

Impact of Russian Invasion of Ukraine on East Asian Security

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1. Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a serious challenge to the fundamental norm of the international community. Obviously, it is a blatant violation of the United Nations Charter. Such an outright aggression has not happened for the three decades since Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. According to Tanisha Fazal, a sovereign state disappeared from the map of the world every three years on average from 1816 to 1945—a fact all the more alarming given that there were about a third as many states back then as there are now. In that period, about a quarter of all states suffered a violent death at one point or another.¹ Compared with that period, attempt to deny other countries' sovereignty by force is very rare in today's world. Border disputes take place in many places in the

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¹ Tanisha Fazal, "The Return of Conquest? Why the Future of Global Order Hinges on Ukraine" (2022/4/6), download date: 2023/5/23, 《*Foreign Affairs*》, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-06/ukraine-russia-war-return-conquest>.

world even today, but the Russia-Ukraine war is not a border dispute. For Ukrainians, it is an existential struggle for survival, and for Russia (or President Vladimir Putin), the end goal is the destruction of their sovereign nation as such.²

It has been swaying the rules-based international order. It is not a matter of Europe alone. The entire international order is at stake. If the international community accepted or acquiesced in the Russian aggression on Ukraine, similar violence would easily happen elsewhere as well. Relating to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the National Security Strategy of Japan states, "The possibility cannot be precluded that a similar serious situation may arise in the future in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in East Asia."³ This expression reminds us of Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's repeated statement that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow."⁴ This expression is usually referred to as a Ukraine analogy of Taiwan, but it should be understood in a much wider context. It is not just about Taiwan but about the entire international order.

With these in mind, this article touches upon the background of the invasion first, and then discusses the following three points: first, lessons learnt from the war so far; second, implications of the war on the East Asian security; and finally, what Japan should do for the Japanese national security.

2. Background of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Russia justifies its invasion of Ukraine by making three points: first, "the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bloc to the east and the advance of its

² Oxana Shevel, quoted in Taylor McNeil, "As the War in Ukraine Continues, Questions About How It Ends: With resistance to the Russian invasion much stronger than expected, the conflict's future is uncertain, Tufts experts say" (2022/3/16), download date: 2023/5/23, 《*TuftsNow*》, <https://now.tufts.edu/articles/ukraine-war-continues-questions-about-how-it-ends> Alumni%20e-news&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=news_alumni_03192022_(AS)(FLT).

³ Cabinet decision, *National Security Strategy* (Provisional Translation), (December, 2022), p. 2.

⁴ For example, "Keynote Address by Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue" (2022/6/10), download date: 2023/5/23, 《*Prime Minister's Office of Japan*》, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202206/00002.html.

military infrastructure ever closer to Russia’s border” ;⁵ second, “to protect people who have been subjected to abuse and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years,” and “the demilitarization and de-Nazification of Ukraine, as well as the prosecution of those who have committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation”;⁶ and third, the assertion that “modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia” and that “Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia – by separating, severing what is historically Russian land.”⁷ In relation to the third point, Putin even said, “Ukraine actually never had stable traditions of real statehood.”⁸

Though fallacy of these arguments does not require any explanation, Russian criticism of NATO expansion should be refuted here in this article as the argument might affect the discussion on the value of US alliance relationships in the Asia-Pacific.

Russia was not always against NATO’s eastward enlargement. Russia was cooperative in a certain degree until sometime in the recent history. In the meanwhile, NATO was rather negative about the admission of Central and East European countries because of its consideration to Russia.⁹ If Russia insists that NATO’s eastward enlargement became a menace to it, it must understand what made NATO have those Central and East European countries as its members. It is exactly because Russia has been regarded as a threat by those countries. They just needed the alliance in order to protect themselves from the Russian threat. NATO just opened its east entrance and the Central and East European countries came in through the door in the face of the growing threat of Russia. NATO is not to blame. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Finland

⁵ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 24 February 2022, 0600 hours, Moscow, The Kremlin,” Annex to the letter dated 24 February 2022 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (2022/2/24), p. 2, download date: 2023/5/23, 《United Nations Digital Library》, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3959647#record-files-collapse-header>.

⁶ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 24 February 2022, 0600 hours, Moscow”, p. 6.

⁷ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation” (2022/2/21), download date: 2023/5/23, 《The Kremlin》, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67828>.

⁸ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation” (2022/2/21).

⁹ Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2022* (Tokyo: 2022), p. 8.

and Sweden applied for the NATO membership and Finland was already accepted. NATO enlargement is continuing against Russia's opposition because Russia invaded Ukraine. It is an own goal of Russia.

The Defense White Paper of Japan mentions a few military factors as background of the invasion. Possibility of Russia's optimistic assessment on Ukraine's will and military capability to resist invasion based on Russia's success experience of annexation of Crimea in 2014 and also Russian confidence about its own military capability improvements through structural reforms and modernization under the Putin administration.¹⁰ If these are in the background of the Russian decision to invade, the Russian judgement proved to be wrong.

3. Lessons learnt from the war

There are a number of lessons learnt so far from the Russia-Ukraine war. At least there are eight points as follows:

First, the international norm against use of force was reaffirmed. The fundamental rule enshrined in the UN Charter is the basis of the international condemnation of Russia. However, the rule is not equipped with a mechanism to enforce. How to enhance the validity of the rule remains a big challenge for the international community.

Second, international security cannot be divided. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, "What happens in Europe matters to the Indo-Pacific. And what happens here in Asia matters to NATO."¹¹ Security of Europe is indivisibly connected with peace of Asia.

Third, self-help is critical for the state's national security and for the protection of its nationals. Sovereign states must be always prepared, physically and spiritually.

¹⁰ Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2022*, p. 11.

¹¹ "Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the CHEY Institute during his visit to the Republic of Korea 30 Jan. 2023" (2023/1/30), download date: 2023/1/31, 《*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*》, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_211296.htm.

Both capability to defend and will to resist are indispensable. Otherwise, other countries will not come to help.

Fourth, alliance and partnership are also indispensable. While self-help is critical, it is an illusion to think that a country can protect its sovereignty all by itself in today's world because of the huge destructive capability of the modern military and also because of the highly connected nature of the international community. Some years ago, NATO was said to be brain-dead, but it is not the case any longer.

Fifth, traditional type of warfare with guns, tanks and manned aircraft happens, and therefore the state must be prepared for it, too. Victory cannot be achieved without munitions and missiles. Cyber operations play an important role, but it is also important to be prepared for warfare in the physical space.

Sixth, food, energy and natural resources are easily weaponized. So, it is indispensable to raise resiliency and enhance comprehensive national power, including economic capabilities.¹²

Seventh, skill of the national leader particularly in crisis management and international communication is indispensable, too. International presence of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, online and in person, has been outstanding since the outset of the Russian invasion.

Eighth and finally, security of countries which abandoned nuclear armament is a must. Victory of Ukraine will be a significant step for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Ukraine eliminated all nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union from its territory and in return it obtained security assurance from Russia, the UK and the US by signing Budapest Memorandum in 1994. The international community must recall that

¹² “Comprehensive national power” is a term used in the National Security Strategy of Japan. The main element of “comprehensive national power” for Japan’s national security are diplomatic capabilities, defense capabilities, economic capabilities, technological capabilities and intelligence capabilities. Japan will achieve its national security objectives, harnessing its comprehensive national power, in accordance with the National Security Strategy. (Cabinet decision, “National Security Strategy (provisional translation)” (2022/12/16), download date: 2023/2/26, 《*Ministry of Defense*》, pp. 11-12, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/pdf/security_strategy_en.pdf).

Russia is a signatory of the agreement which reaffirmed “their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine.”

There will be more lessons in future as the war continues. We have to keep watching the situation closely.

4. Impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on East Asian security

The Russian invasion of Ukraine will continue to affect the security environment of East Asia into the future. This article touches upon the following three points.

First, the impact on the North Korean situation. The Russian invasion of Ukraine set a bad example for North Korea. North Korea’s denuclearization has become increasingly difficult due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There are three points here.

One, effectiveness of nuclear blackmail. North Korea probably believes that Russia’s nuclear blackmail is effective in order to deter NATO and American forces from direct military involvement in the war. If so, it is pretty certain that North Korea has more confidence in the utility of the nuclear weapon.

Two, security assurance toward non-nuclear states. North Korea suggested in the past that Iraq and Libya collapsed and Syria was attacked due to their lack of nuclear arms.¹³ Probably North Korea believes that if Ukraine had not given up the nuclear weapons inherited from the former Soviet Union, Russia would not have invaded. It also suggests that the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 did not work for Ukraine. Credibility of international security commitment was heavily damaged. Kim Jong Un must have strengthened his determination to retain nuclear arms, or he will use the Ukraine example as a convenient excuse for North Korean nuclear armament.

Three, sanctions against nuclearization. The international community is

¹³ Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2019* (Tokyo: 2019), p. 97.

preoccupied with the Ukraine issue and lacks attention to North Korea even though it kept launching ballistic missiles in a record-high frequency.¹⁴ In November 2022, immediately after North Korea's ICBM launch, China and Russia defended the North Korean position in the UN Security Council and the Security Council could not issue a statement to condemn North Korea.

In February 2022, China and Russia released a joint statement, in which the two countries “oppose further enlargement of NATO and call on the North Atlantic Alliance to abandon its ideological cold war approaches.” They also “reaffirm that the new inter-State relations between Russia and China are superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era,” and says, “Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation.”¹⁵ Actually, their bilateral relationship has limits as suggested in Putin's statement on September 15, 2022 to Chinese President Xi Jinping that Russia understood that China had “questions and concerns” about the war in Ukraine. It is a notable, if cryptic, admission from Putin that China may not fully approve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.¹⁶ However, they did cooperate to defend the position of North Korea.

Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to expect the international community to be united on sanctioning North Korea even if North Korea conducts a nuclear test explosion.

Second, the impact on the mind of China.

China and Russia reaffirmed their partnership in the Joint Statement of

¹⁴ The number of ballistic missile launches was 59 in 2022. It was a record high. It is far more than 23 launches in 2016, 17 launches in 2017, and 25 launches in 2019. “Kitachousen-niyoru kaku-misairu kaihatsu-ni tsuite” [On the nuclear and missile development by North Korea] (2023/2), download date: 2023/5/27, 《*Ministry of Defense*》, p. 2, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/surround/pdf/dprk_bm_2023.pdf.

¹⁵ “Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development” (2022/2/4), download date: 2022/2/5, 《*The Kremlin*》, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>.

¹⁶ Anton Troianovski, Keith Bradsher and Austin Ramzy, “Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Chinese Support for Putin's War Looks More Shaky After Summit” (2022/9/15), download date: 2022/9/16, 《*New York Times*》, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/15/world/ukraine-russia-war>.

February 4, 2022, as already noted. As Russia will grow exhausted by the war and by the international sanction, Russia will not be a much dependable partner for China, but China will continue to partner with Russia in order to counter the US-led “encirclement.” Russia’s role as a major provider of arms will be also important for China.

In terms of the possibility of Chinese use of force against Taiwan, we should be careful about likening the situation of Ukraine with that of Taiwan too easily. Russia denies the statehood of Ukraine and China denies the statehood of Taiwan as well, but the situations involving the two are not the same. The Russian invasion of Ukraine will not automatically enhance the possibility of China’s use of force against Taiwan.

Ukraine is adjacent with Russia on land, but China and Taiwan are separated by 100km of waters. Projection of Chinese ground force on Taiwan would not be easy. During the past 15 months, Ukraine is fighting back hard against Russia, imposing tremendous cost on Russia. So, Taiwan’s resistance could not be underrated.¹⁷

Seeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Taiwanese people are more vigilant than before. The world has been paying more attention to Taiwan. Today, reference to the importance of the peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is quite common in various diplomatic statements of western powers.¹⁸ As Taiwan has become a focal point of international security, it must not be easy for China to use force against Taiwan without paying huge political cost.

The US military forces might come in to fight for the defense of Taiwan once Taiwan is invaded because Taiwan is an important partner of the US. The reason

¹⁷ Yasuhiro Matsuda points out that differences are more numerous than similarities between Ukraine and Taiwan. (Yasuhiro Matsuda, “How Will the Ukraine War Change the New US-China Cold War? --- The Impact of Xi Jinping’s Decisions on the Taiwan Strait Situation,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 2022), p. 126.)

¹⁸ One of the most recent examples is G7 Hiroshima Leaders’ Communiqué of May 20, 2023. Its fifty-first clause has the following sentence: “We reaffirm the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as indispensable to security and prosperity in the international community.” The Hiroshima Accord between Japan and the UK on May 18 also includes the following expression: “We reaffirm the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element in the security and prosperity of the international community

Taiwan's security is important to the US is well summarized by the statement of Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defense before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on December 8, 2021. His points are three: geography, economy and value.

He said, "Taiwan is located at a critical node within the first island chain that is critical to the region's security and critical to the defense of vital U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific. Geographically, Taiwan is also situated alongside major trade lanes that provide sea lines of communication for much of the world's commerce and energy shipping."

He also said, "Taiwan is also integral to the regional and global economy. Its free-market economy embraces innovation, entrepreneurship, and private-sector led growth, which has helped Taiwan become a valuable economic and trade partner for the United States. Indeed, our economy—like many others around the world—has come to count on Taiwan as a critical supplier of high-technology, including semiconductors."

Finally, he pointed out, "Taiwan is a beacon of democratic values and ideals. In stark contrast to deepening authoritarianism and oppression in the PRC, Taiwan has proven the possibilities of an alternative path to that of the Chinese Communist Party."¹⁹

Although Taiwan is not a formal ally of the US and the US policy toward the security of Taiwan is "strategic ambiguity," the US commitment toward Taiwan is becoming less ambiguous because of President Biden's reference to American commitment to Taiwan several times in the recent past.

With all these in mind, it might be rather safer to say that the Ukraine war made China exercise caution in addressing the Taiwan issue by force. However, there are counter-arguments on this point.

For example, Bhaskar Chakravorti argued, "The United States and other governments will shrink from imposing sanctions on China that are even remotely as drastic as what they imposed on Russia. Western economic interests are far too

¹⁹ "Statement By Dr. Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, Office of the Secretary of Defense Before the 117th Congress Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate" (2021/12/8), download date: 2022/5/2, 《*United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*》, p. 1, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/120821_Ratner_Testimony1.pdf.

intertwined with China's," and concluded, "Despite the rising tension with China, it is hard to see how the Ukraine war set a precedent for a confrontation with a vastly bigger economic power such as China."²⁰

For another example, Bonny Lin and John Culver argued, "China's willingness to use force is a political decision that is shaped by more than just assessments of military capabilities. Even if China is not confident it can successfully execute an amphibious invasion of Taiwan, Beijing could believe that the geopolitical and internal costs of not using force outweigh the risk of military failure," and "It is possible that the conflict may introduce some near-term uncertainty and doubts into the PLA's assessments of its military capabilities. However, in the long-term, the PLA can learn from the Ukraine conflict and could adjust its military plans for Taiwan to be more lethal, faster, and more escalatory." They also expressed a view similar to that of Chakravorti, arguing, "China's economic and financial heft significantly surpasses that of Russia, and Beijing may believe that economic sanctions could be more difficult to implement against China without significant collateral damage to global trade, supply chain, and financial institutions." However, they did not forget to mention Taiwan's will and capacity, and said, "Yet given Ukraine's strong resistance, the PLA may need to reconsider its prior assessment of Taiwan's will and capacity to resist."²¹

The above-quoted views are not necessarily different from each other. Lin and Culver also posed some questions, "As Taiwan learns from Ukraine, key questions the PLA may face are: Is it possible for China to limit deaths and atrocities committed against civilians in an invasion of the island? Even if the PLA can gain control of Taipei quickly, would China face a long war of resistance in other parts of Taiwan? Does the

²⁰ Bhaskar Chakravorti, "Why the Corporate Flight From Russia Is No Precedent for China: Businesses are unlikely to face similar pressures in an Asian crisis" (2022/3/23), download date: 2022/4/18, 《*Digital Planet*》, <https://sites.tufts.edu/digitalplanet/why-the-corporate-flight-from-russia-is-no-precedent-for-china/>.

²¹ Bonny Lin and John Culver, "China's Taiwan Invasion Plans May Get Faster and Deadlier: Russian mistakes offer some warnings for Beijing's ambitions" (2022/4/19), download date: 2022/4/21, 《*Foreign Policy*》, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/19/china-invasion-ukraine-taiwan/>.

Russian Army's poor performance demonstrate even greater risks for the PLA, which last fought a war in 1979?"²²

Related to these questions, an episode of the history of US-China relations seems suggestive. In October 1975, when Henry Kissinger, the then Secretary of State and National Security Adviser, met with Chairman Mao Tse-tung in the Chairman's residence in Beijing, Mao discussed the Taiwan issue with Kissinger, saying, "It should be in your hands. And if you were to send it back to me now, I would not want it, because it's not wantable. There are a huge bunch of counter-revolutionaries there. A hundred years hence we will want it (gesturing with his hand), and we are going to fight for it."²³ Presence of "a huge bunch of counterrevolutionaries" is even more true in Taiwan today.

Setting aside the possibility of the Chinese use of force against Taiwan in the short run, China will continue to hone its military capability, learning much from the Russia-Ukraine war, and the military balance between China on the one hand and the US and its allies and partners on the other will tilt toward the Chinese side.

Finally, Russia in Northeast Asia. Russia's decline particularly in its economy and ground force will be inevitable, but damage to the Russian navy is slight so far and the nuclear force remains intact. Russia will probably try to maximize the use of its naval and nuclear forces in order to exercise its influence. Russia has been deploying its SSBNs and SLBMs in the Barents Sea as well as in the Sea of Okhotsk.²⁴ If the tension rises between Russia and the US, the tension will be extended to the Sea of Okhotsk. Japan could not be indifferent to such a situation.

²² Lin and Culver, "China's Taiwan Invasion Plans May Get Faster and Deadlier".

²³ "124. Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, October 21, 1975, 6:25-8:05 p.m.," download date: 2023/1/22, 《Office of the Historian, Department of State》, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v18/d124>.

²⁴ Nakasone Peace Institute, "2022 nendo kaiyo-anzenhoshou-kenyuiinkai-kenkyu-houkoku: indo-taiheiyou chiiki-no anteika-to kiki-eno nihon-no taio [2022 Report of Maritime Security Research Committee: Japan's response to the stabilization and crisis of the Indo-Pacific region]" (2023/3), p. 18.

5. Conclusion

The new National Security Strategy states that Japan's security environment is as severe and complex as it has ever been since the end of World War II.²⁵ The Russian invasion of Ukraine heightened the Japanese sense of crisis. There are so many challenges for Japan's own national security. The National Defense Strategy enumerates three pillars of Japan's national defense: strengthening Japan's own architecture for national defense; joint deterrence and response by the Japan-US Alliance; and collaboration with like-minded countries.²⁶ Thus, this essay concludes by indicating a few points on each of the three pillars.

First, Japan's self-help for its national defense. Continuous efforts in time of peace are truly critical as it takes much time to fully prepare. It is important to make the military operations sustainable by procuring and stockpiling munitions, fuel and spare parts. Cyber operational capability is increasingly important while the importance of traditional physical military capability should not be underrated. Protection of civilians is also important. As non-combatants, they must be well protected. So, shelters must be built. As national will to resist any invasion is the basis of all the efforts for national defense, public education on the importance of national defense should be enhanced.

Second, the Japan-US Alliance. Stationing of US forces on the soil of Japan is a clear sign of the US commitment. It is not just a symbolism but a visible proof of joint operation in time of need. Therefore, it is important to provide dependable stationing environment for the US military. As infrastructure for effective operations of the US forces is very important, civilian seaports and airports should be available for the use of the US forces with priority in case of emergencies. Host nation support should be regarded as part of the efforts to enhance the credibility of the US extended deterrence, but much more should be done to ensure the US nuclear umbrella is more credible. For example, Japan-US bilateral dialogue on extended deterrence should be deepened to make joint decision-making on nuclear deterrence possible. As deterrence

²⁵ Cabinet decision, "National Security Strategy", p. 2.

²⁶ Cabinet decision, "National Defense Strategy", (Provisional Translation)" (2022/12/16), pp. 10-23.

is a psychological warfare to work on the will of adversaries, it is hard to notice that the deterring power is winning, but it does not mean that deterrence is illusion. History already shows it is real, but without political efforts to convince the public, it will not be effective. Public education on extended deterrence is also important.

Third and finally, international partnership. Security of the international community is one. In order to address Russia as well as China simultaneously, trilateral partnership of Japan, the US and Europe (NATO and EU) has a great deal of significance. Partnership with other US allies in this region such as Australia, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Canada should be also enhanced. Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (JDSC) signed between the prime ministers of Japan and Australia last October states, “We will consult each other on contingencies that may affect our sovereignty and regional security interests, and consider measures in response.” A similar expression is found in the Hiroshima Accord between Japan and the UK. The section on “Interoperable, Resilient, and Cross-Domain Defence and Security Cooperation” has the following phrase: “Commit to consult each other on important regional and global security issues and consider measures in response.” These agreements are important steps to cement the security partnerships. And, the Japan-US “2+2” Joint Statement of January 11, 2023 states in the context of the two countries’ exploration of effective Alliance command and control relationship, “The (“2+2”) Ministers also shared the need to improve effective coordination with partner countries for more robust policy and operational cooperation.” Thus, the dividing line between the Japan-US Alliance cooperation and Japan’s international security cooperation with other partners is becoming low and these two pillars are becoming more intertwined. Capitalizing on this trend, synergy of these two pillars should be explored. In this context, coordination with partners should include that with Taiwan as the security of Taiwan is closely linked to that of Japan and coordination between the two sides will be inevitable.

By making these significant efforts, Japan will be able to impose higher costs on its adversaries if they try to change the status quo by force, and these Japanese efforts will contribute to regional and global stability.