent unification of the country on Seoul's terms. The result would be the emergence of a single Korean state, likely to be both democratic and nationalistic. This combination would exercise an unwelcome influence on China's internal situation – especially on the ethnic Korean minority. A united Korea, being essentially an enlarged version of the present-day ROK, is also likely to remain a U.S. ally. This means that the U.S. troops, listening stations and air bases would move much closer to the Chinese border and Beijing itself.[19] Zhu Feng and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga observed in 2015: "The most important security concern driving China's policy remains China's view of North Korea as a comprehensive strategic buffer."[20] Indeed, this was China's major concern for centuries, and a reason behind China's decision to send troops to Korea in 1950 (as well as in 1592 and 1884). The recent developments made this concern even more important.

This age-old buffer zone logic is nicely expressed by an oft-repeated adage which compares North Korea and China with lips and teeth. This remark, first made by Mao Zedong himself, is often misinterpreted by Westerners as a reference to China and North Korea's special closeness, while, in reality, the implied message is more complicated. The adage is a reference to a story (well known to all educated Chinese) of the State of Yu and the State of Guo, of the Warring States period, with the State of Guo serving as a buffer zone for the State of Yu. The full expression, allegedly a quote from a wise adviser's remonstrance, says: "If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold,"[21] and it was meant to remind the sovereign about the importance of keeping buffer zone states in good shape.

Until the crisis in its relations with the U.S., Beijing was prepared to consider some compromises. For example, Chinese scholars in the 2000s and early 2010s frequently suggested that the U.S. should promise not to deploy any military assets north of the present-day DMZ if Korea is unified under Seoul's auspices. There were also periods when China's attitude to North Korea was turning for the worse. For example, in 2013 the resumption of nuclear tests and the execution of Jang Song-taek, Kim Jong-un's uncle with close ties to Beijing, triggered a significant, if short-lasting, cooling in the bilateral relationship.[22]

However, nowadays the Sino-American Cold War makes a U.S.-China compromise highly unlikely, essentially impossible. Chinese decision-makers have no doubt that their major and overwhelming goal is to keep North Korea afloat – even though many of Pyongyang actions continue to annoy China.

Western and American experts sometimes express hope that American diplomatic efforts might somehow succeed in persuading China to withdraw its support for North Korea – after all, North Korea's nuclear ambitions, the main concern for the U.S., also disturb and indirectly threaten China. These hopes are completely unfounded. One cannot help but agree with Doug Bandow: "it is unlikely that China could do so even if it wanted to, and it probably doesn't want to."[23]

There is no mutual love between Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping – on the contrary, both leaders see each other with sufficient mistrust and worse.[34] However, political decisions are based not on personal chemistry, but on group and state interests, and the long-term preservation of the North Korean state serves China's national interests best. From the point of view of China, the harm caused by the North Korean nuclear program is real but less painful than the harm likely to be caused by the possible disintegration of the North Korean regime. Therefore, China has made a choice of the lesser evil and grudgingly accepts the necessity of living with a nuclear North Korea. In order to convince China to abandon the North, the West needs to offer Beijing very serious compensation, whose cost is likely to be prohibitive (a Taiwan-North Korea swap, perhaps?).

Around 2018, China made an important strategic decision to maintain North Korea, keeping it afloat through the provision of modest but sufficient aid. Actually, it was a development of its post-2000 policy, but with the beginning of the U.S.-China confrontation, the need to maintain North Korean became tantamount. This aid, likely, consists of three vital items: food, fuel and fertilizer. There are occasional reports about the arrival of this aid, but no detailed information is available in the open sources.[35]

Nonetheless, indirect evidence indicates that such aid is significant. The major indicator is the stability of prices of the relevant items in North Korean markets. Korea does not produce oil and for decades its harvest has been insufficient to meet even the basic nutritional needs of its population. Thus, the fact that prices of grain and fuel as well as the exchange rate of foreign currencies remained stable throughout the turbulent 2020-2023 period should be seen as an indirect but reliable sign of Chinese aid flowing into North Korea. According to Asia Press data, the rice retail prices in February 2020 were 5,670 NKW (per kilo) while in February 2023 it was a bit lower, 5,600 NKW. The USD/NKW exchange rate also slightly went down from 8,832 NKW to 8,100 NKW and the price of gasoline

increased slightly, from 11,340 NKW in February 2020 to 14,800 NKW in February 2023.[26] Given the near absence of regular foreign trade, and the well-known insufficiency of the domestic supply, these figures seem to be a good indicator of the continuous and significant Chinese aid infusion.

China faces substantial obstacles in dealing with North Korea, and these obstacles are partially of its own making, being consequences of the 2016-17 UNSC resolutions once supported by the Chinese diplomats. The UNSC sanctions remain a noticeable hindrance to the development of economic interactions between North Korea and China (as well as Russia). There is little doubt that Chinese (and, to a lesser extent, Russian) companies have been deliberately violating the UNSC sanctions' regime, often with the full knowledge of the authorities. Predictably, the Chinese diplomats deny – and will keep denying – the very fact that violations have taken place, with hardly anybody taking these denials at the face value.[27] Nonetheless, Beijing still has to reckon with the existing restrictions: the existence of the UNSC restrictions means that the scale of violations should remain sufficiently modest.

In other words, the Chinese side can safely supply oil products to North Korea, using the Dandong-Shinuiju pipeline, whose operation is difficult to control. Beijing also can close its eyes to ship-to-ship transfers arranged by private companies. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that China will make significant investments in North Korean industry and mining as long as the current sanctions regime remains operational. If Chinese-owned mines or larger factories emerge in North Korea, this will be too obvious a sanctions regime violation, which even Chinese diplomats will find difficult to deny. Most likely, China will not go that far – it will damage its claim to be a staunch supporter of multilateralism as well as a responsible international player. The reputational damage from such a blatant violation is likely to exceed the rather limited economic gains the Chinese side will get from industrial and mining developments in North Korea. This means that, as long as the UNSC sanctions regime persists, China will be unable and/or unwilling to provide North Korea with assistance on a scale which would make sustainable growth possible.

Given that the removal of the sanctions appears unlikely, in the foreseeable future China will keep North Korea afloat, but will not invest much. Apart from the UNSC decisions, there are other reasons for China to be cautious: North Korea's rapid economic development, should it happen, would not necessarily serve China's long-term interests. As experience has shown, whenever the North Korean leadership believe that their economic position is stable, they aim at maximizing independence and begin to act with complete neglect of

their allies' interests. Most likely, China will limit itself to maintaining the status quo, and it means that Beijing will deal with a dual task: to prevent North Korea's collapse (and its absorption by the South) while also keeping Pyongyang sufficiently dependent on Chinese aid.

The New Era: Russia

The beginning of the Sino-U.S. conflict was great news for Pyongyang. However, soon afterwards the North Korean leaders got another reason to feel more confident about their future: Russia invaded Ukraine. The Ukrainian conflict provided Pyongyang with the gift of another ally, albeit less useful than China. Significantly, it also contributed toward the changes in the world North Korean leaders see as desirable – the seeming retreat of the U.S.-led globalizing world serves their interests perfectly.

Once the war began, North Korean diplomacy began to support the Russian position on Ukraine with remarkable intensity. In early March, soon after the Russian invasion began, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution which condemned the invasion and demanded that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders." Out of 193 UN Member States, 35 abstained and merely five, including Russia itself, voted against this resolution. The four other countries which voted against this resolution included Belarus and Syria (both heavily dependent on Russia), Eritrea and North Korea.[28]

The voting pattern predictably continued. For example, on October 12, 2022 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on member countries not to recognize the four regions of Ukraine that Russia has claimed. Out of 193 UN Member States, 35 abstained and five voted against it – including, of course, Russia. The four other dissenters included this time Belarus, Syria, Nicaragua and North Korea.[29] Since the invasion, the North Korean representative at the UN always voted against resolutions which condemned Russia's actions (and the number of countries which did so was always very small).[30] Interestingly enough, North Korea voted against allowing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to deliver a video address to the UN General Assembly in September 2022. Apart from Russia and North Korea, five other states voted against the Ukrainian President's voice being heard: Belarus, Cuba, Nicaragua, Eritrea, Syria.[31]

Finally, the DPRK became one of a handful of states which officially recognized as independent states the two self-proclaimed republics the pro-Russian forces established in East Ukraine.[32] Soon, in late September 2022, these territories were annexed by Russia, and this annexation was also duly recognized by the DPRK government.[33]

The North Korean diplomatic efforts were reciprocated. On May 26, the UN Security Council met to discuss the then recent resumption of ICBM tests in North Korea. However, the resolution condemning the North Korean actions was blocked by the Russians and Chinese.[34] Needless to say, the Beijing and Moscow functionaries claimed that it was the United States who was responsible for the North Korean nuclear and missile ambitions. Most likely, this is what we are going to hear in the foreseeable future every time some resolutions critical of North Korea are introduced to the UN Security Council.

In the first few months of the Ukrainian conflict, the North Korean media remained silent on the war in Eastern Europe. This agrees well with the current North Korean policy on reporting overseas news. Since early 2020, the North Korean media dramatically reduced overseas news coverage (and began to give preference to the randomly chosen reports about disasters of all kinds happening around the globe). Thus, North Korean initial silence agreed with the current information policy pattern.

However, in February 2023 North Korean leaders departed from their earlier position. On January 27, Kim Yo-jong, the sister of Kim Jong-un and de-facto spokesperson of the North Korean government, delivered a bombastic statement, where she expressed full support for Russia's invasion. Having said, that the "world would be brighter, safer and calmer now, if it were not for the U.S.," she condemned shipping of Western military aid to Ukraine. Kim Yo-jong said: "We will always stand in the same trench with the service personnel and people of Russia who have turned out in the struggle to defend the dignity and honor of the state and the sovereignty and security of the country." This sounds strong and, indeed, can be seen as an unusually strong expression of solidarity by the current North Korean standards. Nonetheless, one should not overlook that Kim Yo-jong's statement is, essentially, as symbolical as it is bombastic.[35]

However, the UN voting and statements are not the only area where cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang is possible. In late 2022 and early 2023, there were numerous reports about the shipment of artillery ammunition and light arms from North Korea to Russia. The first such report was made by the New York Times in early September 2022.[36] Soon afterwards, the U.S. government agencies made statements which confirmed that, according to the U.S. intelligence, some talks between Russia and North Korea on shipments took place, even though they were deliberately imprecise about details. On November 2, the White House's national security spokesman repeated the claims about the North Korean shipment of the artillery shells.[37] Then, in December, it was again officially stated by the White House that the ammunition and, perhaps, some light arms (like grenade launchers) were going to be delivered not to the regular army, but to the Wagner Group paramilitaries.[38]

The claims were officially denied by both the Russian and North Korean sides a number of times,[39] but such denials should be expected: the purchase of the arms from North Korea would constitute a blatant violation of the UN sanctions regime. Finally, on January 20, 2023, the White House claimed that the shipment has left North Korea. In an unusual twist, the U.S. side even published some satellite photos which depicted five railway carriages (allegedly with ammunition) which left the North Korean border railway station.[40]

For the time being, the U.S. claims look plausible, even though it seems that shipments are of small scale. Indeed, even keeping in mind the hyper-militarization of the North Korean economy, it is difficult to expect that these shipments will seriously change the balance of power on the frontlines – even though these shipments, if real, can help North Korea to get some currency, since the Russian government, awash in money but short of ammunition, is going to pay well. At the same time, compared with China, Russia has less stake in maintaining the image of a responsible member of the international community. So, it can politically afford to openly challenge the UNSC resolutions – something China is likely to avoid, as argued above.

However, this willingness will hardly translate into Russian investment to North Korea. Even in a better environment, the only investments considered were the pipeline and railway constructions – two projects whose goal was to connect Russian and South Korean markets, with North Korea being used only as a space to be traversed. The Russian companies lack experience operating in North Korea, and have little interest in doing business there. The investments could only be made possible by government guarantees, which are unlikely.

Labor exports are another field where cooperation between the Russian Federation and North Korea is possible. In 2017 Russian diplomats supported the UNSC resolution 2375, which banned the employment of North Korean workers in the UN member states. At the time, there were well over 30,000 North Korean workers employed in Russia (largely in construction),[41] with the unbroken history of Russia's labor imports from Korea going back some 75 years.[42]

Once the Russian troops advanced into Eastern Ukraine and North Korea formally recognized the self-proclaimed Donbass states, Alexander Matsegora, the Russian ambassador in Pyongyang, gave an interview to Izvestia daily where he explicitly said that North Korean construction workers would be employed at the reconstruction work in Eastern Ukraine.[43] Obviously, it was not his initiative: around the same time, the possible employment of North Korean workers was mentioned by another high-ranking Russian official, Marat Khusnullin, an influential deputy prime minister, responsible for the construction industry.[44]

It was seemingly expected that the nebulous legal standing of the breakaway regions would allow getting around the UNSC sanctions regime, since the self-proclaimed statelets were not UN members and hence could ignore sanctions with impunity. Obviously, Vladimir Putin's hasty decision to annex the regions changed the situation, depriving the labor import scheme of a convenient excuse. Nonetheless, talk about labor exports lingers.

However, if seen from Pyongyang, Russia remains a rather problematic ally. First, for Russia, the strategic value of North Korea is significantly lower than for China. Second, the Russian economy is much weaker and smaller than that of China and likely to shrink in the near future. Therefore, Russia is both less willing and less able to provide significant economic assistance to North Korea.

The above-mentioned structural incompatibility of the Russian and North Korean economies is here to stay, so Russian companies are unlikely to import North Korean goods in large quantities. An increase in the volume of trade between the two countries is possible, but only as long as it will be subsidized by the Russian government. The only possible exception is labor exports which are likely to expand: one can expect that in the near future North Korean workers will be employed in Russia in large numbers. To make the violations of the UNSC resolutions less obvious, they can be issued student or visitors' visas.

Given that Moscow is not going to subsidize its economic interactions with Pyongyang, in North Korea's relations the diplomatic dimension is likely to remain prevalent. The most valuable diplomatic commodity at Russia's disposal is the permanent seat at the Security Council. This allows Russia to easily use its veto power to block anti-North Korean resolutions. This position of Russia (and China) means that, for the foreseeable future, the UNSC will remain paralyzed on matters related to North Korea. Due to the change in Russian and Chinese positions, North Korean actions, including nuclear and ICBM tests, will hardly suffer anything but a mild verbal condemnation. Russia's diplomatic support will be provided to North Korea in other international venues as well.

Given that China is already determined to block all anti-Pyongyang moves in the UNSC, Russia's support might appear superfluous, but this is not the case. North Koreans cannot rule out that in the long run, China might change its position due to some reasons, but even in such an unfavorable situation Pyongyang will still be able to rely on a Russian veto. North Korean diplomats will reciprocate by voting for Russia whenever they are present. The actual value of such support is small, given North Korea's pariah standing and relatively small international presence. Additionally, the pro-Moscow countries are likely to remain a small minority, so the North Korean vote will hardly tip the balance.

Nevertheless, the North Korean diplomatic actions, while symbolic, will not remain unnoticed in Moscow whose leaders are eager to have a modicum of approval, both for domestic propaganda purposes and their own peace of mind.

Diplomatic interactions between Moscow and Pyongyang are curiously asymmetric. North Korea's diplomatic actions cost Pyongyang nothing, but have little if any impact on the real situation. On the other hand, Russia's willingness to block further sanctions against North Korea brings quite tangible material benefits to North Korea – or, rather, blocks significant losses Pyongyang would suffer otherwise. It renders the UN sanctions regime, whose efficiency has been grossly overestimated, completely toothless.

However, the prospects of RF-DPRK relations are less certain than those of the DPRK's relations with China. Much depends on the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as on the situation in the Russian economy and society, especially the long-term impact of the sanctions. If the sanctions do not hit Russia hard, and/or the war in Ukraine does not result in a serious Russian defeat, the current model of Russian-North Korean relations may continue for a long time.

The Impact

North Korean leaders benefited much from the recent developments. The Chinese and Russian support guarantees the security and stability of the Kim family regime for the foreseeable future. As long as the U.S.-China conflict persists, North Korea will remain incorporated into the China-led block (small and essentially consisting, apart from China itself, of Russia and a handful of other states). This will ensure that North Korea will receive aid – perhaps, not generous, but definitely sufficient to stay afloat.

This is reminiscent of 1953-1960 situation. However, these days, China, not Russia, is the foundation of the de-facto alliance, with Moscow's role being very limited. Russia lacks both the need and the means to support North Korea on a level which would make a meaningful difference.

We already can see how such changes in the outside world influenced North Korea's domestic policy. The North Korean leadership reacted to the ongoing changes by curtailing the market-oriented economic reforms Kim Jong-un and his government carried out in 2012-2019. The new reform measures ceased to be introduced after 2017, and from around 2020, the North Korean press extolls the glories of the centrally planned economy. The authorities seemingly hope

for a return to the days of Kim Il-sung, when, in the 1960s and 1970s, North Korea had an extreme variety of the Leninist economy.[45] This model is inefficient, and North Korean leaders seem to be aware of this. However, under the current conditions, North Korea can afford an inefficient, completely stagnant, or even slowly shrinking. economy, since its inefficiency is largely offset by Chinese economic support. It is more important for the North Korean leaders that the Leninist economic model boosts the government's ability of surveillance and control.

Most likely, North Korea will reduce its interactions with the outside world, which in the past two decades were driven by the hope to acquire some aid and investment, even at the cost of some political risk since exchanges exposed the population to dangerous, uncensored knowledge of the outside world. In the current situation, with steady, if modest, Chinese support, such measures are not necessary any more. The foreign presence in North Korea, which was dramatically reduced with the outbreak of the pandemic, will not return to the pre-2020 level for a long time.

The new situation will also influence North Korea's nuclear program. Expectations about possible denuclearization have been a pipe dream since at least 2006, the year of the first nuclear test, even though it took a long time before this became obvious for many. However, until recently one could hope that, in exchange for sanctions' relief and other concessions, the North Korean leaders would agree to limit or downsize their nuclear and missile programs. Such a deal, a swap of some nuclear facilities for some sanctions, could be discussed in Hanoi in 2019, even though the North Korean demands and expectations were excessive, and this resulted in talks collapsing.

However, the current developments make even such imperfect compromise highly unlikely. The Chinese and Russian position ensures that sanctions cannot be tightened, while existing sanctions are likely to be violated. This deprives North Korea of any incentives to search for a compromise on its nuclear and missile program. On the contrary, Pyongyang will likely work towards improving both its ICBM force, necessary to deter and/or blackmail the U.S., and its tactical component, necessary to blackmail or subdue the South.

Thus, the dual crisis is likely to deliver a North Korea which will be more stable, more repressive, significantly more isolated, less interested in compromises and more willing and able to advance its nuclear and missile programs. Unfortunately, this is likely to be a lasting change.

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From Shrimp to Middle Power to Something More? South Korea as a Global Pivotal State

By Ramon Pacheco Pardo

75 years ago South Korea was established. Then no one would have predicted its current impressive economic, political, diplomatic, technological, security, and cultural status. Least of all, (South) Koreans themselves, who back in 1948 were still recovering from decades of colonization and the division of their country at the whim of foreign powers. Yet, the South Korea of 2023 is globally recognized and even admired in multiple areas. Regardless of whether South Koreans see their country as a powerless shrimp or a skillful dolphin navigating great power competition, the rest of the world does not see Seoul as a small player anymore.

The real question that South Korea faces today, therefore, is whether it will remain a middle power or whether it will become a middle power capable of acting as a pivotal state in particular areas of strength. For South Korea cannot aspire to become as powerful as the U.S. or China as a foreign and security player. No other actor can match today's two superpowers currently, save for the EU in the area of economics and trade. But South Korea is among a number of middle powers capable of influencing global affairs, be it Australia, India, Indonesia, or Japan among its Indo-Pacific peers, France, Germany, or the UK from Europe, or Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, or Turkey from different parts of the world.

Yoon Suk-yeol's "Global Pivotal State" (GPS) is a rallying cry for South Korea to "step up" and make use of its capabilities to shape regional and global affairs when it can, rather than simply reacting to decisions taken by Washington and Beijing, as well as other capitals from Brussels to Tokyo.[1] This is not to say that South Korea is new to trying to shape events. Lee Myung-bak's "Global Korea" had the same goal in mind, and both Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in also looked well beyond the Korean Peninsula with their foreign and security policies.[2] These three leaders put aside outdated and misguided notions of South Korean foreign policy being driven by foreign powers or by trade and the chaebol. As cases in point, the Moon government pursued a "New Northern

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Policy" to improve relations with North Korea with the support of Russia in spite of Washington's misgivings. And the Yoon government has indicated that any decision on further THAAD battery deployments is South Korea's to make, regardless of Beijing's views.

Yet, GPS emerges from the notion that perhaps Seoul still focuses on the Korean Peninsula too often. Thus, while GPS is a clear attempt to position South Korea as a pivotal state in regional and global geopolitics—and, equally relevant, to be recognized as such--economists talk about how a large share of developing countries fall into the "middle income trap," not being poor anymore but unable to become rich. South Korea avoided this fate. Seoul should now avoid the "middle power trap," and act as a middle power navigating global geopolitics when it has to but also as a pivotal state shaping them when it can, for example, by continuing its military build-up until it feels safe or continuing its support for Ukraine in spite of Chinese and Russian protests if it feels that is in its interest. This way, South Korea will truly realize its foreign and security policy potential.

South Korea's Rise to Middle Power Status

South Korea could not be considered a middle power at the end of the Cold War. Park Chung-hee dreamt of South Korea becoming a developed economy following his coup in 1961. South Koreans fighting against military dictatorship throughout the 1970s and 80s wanted their country to become an advanced democracy. Foreign policy officials had high hopes for their country's diplomatic role and status after the Koreas joined the UN in 1991. Samsung's Lee Kun-hee dreamt of a South Korean economy powered by innovation when he introduced his New Management Initiative in 1993. And Hallyu's pioneers from the early and mid-1990s hoped to export pop music, movies, and dramas to the rest of the world. And even though South Korea displayed some middle power characteristics in the late 1980s and early 1990s, arguably it was only following recovery from the Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s and early 2000s that the country undoubtedly joined the ranks of the middle powers.

Starting with South Korea's economic power, Seoul joined the OECD in 1996, thus formally becoming part of the "rich countries club."[3] Yet, only a year later the IMF provided South Korea with its biggest bailout package hitherto when the country was hit by the Asian Financial Crisis. South Korea, however, recovered from the crisis relatively quickly and repaid the IMF's package ahead of schedule. And it was throughout the 2000s that South Korea fully cemented its developed country status. The South Korean government and the country's firms started to invest heavily in R&D, and South Korea become one of the top two largest spenders in innovation among OECD countries,

along with Israel.[4] As a result, the South Korean economy is now driven by innovation at the frontier and the country's firms are amongst the world leaders in sectors including semiconductors, electric batteries and cars, biotech, green shipping, or robotics. Thus, South Korea became one of the ten largest exporters of merchandise goods in the world, a position that it still retained at the end of 2021.[5]

Throughout this period of time, South Korea also became more sophisticated in its trade strategy. Successive South Korean governments prioritized FTAs with the country's key economic partners as a way for its firms to gain a comparative advantage. Therefore, South Korea is one of the few countries in the world and one of only two in Asia—along with Singapore—to have signed FTAs with the "Big 3" global economies of China, the EU, and the U.S..[6] In fact, the FTA with South Korea was the EU's first with an Asian country as well as its first "new generation" FTA going well beyond tariffs. Given Brussels's regulatory power, this FTA thus later served as a template for others that the EU and other countries signed. Meanwhile, FTAs with Australia, Canada, Indonesia, Singapore, or Vietnam and membership of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) have further embedded South Korea in regional supply chains as well as boosted links with key trade partners.[7] It should also be noted that South Korea also is one of the three largest Asian aid donors,[8] and in 2010 became the first former aid recipient to join the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of donor countries.[9]

As for politico-diplomatic power, UN membership in 1991 opened the door for Seoul to become a more active player in global affairs, particularly since it coincided with the end of Cold War divisions into two antagonistic blocs. Therefore, South Korea has become a keen supporter of the UN system, most notably with Ban Ki-moon's tenure as the organization's seventh secretary general in 2007-16.[10] From the late 2000s, South Korea also found a niche area in sustainable development and green growth. As three cases in point, the UN opened its Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) in Incheon in 2011,[11] the Green Global Growth Institute (GGGI) was launched in Seoul in 2012,[12] and South Korea was one of the founding partners of Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G) in 2017.[13] Another area in which South Korea has also found a niche is peacekeeping. Seoul is one of ten largest contributors to the UN's peacekeeping budget,[14] one of the five largest peacekeeper contributors among OECD members,[15] and in 2021 hosted the Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial.[16] These are two examples of issue-areas in which South Korea has become an authoritative voice and player in recent years.

Beyond the UN framework, South Korea is a member of the G20 group of leading economies working to promote financial stability, has been invited to partake in G7 summits, and in 2013 launched MIKTA—a coalition of middle powers also involving Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey, and Australia.[17] At the regional level, Seoul hosts the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), the organization launched in 2011 to promote peace and cooperation among China, Japan, and South Korea.[18] Furthermore, South Korea is one of the four Asia-Pacific countries with which NATO is strengthening links within the NATO-AP4 framework—along with Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, whose leaders attended the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid together with Yoon Seok-yul.[19] In short, South Korea has embraced the shift towards minilateralism that has come hand-in-hand with Sino-American rivalry and the declining influence of multilateral organizations. Being part of smaller institutions is a conscious choice, and enhances South Korea's voice rather than taking an implausible middle ground or not even sitting at the table.

Arguably, it is South Korea's growing security and military clout that has seen a greater shift in recent years. Due to the threat coming from North Korea and partly thanks to its 70-year old alliance with the U.S., South Korea has developed a formidable arsenal including missiles, tanks, howitzers, submarines, vessels, or, more recently, jet fighters and even rockets. As a result, South Korea has become one of the ten largest weapons exporters in the world.[20] As a case in point, South Korea is the only Asian country providing NATO members including Estonia, Norway, or Poland with weapons being used to replace those that they themselves are sending to Ukraine to repel Russia's invasion—with some South Korean weapons making their way to Ukraine as well. Furthermore, the ROK Navy has become a regular participant in U.S.-led joint maritime exercises across the Indo-Pacific,[21] and has been part of the international Combined Maritime Forces fighting against piracy in the Gulf of Aden.[22] Plus, the South Korean armed forces joined U.S.-led coalitions in countries such as Afghanistan or Iraq.

Lastly, Hallyu has made of South Korea Asia's top exporter of cultural products and one of the countries with the strongest soft power credentials at the global level. Regardless of one's views about the extent to which soft power can be used to influence the policy of third countries, it is undeniable that Hallyu has made South Korea better known across Asia and globally. This has helped to improve perceptions of South Korea overseas.[23] And successive South Korean governments have made use of the success of Hallyu to help boost the sales of South Korean products, promote the study of Korean language, organize festivals and concerts to promote South Korea's image, or support large-scale event bids (e.g., BTS and the Busan 2030 World Expo), among others.

Considering all of the above, there is little doubt that the South Korea of 2023 is a middle power with formidable economic, diplomatic, military, and cultural capabilities, a far cry from the "shrimp" of the Cold War or even the emerging power of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The stage is now set for South Korea to make use of its assets to yield influence in global affairs in a way that it could not hitherto.

Beyond Middle Power Status? Yoon Suk-yeol's Global Pivotal State

South Korea's GPS needs to be understood in the context of the decades-old quest among the country's political, business, and thought leaders to make their country more central to global affairs. In this respect, the focus of GPS is on committing Seoul to use its resources to project global leadership in as many areas as possible.[24] This may seem ambitious. But then, back in the 1960s it was also ambitious for South Koreans to think that theirs would become one of the biggest and most developed economies in the world. And it was similarly ambitious back in the 1990s to think that South Korean culture could become Asia's most recognized globally. In this sense, GPS builds on an ingrained South Korean ingenuity to think big and in new ways.

GPS and South Korea's push to become a pivotal power in as many areas as possible, however, needs to confront the reality of today's international system. And this reality is that U.S.-China economic, technological, diplomatic, and military competition is the defining framework underpinning international relations, leading, above all, to the decline in the importance of multilateral institutions, an (apparent) division of countries into two separate blocs based on values, a growing interconnectedness of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific geopolitical theaters, and, more generally, a more unstable international environment when compared to the aftermath of World War II. In fact, Russia's invasion of Ukraine shortly after Moscow and Beijing declared their "no limits" friendship would seem to confirm this state of affairs.[25] Thus, South Korea needs to consider its options in an environment in which multilateral institutions are no longer the arbiters of conflict. Seoul's decision to move closer towards the U.S. and its partners, while emphasizing minilateral institutions, suggests that policy-makers are fully aware of this environment.

A South Korea that aspires to be more than a middle power, therefore, should not feel despondent and powerless when faced with this international environment. Instead, Seoul should seek to gain influence according to its own interests and to utilize the environment to achieve its goals. Indeed, the idea that South Korea is irrevocably doomed to suffer in the confrontation between its

main trade partner, China, and its long-standing ally, the U.S., is misleading. For one, South Korea and China are economically interdependent—even if Beijing is the largest of the two economies. Plus, the U.S. is the stronger partner in the ROK-U.S. alliance but its strength is greater when South Korea offers military, diplomatic, or economic support to its foreign policy and security initiatives. As former Foreign Minister Kang Kung-wha and current Foreign Minister Park Jin have suggested, South Korea has cards to play in the great power game.

Starting with the intertwined areas of trade, supply chains, and technology, the dismantlement of WTO-led multilateralism and economics-first-driven manufacturing processes seems to be here to stay. In this context, South Korea needs to be part of the agreements and frameworks replacing the WTO scaffolding. This is particularly the case as economic nationalism and industrial policy are becoming more common, including in the U.S. and Europe, and digital trade or investment rules are not adequately covered by existing arrangements. To this end, membership in the RCEP was and is a no-brainer for Seoul, considering that both China and Japan are part of the agreement. Likewise, joining Joe Biden's Chip-4 alliance and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) from the outset were necessary for South Korea, which otherwise would have been excluded from bodies that may end up setting regional or global standards and regulations. At the same time, South Korea can play an important role in all of these bodies given the know-how of its trade officials and other policy-makers and experts, the importance of chaebol such as Samsung, Hyundai, LG, or SK to the global economy, and its economic size. In this sense, it makes more sense to join groups in which it can have a say and shape decisions and events, rather than having no say by insisting on equidistance between Washington and Beijing.

In fact, these factors explain why it would also make sense for South Korea to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA). Neither agreement is particularly relevant now, given that CPTPP only includes two of the ten biggest economies in the world—and three of Asia's four largest economies are not part of it—and DEPA only includes three fairly small economies. But these agreements cover new areas such as digital trade, include countries in the Americas with which South Korea wants to boost economic links, and could end up including China, which has applied for membership in both, or even the U.S. were it to rethink its opposition to new free trade agreements in the future. For Seoul, it is far better to be in and have a voice while becoming one of several rule-makers, than being out and risk others joining first, by which time South Korea would become a rule-taker.

Leaving inter-governmental agreements aside, the strength of South Korean firms in multiple high-tech sectors is a strength that Seoul needs to build upon. The *chaebol* continue to enjoy fairly good relations with government. This can sometimes bring problems.[26] But it is also a source of strength in the era of economic nationalism, friend-shoring, and onshoring. Most notably, Europe, Southeast Asia, and the U.S. compete to attract South Korean factories in sectors from semiconductors to cars, while China is not resigned to losing the factories that remain there. This boosts economic links between South Korea and a host of countries, raises Seoul's value as a supply chain partner, and makes the South Korean government and its firms necessary interlocutors regarding the present and future of a tech-, innovation-, and green-driven economy. It thus makes sense for the South Korean government and firms to work closely with each other for their mutual benefit.

One last aspect in the area of economics in which South Korea needs to elevate its game is aid provision. Even though South Korea has a shorter history as a donor compared to other developed countries, sitting towards the bottom of the OECD's ODA as a share of GDP table is not a good look.[27] It is natural for South Korea to destine most of its aid towards Southeast and South Asia. For most donors, geographical proximity and cultural affinity remain major drivers behind their decisions regarding aid provision. Yet, even if South Korea were not to significantly modify the main destinations of its aid, boosting its ODA would help with the development of countries which are amongst the poorest in the world, particularly in South Asia. Since South Korea benefited from Western aid for decades, it has a moral obligation to repay the international community with aid of its own, particularly considering that many countries look to South Korea as a development model.

Security is another area in which minilateralism and cooperation among partners, in particular of the "like-minded" variety, is burgeoning. And South Korea ought to seize the opportunities that this presents. Certainly, closer security cooperation with the U.S. and U.S.-centric frameworks will create some political and diplomatic frictions with China. But Seoul should be aware that these are inevitable, unless Beijing changes its behavior. South Korea of course has first-hand experience of this, dating back to Park Geun-hye's decision to allow the U.S. to deploy THAAD on South Korean territory, which led to economic retaliation from China.[28] Plus, South Korea has seen the incursion of Chinese and Russian jet fighters into its ADIZ and even airspace, regularly has to deal with Chinese vessels moving into its EEZ and even territorial waters, and is on the receiving end of cyberattacks involving China, North Korea, and/or Russia. In other words, participation in U.S.-centric security frameworks attends to the reality of ongoing tensions with China. The

implications could be that tensions with China become a permanent feature of Sino-South Korean relations, at least in the coming years. Beijing could also engage in a new round of (unofficial) economic sanctions. So, there are potential downsides to this approach.

The biggest debate in South Korea, understandably, is about South Korea-U.S.-Japan trilateralism. This is the U.S.'s strongest minilateral in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, involving regular diplomatic, military, and intelligence exchanges and exercises, and surviving even periods of political tension between Tokyo and Seoul. In fact, there are policy-makers in the EU and Canada, for example, who quietly would be very pleased with new quadrilateral frameworks involving Seoul, Washington, Tokyo and themselves, respectively.[29] This shows that there are strong incentives for South Korea-U.S.-Japan trilateralism to strengthen, including common threat perceptions, similar interests, and shared values. Realistically, Japan-South Korea tensions are not going to go away any time soon, even after Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida Fumio have embarked on a top-level effort to mend ties and prevent historical problems from affecting bilateral relations. After all, tensions between former colonizers and colonies are common across the world. But they can be managed, and should not prevent practical cooperation regardless of the state of political relations. This is the position of the Yoon government.

NATO-AP4 cooperation should be a priority for South Korea. The complementarities between the transatlantic organization and South Korea in areas ranging from cybersecurity to non-proliferation activities to weapons technology development make cooperation a no brainer. Furthermore, South Korea's arms transfers to NATO members supporting Ukraine has significantly boosted the credentials of Seoul as a reliable and willing security partner.[30] In fact, arms transfers are also strengthening links with countries across the Middle East or South and Southeast Asia. Plus, maritime and cybersecurity concerns are further boosting cooperation with these regions, as well as with countries and actors such as Australia, Canada, and the EU. These are areas that South Korea should exploit, given that demands for weapons need to be met, while maritime and cybersecurity risks are here to stay. A big question for South Korea is the extent to which it should engage with Quad/Quad+. It is fair to say that the slow progress of military cooperation among Quad members within this framework, together with the division among them regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine have shown the limits of the grouping as a security framework of consequence. Engagement with Quad, thus, should be seen as supplementing rather than replacing more reliable and important minilaterals and bilaterals that better serve South Korean interests.

Diplomacy and politics are another area being transformed by Sino-American competition and the demise of multilateralism, for which South Korea needs to change its way of thinking and the way it acts. Certainly, South Korea should continue to support the UN system and groups that bring different voices together, such as the G20. After all, South Korea has benefited from the Liberal International Order (LIO) and it should not shy away from it at a moment of crisis, such as the current one. The LIO also gives an equal voice to all its participants, at least formally, which is beneficial for middle powers such as South Korea.

Yet, the so-called G7+/D10 is emerging as an important group giving voice to "like-minded" countries in the transatlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. The G7 in its original composition became obsolete at least two decades ago, given that it is a Western-centric organization. But incorporating Australia, India, and South Korea would help to revitalize it. The UK understands this, and so does the U.S., which after all is the key player in the organization.[31] But it remains to be seen whether other G7 members also understand this. Germany, for example, did not invite Australia or South Korea to the summit it hosted in 2022. Seoul should work together with Australia, India, and G7 members more attuned to 21st century geopolitics to expand the format of the grouping on a more sustainable basis. This would strengthen South Korea's voice when issuing messages and declarations as part of a group of fellow democracies. The 2021 Open Societies Statement that South Korea signed during the G7 summit held in the UK is a case in point.[32]

More difficult to ascertain is whether middle power groupings can retain relevance in an era of Sino-American competition. When launched in 2013, MIKTA made sense. Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia were middle powers seeking to present a vision of global governance separate from that of the superpowers or that of fellow middle powers with a seat at the UN Security Council—namely France, Russia, and the UK. Yet, over time and especially during the latter part of the Moon Jae-in government and now during the Yoon Suk-yeol government, South Korea has been boosting its ties with fellow democratic countries in economics, security, and diplomacy. It may be that MIKTA members can sometimes work together in areas such as peacekeeping or sustainable development, or perhaps issue joint statements as in the past. But considering the current international environment, it is unlikely that this or other middle power groupings bringing together a disparate group of countries can work well and serve Seoul's interests as well as others.

Considering South Korea's soft power credentials, it is necessary to discuss the extent to which Seoul can mobilize its resources in this area to pursue its foreign policy goals towards becoming a pivotal power. Certainly, there are doubts about the extent to which soft power can help to advance one's foreign policy goals. The popularity of Hallyu in China, for example, did not prevent Xi Jinping from imposing sweeping economic sanctions against South Korea following the announcement of THAAD's deployment in 2016. And no amount of soft power prevented South Korean firms from being affected by Biden's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which hit Hyundai in particular. That is, soft power will not help South Korea to achieve its goals when a superpower's core objectives are at stake.

Yet, it is undeniable that South Korean soft power confers benefits to its government when pursuing its foreign policy. While in the case of South Korea soft power is more commonly linked to Hallyu these days, the country's development history and model, high-tech economy, and, in the case of some countries and civil societies, strong democratic credentials also matter. All of them have created a positive perception of South Korea, and led more policy-makers, business leaders, and civil societies at large to learn more about the country, including its history, culture, and language. This is beneficial insofar as South Korea has an attractive story to tell, certainly with negative aspects but mainly with positive ones. While it is difficult to quantify and determine the influence of soft power, it should help in winning infrastructure building or arms sales contracts, being asked to join groupings of "like-minded" partners, or getting invitations to attend or even host forums.

South Korea should therefore strive to do more in its foreign and security policy. This helps pursue its own interests, allows Seoul to fill gaps that otherwise others will, and is a demand from third parties that cannot be ignored. Economic growth certainly is one of these core interests. Without joining economic minilaterals and new supply chain configurations, it would be difficult for South Korea to become a pivotal economic player. Managing China's rise is another key interest for South Korea. Becoming part of security minilaterals, particularly with "like-minded" partners, as well as minilateral diplomatic groupings should be part of pivotal South Korea's strategy to deal with its more powerful yet sometimes antagonistic neighbor. Dealing with North Korea is another key interest for South Korea. And whereas most of the work in this area falls on the shoulders of the U.S. and South Korea itself, intensifying cooperation with "like-minded" partners or organizations such as NATO—also concerned by North Korean actions—would help strengthen South Korea's case to be at the driving wheel of Korean Peninsula security developments. Finally, global

recognition matters for South Korea. Yet, ascribing to the LIO, currently in decline, cannot be the only way for South Korea to try to achieve this. Seoul needs to insert itself in as many relevant groupings as possible and make use of its full range of assets to truly become a GPS.

A Global Pivotal State in the Age of U.S.-China Rivalry

As South Korea moves closer to the U.S. as part of its GPS, there is a question as to how China may react to this shift in foreign policy. There are clear indications that China is taking South Korea's approach to foreign policy badly. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs engaged in a spat with its South Korean counterpart last August, after it argued that the Yoon government had agreed not to deploy new THAAD missile batteries, which Seoul denied.[33] And Beijing criticized the Yoon government's Indo-Pacific strategy upon its publication last December, arguing that South Korea was joining U.S.-led coalitions in the region.[34] Even during the latter part of the Moon government, relations between Seoul and Beijing soured as South Korea joined criticism of China's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, Seoul drew closer to the Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy via Moon's New Southern Policy, and China became wary of South Korea's military build-up.[35] Since South Korea is likely to continue to draw closer to the U.S. and its partners, including via South Korea-U.S.-Japan trilateralism, it is likely that Sino-South Korean relations will continue to deteriorate

In the past, South Korea may have decided to pursue a middle way in between Beijing and Washington. However, this is not the case anymore, as Seoul has become more willing to stand up to Beijing. It is precisely South Korea's decision to defend its position as part of U.S.-led and other minilateral frameworks that will help Seoul prevent the worst effects of any potential backlash from China. Furthermore, South Korea is not thinking about breaking economic links with China not only due to the economic benefits, but also because economic interdependence gives Seoul a modicum of leverage over Beijing—particularly in high-tech sectors in which it maintains a comparative advantage. In a sense, this has been Japan's position. Tokyo sees minilateral frameworks and economic interdependence with China as means to strengthen its position vis-à-vis Beijing, rather than simply weaknesses and threats.

Seoul's diversification of its foreign policy and security links should also help it mitigate the effects of any potential backlash from Beijing. Certainly, South Korea is not the only country doing this. Australia and Japan are also expanding ties with NATO. Along with Seoul, Tokyo has become the EU's main security and

diplomatic partner in Asia and the Indo-Pacific—a move that has coincided with Brussels becoming warier of close links with China. Yoon's push for stronger ties with Japan will be helpful if a new U.S. president challenges the value of Washington's alliances, as Trump did, and not only to deter China's aggressiveness. So would be Seoul's moves to strengthen links with Australia, India, and multiple Southeast Asian countries. This is the same policy that Japan, as well as Australia, is pursuing. In short, Asian and Indo-Pacific middle power are boosting ties among themselves and with outside partners as means to address their concerns about China, and to navigate Sino-American rivalry.

Conclusion

Having attained middle power status over two decades ago, South Korea is now getting ready to move to the next level. Can it become a GPS or pivotal power? The answer is yes. South Korea certainly has the capabilities, know-how, and, crucially, intention to be a more proactive actor in global affairs. While Yoon Suk-yeol is not the first president to set South Korea down the path of greater focus on global issues at the expense of Korean Peninsula or regional affairs, South Korea's ever-growing capabilities coupled with an international system defined by Sino-American competition, leading to growing cooperation among "like-minded" partners," should, arguably, help him bring Seoul closer to its goal.

To this end, South Korea should ensure that it becomes part of agreements and groupings that increasingly are replacing global governance institutions as the primary arena where consequential decisions are being made. This does not mean leaving aside its role in multilateral organizations, which it has been building up for decades. But it does mean taking a proactive approach towards new institutions and frameworks, many of which are being led by the U.S.. The Yoon government's decision to join IPEF and the Chip-4 alliance from the outset are cases in point. So is Yoon's and, previously, Moon's embrace of NATO-AP4 cooperation. And sometimes South Korea will need to knock on the door of existing frameworks, most notably that of the G7.

This does not mean "choosing sides" between China and the U.S., at least in the Cold War sense of joining one bloc and essentially cutting ties with the other. No U.S. partner is ready to do so, not even Japan that maintains strong economic ties and is setting up a military hotline with China. But Seoul will find it easier to cooperate with the U.S. and other "like-minded" partners with which it shares interests and, crucially, values. Unless Beijing shifts its generally assertive behavior and Washington starts to see its relationship with China

differently, Sino-American competition will continue. And South Korea will find itself in the U.S.-led camp more often than not. But that is inevitable for a country that wants to be a pivotal power, and wants to have a voice in regional and global affairs that, today, neutrality does not allow for.

South Korea can and should try to become one of the small foreign policy whales that can have great influence in global affairs. After all, the South Korea of 2023 possesses strong economic, diplomatic, military, and soft power capabilities. The way it uses them will determine whether it achieves pivotal, or small whale, status.

Endnotes

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[2] I develop this point in more detail in my book South Korea's Grand Strategy: Making Its Own Destiny (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2023), which analyses the country's grand strategy and foreign policy from the inauguration of the Sixth Republic in 1988 until the present.

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[29] This point is based on multiple private conversations and interviews with policy-makers from Canada, the EU, South Korea, and the U.S. throughout 2021-23.

[30] This point is based on multiple private conversations and interviews with policy-makers from NATO and NATO members throughout 2022-23.

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