

An Analysis of the Ukraine Situation and Future Prospects

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1. What is the background of the war in Ukraine

Although I am a scholar myself, it is very burdensome and painful, as a human being, to academically analyze and comment on the war in Ukraine, where a lot of people are suffering. But since it is my duty, I shall get started with today's presentation on the war in Ukraine.

First of all, if we look into the nature of the war in Ukraine, we only perceive the current crisis in terms of the war between Russia and Ukraine, but in fact, this war needs to be understood within the framework of the 'triple war'.

First, this war is an extension of the Donbas War, a war between Ukraine and the separatist groups in the Donbas region of Ukraine. The Donbas War broke out as the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR, respectively) in the Donbas region sought independence from Ukraine in 2014, and has lasted for eight years as the violations of the Minsk Protocol continued. Second, it is a state-to-state war between Russia and Ukraine. It is a war between Ukraine who presses for membership in NATO and Russia who tries to stop Ukraine from joining NATO. Lastly, it is a war between Russia and the West, which is just as important as Russia-Ukraine war. It has a major geopolitical implication, for it is a war between the West, which seeks to restore and maintain a liberal international order, and Russia, which seeks to embody the principles of geopolitical realism in the region. The contexts of these three wars must be examined to fully grasp the reality of the war in Ukraine.

2. How did the war in Ukraine begin?

I would like to analyze the beginning of the war in Ukraine by its cause and the immediate cause. The cause of the war, which constitutes the background of the outbreak of the first Ukrainian war, can be found in the conflict between the West and Russia. It would not be an overstatement to say that Russia, which emerged after the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, dreamed of building a new New World Order while participating and cooperating in managing the world as a member of Europe. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia weakened in the process of domestic political chaos and regime change. Thus, there were considerable limitations for Russia to effectively act as a member of the Western developed world. But to the question of whether the West, including Europe and the United States, was willing to accept Russia as an important partner in the first place, I can give you that the answer is ‘no’.

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been conflicting arguments in Europe regarding the European security order. On one side stand those from the standpoint of ‘Atlanticism’ who argue that the United States and Western Europe must be central to the European security order. On the other are ‘Europeanists’ who argue that European countries should play a central role. Within Europeanism, groups are again divided into a position that Europe, including Russia, should be central in the traditional sense and a position that calls for the creation of a large Europe that covers the United States and Russia. The organization that embodies Atlanticism is NATO, and the organization that embodies Europeanism was then the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe(CSCE), which later changed to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe(OSCE).

Following these arguments, the U.S.-led NATO eventually became the basic framework of the European security order. Russia, however, was not allowed to join NATO, and the European order was reorganized in the direction of strengthening the European security order without Russia. The problem was that NATO was gradually expanding into the East. In the process of expanding eastward, there were agreements between Russia and NATO that NATO forces would not be deployed to new NATO members, but these promises were gradually ignored. It is true that the deployment of U.S. air bases and NATO troops, as well

as the deployment of the U.S.-led missile defense system, in the new NATO member states have put considerable pressure on Russia. But even with this background, it is hard to say that Russia started the war right away for such reason.

Russia did not have a strong voice in opposing the former communist countries from joining the European Union and NATO, and even when Russia spoke out, Western countries would not listen. But Russia has strongly opposed countries that seceded from the Soviet Union, such as Georgia and Ukraine, from joining NATO, considering it a very big threat. This is as much threat as what the United States went through when the Soviets deployed missiles in Cuba. Ukraine and Georgia's admission to NATO is a threat at that much level. After all, the European security order system, which does not take into account Russia's security, poses a significant threat to Russia. Following this line of thought, Russia's shift from defensive to offensive defense led to increased conflict with the West, which became the background of the war.

In addition, the United States' check on Russia is probably one of the main causes. Since Russia would remain a significant military power even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a measure that weakens Russia's military force to prevent from ever recovering to the same level has been set as a significant goal in U.S. defense and security policy. This position, stated by then Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz, was later detailed in "The Grand Chessboard" written by Zbigniew Brzezinski who served as President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor. In his book, Brzezinski already predicted that Ukraine will become a very significant geopolitical axis. As such, it can be noted that the current situation in Ukraine is the result of the U.S. defense and security policy to keep Russia in check.

So then we need to look at the immediate causes of the war, how this background worked specifically for this war that is happening right now. If Ukraine were to join NATO, the intense Russian backlash was expected. So European countries wanted to deal with Georgia or Ukraine's NATO membership very carefully. In particular, Germany and France seem to have understood that Ukraine's admission to NATO was not such a simple matter. In Georgia's case, however, Georgia began the war in 2008 to overcome the main obstacle in joining NATO, which was the separatist conflict. Georgia attacked South Ossetia to eliminate

separatist forces within its territory, such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and achieve territorial integration. However, Russia-Georgia War broke out as Russia did not sit by and watch the attacks on the separatist forces which they supported and thus, intervened. European countries saw through this complicated situation and were taking a very cautious stance. However, the United States did not abandon its policy of trying to check and weaken Russia by actively admitting countries like Georgia to NATO. At the 20th NATO summit at Bucharest in 2008, the United States expressed strong support for Ukraine and Georgia's NATO membership and this led to a clear conflict between the United States and Russia. Meanwhile, European countries such as Germany and France, unlike the United States, continued to debate with reservations about Ukraine and Georgia's fast admission to NATO.

But the problem is that the United States has continued to provide military support to Ukraine since 2014. With the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine in 2013-4, the pro-Russian regime was overthrown and a pro-Western regime emerged. In this process, very strong measures were taken against pro-Russian groups, regions, and the Donbas region, which was advocating separatism, and frequent incidents of racist terrorism were reported. In Ukrainian politics, pro-Western, anti-Russian nationalism has intensified. This change naturally led to strengthened policy of actively promoting NATO membership in Ukraine, and the U.S.-military support for Ukraine has given further support to this anti-Russian, pro-Western nationalism in Ukraine. From this perspective, it seems clear that this is a war that emerged during the escalating conflict between Russia and Ukraine over ethnic issues.

3. What is the cause of the war in Ukraine?

As the talk about the war in Ukraine emerged in last November, the U.S. has raised concerns for the war crisis in Ukraine in December, and in fact, the intelligence confirmed that Russia was increasing its troops near the Ukrainian border. Many experts at the time predicted that the heightened crisis would not lead to a war, but would simply be a threat. What's interesting is that the U.S. continued to spread rumors of war in this process, and European and NATO officials complained that the U.S. was escalating the crisis and creating the war atmosphere.

There are two possible reasons why the United States strongly raised the alert on war. One is because the U.S. assessed that Russia would definitely go to war. The other is that by spreading rumors of war, the U.S. gave warnings to the European countries and Ukraine, and at the same time, tried to prevent Russia from taking extreme actions. The U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has mentioned the latter intent, in this regard. But even experts who predicted that there would be no war saw the possibility of Russia starting a war under one condition. That is the situation where the Ukrainian government forces intensified their attacks on the separatists in eastern Donbas. Many experts have pointed out that if the attack on the eastern separatists become serious, Russia could intervene militarily and thus, it should be managed carefully. But the U.S. has shown no particular effort to watch out for Ukraine or to make other diplomatic solutions.

For about six to seven weeks from last December to mid-January, there was a multi-faceted ‘time of diplomacy’ to ease tension. Perhaps, it could be seen as an unintended failure of U.S. diplomacy, because the United States’ emphasis on the war crisis theory to prevent Russia’s dangerous behavior only reduced the scope for a diplomatic solution for Russia, Ukraine and the international community. It is regrettable that the United States has brought unintended consequences in terms of reducing the scope of diplomacy by emphasizing the imminent war. Macron’s aggressive mediation called for the possibility of a diplomatic solution to Ukraine’s neutrality and Russia also gave positive response. Nevertheless, the U.S. turned down all these efforts and led to Ukraine taking a more negative and unwilling stance. The regret that the two sides or other parties have not been more proactive in diplomacy leaves resonance when it comes to President Zelensky’s recent speech in which he admitted Ukraine would not be able to join NATO.

As time for diplomacy gradually diminished, I believe President Putin began to seriously consider the use of military force around January, when Ukrainian government attacks on separatist rebels in the Donbas region considerably escalated. As I mentioned before, the war in the Donbas region lasted for about a year from 2014 to 2015, and it seemed to be a ceasefire through the Minsk Protocol. The Minsk Protocol was drafted in the Normandy Format, involving Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany. The main content of this agreement

was to stop the military actions between the two sides and give extensive autonomy to Donetsk and Luhansk Republics. In other words, the basic focus was to keep the Donbas region in Ukraine's sovereignty, but to have autonomy and open the way for exchange and communication with Russia. However, Ukraine did not comply with the Minsk Protocol and has continuously attacked the Donbas region. Of course, Russia has raised issues concerning this.

Over seven years of the Donbas War, nearly 15,000 people were killed, and nearly 2.5 million pro-Russian residents in eastern Ukraine were exiled, deported or evacuated. But the international community has not handled the Donbas War properly. Russia has been raising issues about this, but the European security order has not responded. The escalated attacks on Donbas by Ukrainian government forces in early 2022 in the midst of escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine led to Russia officially recognizing the Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics. This eventually resulted in the abandonment of the Minsk Protocol and the outbreak of war. According to the OSCE reports, more than 3,000 violations of the Minsk Protocol have already been reported between January 24th and February 6th, just before the war broke out. Moreover, the OSCE report records show that explosions and bombings were significantly concentrated in the Luhansk and Donetsk Republic, indicating Ukraine's strong attacks. Some media reports that nearly 130,000 Ukrainian government troops targeted the Donbas region during this period. Against this backdrop, between February 23rd and 24th, Putin officially recognized the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk Republics and ordered a military operation. It is worth noting that the direct cause of the war was the continued violations of the Minsk Protocol and the increased Ukrainian offensive against the Donbas region.

Here, I presented the causes, immediate causes and triggers of war in the sense that we need to further examine what happened, not to judge who did wrong or who did well.

4. How will the war in Ukraine end?

Russia has been increasing its force and pressure on Ukraine since the war broke out, and this shows that Russia clearly will not stop this war until Russia meets its goals. There are two major conditions for Russia to end the war. The first is Ukraine's neutralization, along

with renouncement of pursuing NATO membership. The second is the acknowledgement that the Crimea is Russian territory and the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in the Donbas region as independent states. It is a negotiation for a ceasefire and peace, but Ukraine is playing a tug-of-war with Russia's demands for coordination, and most of these demands seem to have to be accepted by Ukraine. The problem is that as he started the war, President Putin made clear his goal of demilitarization and denazification, although the term is quite controversial, of Ukraine.

The unsystematic appearance of Russian military power continues to be reported in Western media, but military experts say that Russia is now thoroughly destroying important military bases and infrastructure in Ukraine through military operations. Russia has been at war for a considerable period of time with the aim of leaving no room for military resistance from Ukraine. In that sense, we can see that the demilitarization of Ukraine is an important objective of Russian military operations. Second, the term 'denazification' itself is very out of the blue. The term 'Nazi' is very provocative. After the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, Poroshenko's regime was made up of far-right nationalists, and since then, the far-right nationalist militant group called Azov regiment was included in the Ukrainian army. Centered around Azov regiment, there have been attacks on Donbas separatists, pro-Russian and Russian-speaking residents. In this regard, President Putin set the goal of thoroughly eliminating them and this is related to one of the reasons for the violent attack on Mariupol. Moreover, some commentators analyze this war as President Putin's 'revanchism' as they interpret it from the perspective of retaliation to pay back what pro-Russian residents suffered.

With regard to Ukraine's neutralization model, it is known that Russia wants Ukraine not to join any political and economic bloc like the model of Swiss neutrality. Ukraine, however, like Scandinavian countries, wishes to reach a compromise by interacting economically with the West but not joining military organizations like NATO. In the end, the Ukrainian neutralization model is likely to end up in the Scandinavian way in which neighboring countries and the UN guarantee Ukraine's security in document. So the questions that remain in the end are the independence of the two eastern republics and the attribution of the Crimea to Russia, and whether Ukraine concedes will be a very important condition. However, Ukraine's situation is pretty tough. If Zelensky makes too many compromises, the

strong right-wing forces in Ukraine are likely to deny Zelensky. President Zelensky should be quite concerned because there is a possibility of a prolonged civil war as various armed groups scattered around the country engage in guerrilla warfare. President Zelensky, who was not free from the responsibility that he should have prevented the war through a diplomatic solution, has showed heroic leadership in leading national resistance despite Western suggestions to defect. But while there is pressure to wage this war at the expense of the citizens until Russia meets certain conditions, Zelensky cannot help but care about internal right-wing opposition even if he wants to compromise with Russia. If Ukraine goes into disintegration or fragmentation, it is going to be a very difficult negotiation because we can expect far more devastating consequences.

If a compromise is reached and Ukraine accepts much of Russia's demands, renounces NATO membership, adopts a Ukrainian neutralization model and agrees on the independence of the Donbas region, Russia will meet its goal. It is hard to rule out the possibility of splitting Ukraine by incorporating the region from western Russia to the Crimea and possibly the southern coast to Russian territory when the war is not easily resolved. But this would be a highly contentious prospect. There is another scenario in which Russia goes through domestic political difficulty and retreats in general, leaving the Donbas region as a disputed area, but this seems very unlikely. What is clear is that no matter what the situation, the longer the war, the greater the damage to Russia as well as Ukraine.

5. How will the war in Ukraine affect international politics?

It is a little hasty to predict the international political impact of the war in Ukraine, but I'd like to point out a few things that we should pay attention to. First of all, coordination of the European security order is inevitable. The European security order that includes Russia has failed in the end. And now, the European security order that is at odds with Russia will be established. At the same time, the matter of how to embrace Russia should be considered. Experts are also divided on how well the West will maintain a united squad in the process of building a new European security order. There is a possibility that the European position and the U.S. position will not be fully aligned in the process of establishing a European security

order. The U.S. and Europe will have to go through difficult coordination, and there may be a debate about the armament and role of Germany in the process.

The second is the end of the Cold War. During the post-Cold War period, the confrontation based on ideology and logic of the camp disappeared, and the ‘liberal international order’ that the West, including the United States, wanted to create became the basis of the global order. After this end of the Cold War, the global order centered on the liberal international order will decline considerably. Regarding the future world order, many experts talk about ‘multipolar order’ as an alternative order to the liberal international order. However, the interpretation of ‘multipolar order’ varies. While there are those who understand ‘multipolar order’ as the order that major powers and the U.S. build altogether, Russia seems to take it in a more regional sense. In Russia’s stance, there are parts where a liberal international order centered on the West works, but other powers that disagree with it can create a regional order that embodies its own understanding within its own region. For instance, Russia wants to be recognized as a major power leading the Eurasian order. For China also wants to be recognized by creating its own influence in China, it can be seen that China and Russia support and cooperate with each other and aim for a multi-regional order. If Russia and China are pushed off because their order is a heretical one against the liberal international order of the West, they will work together to resist, protest and strengthen cooperation against Western challenges. Like this, the challenge to establish a new multi-polar-multi-regional order is expected to intensify.

Lastly, while security issues have been dealt with in combination with the soft and hard sectors until now, military security in the traditional sense has now begun to be emphasized again. This means that the global arms race is naturally escalating. And the stiffening of security issues may completely change the meaning of the current regional conflicts around the world. The entire world can become more unstable. The point that’s going to have a direct impact on us is that the U.S. used to be able to focus on Asian issues while less concerned about European issues, but now things have changed. The U.S. modified its military and security strategy since the end of the Cold War and even seemed to eventually step out of the Middle East, but now it seems like the U.S. needs to deliberate a strategy that considers at least two battlefields in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. If so, the

strategic competition between the U.S. and China would be reorganized and become quite conflicting. With the rigid security issues and the strategic competition between the U.S. and China following the formation of a new Cold War order, there is a possibility of a geopolitical confrontation between the northern and southern triangles in East Asia, especially Northeast Asia, a scenario in which Korea wishes to avoid the most. In other words, it is likely that the geopolitical confrontation between the northern triangle and the southern triangle, similar to the Cold War period, will be activated. There could be increased possibility of Korea's foreign and security policies facing considerable challenges.

6. What are the implications of the Ukraine crisis for Korea?

Two separate land blocks bumping against each other usually are not a problem, but when the pressure on each mass increases, the fault zone fluctuates and leads to an earthquake. Likewise, the point at which geopolitical spheres of influence meet is normally not problematic. But if this sphere of influence is directed at different orders or values, for instance, when liberal international order and multi-regional geopolitical realism collide, countries on this fault zone are exposed to serious diplomatic and security dilemma. Because the war in Ukraine showed that geopolitical pressures could go beyond heightened levels of geopolitical pressure and lead to concrete conflicts, intermediate states in geopolitical fault zone received strong warnings about this crisis.

In the process of activating the geopolitical fault zone, Ukraine's foreign and security policy went through a rapid shift in the balance between the two directions, pro-Western and pro-Russian. The problem is that this sudden shift in diplomatic and security balance creates internal divisions, which provide an excuse for intervention from the powers of both sides. Also, from the perspective of powerful countries whose benefit cost varies depending on the rapid change of the diplomatic balance of the geopolitical intermediate countries, they are tempted to take active or militant policies to fix the situation in their favor.

The painful experience Ukraine is going through can be reproduced in Korea at any time. Therefore, we should be careful of rapid changes of balance in foreign and security

policies, and find a perfect balance based on a precise evaluation of the environment and the national capabilities. It should also be considered that the government should continue its efforts to secure a space of diplomatic autonomy and create a space of autonomy that can withstand or digest the pressure from both sides. Finally, with geopolitical fault zones activated, domestic political divisions in relation to diplomatic issues can serve as a very dangerous vulnerability. Therefore, in order to establish a balanced diplomacy based on identity, it is necessary to strengthen the foundation of domestic political consensus on foreign and security policies. I would like to stress that we can secure support from neighboring countries only when we promote these foreign and security policies in a stable and consistent manner.

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