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A New Chapter in the Korea-Japan Relations Opens

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Putin’s Strategic Miscalculation

All odds are going against the new Czar Putin’s expectations regarding the War in Ukraine. The war becomes more protracted as the world becomes united against Putin and the Ukrainian people’s will to fight becomes stronger and stronger under President Zelensky’s leadership. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is fundamentally changing the security and economic order of Europe, which has been maintained for 30 years since the post-Cold War. European countries are collectively seeking a new security and economic order against Russia’s irresponsible and anti-humanitarian conduct of war. Finally, Finland and Sweden, which have maintained a neutral nation’s status since World War II, decided to join NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), further isolating Russia. European countries are trying to strengthen the collective security organization between democratic countries, after seeing Ukraine become a victim of Russian President Putin’s attempt to rebuild the glory of
the former Soviet Union with military forces.

European countries are realizing that security and economics are very much interrelated and inexorable. The post-Cold War European countries maintained a line of "energy to Russia, security to the United States." As a result, Russia accounted for 41.1% of the EU's natural gas imports at the end of 2020, 26.9% of crude oil, and 46.7% of coal.13 Russia made money by exporting energy and developed military power with that earned money, and used Europe's dependence on energy as diplomatic and security cards to extract benefits from Europe. The Ukrainian war has caused Europe to rethink the impact of their energy dependence on Russia upon foreign policy and security, thus resulting in their realization that separating its economy and security turned out to be strategically wrong. Now, European countries are looking for alternative energy sources by trying to stop importing energy from Russia in line with U.S. and EU sanctions against Russia.14 In timely fashion, the EU Commission classified nuclear energy as carbon-neutral in February 2022, and countries, including Germany, that stopped nuclear energy production are also trying to return to nuclear power generation. The Ukrainian war shows that serious side-effects can occur when an authoritarian regime like Russia, not a liberal democracy, becomes a military power and an economic-rich country at the same time. This also arouses mankind's concern as to where an economic and military great power with an authoritarian regime like China will be headed.

Timely Strengthening of the ROK-US Comprehensive Strategic Alliance

Russia's invasion of Ukraine also awakened Koreans to look at the alliance from the bottom. South Koreans, who experienced a Communist regime brutally using military forces in the 1950 Korean War, now began to realize the importance of the alliance again. It is being largely appreciated among South Koreans that the former President Rhee Syng-man was the wisest and most future-oriented leader who persistently pursued for the signing of the Korea-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty, recognizing that under the Cold War rivalry between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union, South Korea's only way for survival, freedom, and development would depend on forging an alliance with the United States. As such, the Korea-U.S. alliance has contributed to peace, stability, and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia for 70 years since its signing in 1953.

Now, based on Korea's grown democracy, economy, and technology, global issues have been discussed in a comprehensive and in-depth manner, on an equal footing with the United States, to present a joint statement at the May 21st bilateral summit between President Yoon Suk-yeol and President Biden.15 The South Korea-U.S. alliance has evolved and developed steadily, but the previous administration's policy on North Korea has taken precedence over the alliance policy, causing harmful side effects on the South Korea-U.S. alliance and shaking the foundation of Korea's national security.

Nevertheless, the Korea-U.S. summit on the May 21st showed that South Korea is a "comprehensive strategic alliance" partner on an equal footing with the U.S. as a "global pivotal state contributing to freedom, peace and prosperity of the world." The Yoon-Biden summit, starting with economic issues such as President Biden's visit to high-tech industrial semiconductor manufacturers

and ending with military security issues such as extended deterrence, showed that the scope of the Korea-U.S. alliance is expanding from traditional military security to economic security and even to technology security.

Expansion and Development of the Alliance to a Technology Alliance

It is significant that the two countries agreed on ways to increase and present nuclear deterrence in response to North Korea's increasing nuclear and missile threats - the reactivation of a high-level Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group, which has been dormant during the Moon administration, and new measures to strengthen deterrence. The appearance of the leaders of South Korea and the U.S. in command of extended deterrence operations at the Korean Aerospace Operations Headquarters (KAO) at Osan Air Base was a reasonable measure to be entrusted by the people of the two countries.

Emphasizing the importance of economic security and technological security at the summit, the two Presidents agreed to expand and develop the Korea-U.S. alliance towards a technological alliance. This also serves the long-term national interests of both countries. Key emerging technologies, including advanced semiconductors, batteries for eco-friendly electric vehicles, artificial intelligence, quantum technology, biotechnology, bio-manufacturing, and autonomous robots, were included as cooperative fields of technological alliance. Global supply chain issues included the establishment of a resilient supply chain for major items such as semiconductors, batteries, core rare minerals, pre-detection of supply chain disturbances, and cooperative responses.

Supply chain and technology security agreed upon at the summit can be called 'new economic security'. Previously, 'economic security' meant a stable energy supply after the oil shock in the 1970s, protection of Sea Lanes of Communications, free access to resources and markets, and the establishment of a financial system that guarantees free economic activity. However, main issues under discussion in the international community nowadays related to new economic security issues include how to maintain an edge in trade and technological hegemony, stabilizing supply and demand of strategic materials such as rare raw materials, restoring supply chains and technological edges on standardization, developing vaccines after the pandemic, and developing new energy for carbon neutrality. Thus to make things clear and more salient, it is necessary for us to refer to this as "new economic security" instead of traditional economic security. To advance and attain national interests in the long-term, three things need to be considered from the national level.

The Concept of New Economic Security Urges a Nationwide Response

First, issues of new economic security cannot be dealt with wisely and effectively by only one ministry. It is possible only when pan-governmental and collaborative efforts through establishing a governance system with broad participation of industries, universities, research institutes, and governments will be made. The government should establish a joint public-private new economic security committee under the Prime Minister's direct control, appoint the chairman from the civilians, and the deputy head of the Cabinet Office should assist the chairman to coordinate and cooperate with each government department. When promoting economic and security-related cooperation between Korea and the U.S., it would be desirable for the chairman of the New Economic Security Committee to be the chairman of the Korea-U.S. Economic and Security Dialogue, and the President's economic...

and security secretaries of the two countries needs to be in charge of cooperation and coordination among various organizations rather than leading the economic security matter.

Second, in order to promote Korea’s nuclear energy industry and its export, which have stagnated over the past five years, nuclear industry must be restored. The nuclear power industry and the research ecosystem have come to a dead end due to the ruthless anti-nuclear energy movement of the former administration. Less than three months after the decision to suspend operation of the Gori-1 reactor, the Nuclear Power Promotion Commission decided to fund the decommissioning research project, saying that the future nuclear industry’s market is to foster dismantlement of nuclear power plants. It is ironic that the Nuclear Power Promotion Commission promotes the dismantlement of nuclear power plants, not the promotion of nuclear power. Wolseong Nuclear Power Plant No. 1 was permanently suspended even earlier than the closing date. In order to completely reverse this situation, first of all, interdisciplinary and collaborative cooperative efforts between social science and natural science are needed to explain fact-based correct information, usefulness, and safety of nuclear power plants to the public. In addition, international cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and advanced nuclear power countries is essential to persuade them that nuclear power plants are carbon-neutral energy with rationality and universality.

Currently, even though the first phase of pyro-processing research for reducing and recycling spent nuclear fuels has been successful, the feasibility of Sodium cooled Fast Reactors (SFR) is uncertain. Subsequently, promising small modular reactors include Lead-cooled Fast Reactors (LFRs) and Molten Salt Reactors (MSRs). Therefore, it is wise and prudent for the government to provide research funds to the candidate SMRs equally and fairly to enhance research efficiency and competitiveness.

Third, as stated in the joint statement of the Korea-U.S. summit, Korea and the U.S. should recalibrate and strengthen their mutual extended deterrence mechanism in a time of North Korea’s increasing nuclear and missile threats. In addition, South Korea should step up indigenous efforts to establish a Strategic Command which can combine existing capabilities and, at the same time, foster development of new capabilities so as to conduct joint warfare, either in conventional or nuclear war, by unifying all the services and various capabilities for one goal of defending and deterring against North Korea’s hybrid warfare. In this connection, it is equally important that strategists and experts and governments of South Korea and the United States should develop a new and effective rationale to delegitimize and defeat North Korea’s nuclear-peace logic according to which North Korea has been claiming that they have developed nuclear weapons because of the US hostile policy against North Korea and that they have to defend against Washington’s preemptive attack.\(^5\)

Although such a nuclear-peace logic is nothing but anti-American propaganda and based on fake-history, the governments and people of South Korea and the United States become easily confused because of frequently changing governments and people’s short-term views, such that there is a possibility that North Korea’s misleading logic can prevail. Therefore, it is wise to prevent such confusion from happening in advance.

Half of the year 2022 has already passed. In the history of the world, 2022 will be remembered as the year when the world political economy, which was barely set to escape from the COVID-19 pandemic, faced a major crisis once again because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Before the COVID-19 pandemic took over the world, competition and conflict between the United States and China were the biggest topics. During the Trump era, the trade conflict between the United States and China was very intense. However, the competition between the world's two largest economies has become more multifaceted and complicated after the inauguration of the Biden administration. Some call this the advent of the new Cold War, others call it a new hegemonic competition. Regardless of how you conceptualize the current competition between the two superpowers, it is causing a restructuring of power in the Indo-Pacific region. Then, as the war between Russia and Ukraine prolongs, a restructuring of power in Europe also accelerates. Even Sweden and Finland, the two long-standing neutral Nordic countries, are hoping to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Germany, which enjoyed peace after its reunification, has also raised the banner of rebuilding its army. The world situation seems to remain in foggy conditions for the time being.

Meanwhile, there were also major changes in South Korea's domestic politics in the first half of 2022. The presidential election was held in early March, as the presidential election schedule was changed after the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye five years ago, and for the first time in South Korean political history, an individual who had never won any election in his life, former prosecutor Yoon Seok-yeol, won the 20th presidential election by a thin margin. And on June 1, less than one month after the inauguration of the new president, the local elections and parliamentary by-elections were held. The result was a landslide victory of the People's Power Party (PPP), the ruling party. Nonetheless, it is difficult to say this result was because of the political success of the ruling party. Rather, it reveals the disastrous failure of the opposition Democratic Party of Korea. Although the Democratic Party still remains the majority party in the Korean National Assembly, the political scars and injuries will not be easily healed soon. According to the Korean political schedule, there will be no major elections until the next general election of the National Assembly that is to be held in April, 2024.

In Japan, since Kishida Fumio took office as prime minister in early October last year, the government has been running relatively stable. Prime Minister Kishida's approval rating has also been maintained at a fairly high level. The leading opposition party, the Constitutional Democratic Party, submitted a no-confidence motion against the Kishida cabinet, but it was rejected. There are some critical observations that the influence of his predecessors, such as Abe Shinzo and Aso Taro, is still strong, and Kishida is also acting very cautiously and showing some political compromises with the conservatives or majority within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). It is likely that Kishida will continue to watch his footing until he has certainty in winning the upcoming elections for the House of Councilors (Upper House), scheduled on July 10.
At this rate, the LDP is expected to win the Upper House election in July without difficulty, and the Kishida administration is expected to be more stable thereafter.

Optimists predict that the relationship between South Korea and Japan will be able to move forward as the ideological compatibility between the two leaderships, President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida, is well matched while having the current urgent challenges at the global level as well as the regional level. By contrast, pessimists say that the widening relationship between the two countries has gone too far to return to the good times, and will eventually stand still without resolving historical disputes. The purpose of this essay is to highlight some important points that should be considered in predicting the future of South Korea-Japan relations, which is facing another phase, and to make suggestions for a desirable future of their bilateral ties.

Economic Security

One of the most talked-about words since the recent Korean presidential election is "economic security". President Yoon emphasized the importance of economic security and declared that he would strengthen South Korea's economic security through bolstering economic partnerships with trusted countries such as the US. President Yoon's emphasis on economic security can be regarded as a reaction to the past. South Korea has taken a more pragmatic or two-track approach in the past years, which is so-called Kyung Choong An Mi, meaning the economy is China and the security is the US. However, now Yoon claims that the economy is security and security is the economy.

South Korea's pragmatic foreign policy used to be efficient and effective at a time when globalization progressed and a more cooperative mood existed between Washington and Beijing. However, in the current situation in which tensions between the US and China are escalating, the structural reorganization of the global value chain is in progress, and the digital transformation caused by the Fourth Industrial Revolution is accelerating, the boundary between conventional and non-conventional security has been blurring. Therefore, it is the position of the Yoon administration that security and the economy cannot be considered separately any longer.

There is a strong sense of déjà vu in President Yoon's claim. Almost the same argument was raised by the Kishida government in Japan half a year ago. Taking advantage of a time when the global supply chain is being restructured with having the US at the center, Japan is also trying to adjust its heavy dependence on China for trade. In particular, for strategically important parts such as semiconductors and batteries, Japan's plan is also to establish a supply chain based on cooperation with more reliable partners. Deepened economic cooperation between Japan and Taiwan can also be understood in this context. For example, Taiwan's TSMC, the No. 1 global foundry (semiconductor consignment production), decided in February of this year to invest 180 billion yen (about 1.9 trillion won) more than the original plan; in total, TSMC announced that it will invest 980 billion yen (about 10.15 trillion won) for the construction of a plant in Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan.

Likewise, economic cooperation between South Korea and the US is accelerating. President Biden visited South Korea only ten days after President Yoon took office and chose the Samsung Electronics' Pyeongtaek campus, the world's largest semiconductor factory, for his first destination. During his tour, Biden once again expressed his gratitude to Samsung Electronics for deciding to invest $17 billion in the US at the time of the South Korea-US summit between President Moon Jae-in and President Biden held in Washington in May of last year. He also said that the city of Taylor, Texas would produce the world's best semiconductors. On the last day of his visit to
South Korea, Biden met Hyundai Motor Chairman Chung Eui-sun and Chung promised a $5 billion investment to the US. The presence of Korean companies in Alabama, Georgia and Texas is expected to grow further in the near future.

It is clear that economic security is now an important topic that will reconnect Seoul and Tokyo. It is a good start for both countries to join the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) as founding members. The situation in which the disputes over historical issues were transferred to a trade conflict and further hampered security cooperation between the two countries should not be repeated. Historical disputes are subject to careful management, and complete resolution or absolute victory of one side is not even possible. Hopefully, the current leaderships of both countries will not repeat the mistakes of their predecessors.

Europe as a Mutual Friend

In discussing new horizons in South Korea-Japan relations, cooperation with Europe has become tremendously important in addition to the traditional notion of trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the US, and Japan, which is sometimes called a "virtual alliance". Although Europe is geographically distant from the Indo-Pacific region that South Korea and Japan belong to, as mentioned above, the presence of European countries has become more notable in the present situation in which the Indo-Pacific region as well as Europe are both undergoing power restructuring.

Although many experts are emphasizing the return of geopolitics due to the intensifying competition between the US and China and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, geopolitics has never disappeared and has always been there. Rather, the scope of military operations expanded as the compression of time and space, which David Harvey earlier spoke of, progressed due to the development of technology. North Korea has been spurring perturbing the US that is situated across the Pacific with ICBMs, and South Korea has become the 7th country in the world to successfully develop SLBMs. The United Kingdom, the US, and Australia launched AUKUS and strengthened their military cooperation in the sea using nuclear submarines as a medium. The development of technology also expanded the scope of traditional military operations. The current reality is that the realm of security, from cyberspace to cognitive warfare, is extended to the non-physical areas.

Even before Yoon was inaugurated as the new president, it was said that Washington was planning to invite President-elect Yoon to the NATO summit. And in early April of this year, then-Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong was invited to attend the NATO Ministerial Meeting, and his attendance was the first-ever for a South Korean foreign minister. On June 10, President Yoon also announced his decision to attend the upcoming NATO summit to be held in Madrid, Spain at the end of June, the first time ever for a Korean president. Taking this NATO summit as an opportunity to hold a summit between the two countries, it could be a good ice-breaker between the two countries. If we look back on the fact that the traditional trilateral dialogues among South Korea, the US, and Japan have shown certain limitations, I think that there can be some constructive changes from the past approaches through putting South Korea-Japan relations into a larger basket at this time of power restructuring.

Of course, there are still voices of criticism and concern at home and abroad. For those who have the view that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is mainly due to NATO’s eastward expansion, if South Korea and Japan, which are two economic powerhouses in East Asia, and both militarily and technologically competitive, join hands with NATO, it will be obviously offensive to China and Russia. Those critics would say that this will only cause greater unrest in the Indo-Pacific region. However, if South Korea and Japan just stay
within East Asia and only fight each other while immersed in historical issues that are difficult to resolve between the two, will that really help peace and security in this region? In a situation that is too difficult for South Korea and Japan to deal with individually, I think that it will help to stabilize the regional situation to some extent by expanding the partnerships to other regions and balancing the imbalanced situation. Furthermore, if multiple like-minded countries keep discussing and consulting with one another for greater purposes, we may find alternative solutions that are not visible or even thinkable when South Korea and Japan only look towards each other.

Beyond Past, Beyond Identity Politics

It is often said that the relationship between South Korea and Japan is very unique, mostly because of the historical reasons, but is this really true? Perhaps both South Korea and Japan have been too obsessed with seeing each other in their own fixed way. Of course, how the two countries see each other is interconnected with their views on their own history and national identity. However, in general, relations between neighboring countries are not good, which might need to be viewed as a natural thing, and between the aggressor and the victim, a residue that is difficult to wash away is bound to remain. But what really matters? Now, North Korea is increasing its threats against South Korea, Japan, and the US with various missile launches almost every other week. Now, North Korea is increasing its threats against South Korea, Japan, and the US with various missile launches almost every other week, cyber security became a real concern while moving to a digital society due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and now even human security is seriously threatened by climate crisis, food crisis, and public health crisis. Do South Korea and Japan really want to be stuck in the current state forever? The answer cannot be yes.

Identity politics that often cause mutual resentment and hatred is seductive for populist politicians. However, we need to remember that national identity is not something permanently fixed. Rather it has been changing and can be changed. Just as our present identity is a product of our past, our future identity depends on what we do today. I strongly request the leaderships of the two countries to present different narratives and different visions for their own people as a new chapter of the Korea-Japan relation opens.

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