The Ukraine War and Northeast Asia

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Asia Policy, Volume 18, Number 2, April 2023, pp. 6-19 (Article)

Published by National Bureau of Asian Research

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2023.0031

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If we have learned anything about the international relations of Northeast Asia since the end of the Cold War, it is that exogenous shocks to the system can be highly disruptive to assumptions about the emerging regional order. Many scholars and governments expected an intensification of U.S.-China geopolitical rivalry in the early years of the George W. Bush administration, for example, but the events of September 11 shifted U.S. strategic priorities in a new direction. Rather than designating China as a “strategic competitor” as the Bush campaign had promised, the 2002 U.S. national security strategy declared that, while the United States would remain attentive to the possibilities for great-power rivalry, the common threat of terrorism gave an unprecedented opportunity “to build a world where the great powers compete in peace instead of prepare for war.”

The 2008–9 global financial crisis had an equally profound impact on China’s assumptions about the emerging regional order, convincing leaders in Beijing that the Western democracies were incompetent and that the United States was entering a period of secular decline. This reignited greater geopolitical rivalry rather than cooperation. At first, the Covid-19 pandemic seemed to confirm Beijing’s thesis that the East is rising and the West declining, but later phases of the pandemic undermined confidence in China’s own secular rise while reinforcing U.S. strategies for technology decoupling from China and closer U.S. alignment with allies and partners.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is the fourth major exogenous shock to Northeast Asian order since the end of the Cold War. In terms of national security, it is likely to be the most profound. One is always tempted to draw such conclusions when in the midst of a crisis and lacking perspective, but in this instance there are several reasons to expect that the impacts of

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2 Even the brilliant U.S. ambassador to London John Quincy Adams preemptively reported to Washington after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 that the world had profoundly changed to a Franco-centric system because he had seen reports from only the early fighting at Quatre Bras, which had gone Napoleon’s way.
Putin’s war in Ukraine on the international relations of Northeast Asia will be longer lasting than the effects of September 11, the global financial crisis, or the Covid-19 pandemic.

To begin with, these earlier disruptions were essentially transnational in nature. Some might point out that the global financial crisis originated in U.S. real estate markets or that the pandemic originated in China, but origin is not the same as intent. The United States did not intend to cause a global financial crisis, nor did Beijing likely intend to cause a global pandemic—even if we may find that Xi’s government bears considerable responsibility for accidental release of the virus and the subsequent cover-up. In contrast, Vladimir Putin did intend to use brute force to subjugate and incorporate another sovereign state into his own—and for the first time by a major power since World War II. This shocking revelation occurred at a time of growing geopolitical rivalry with China and therefore confirmed familiar, if distant, memories of nation-state revanchism and belligerence that suddenly seemed very real and dangerous for Northeast Asia.

In addition, whereas earlier transnational disruptions confronted governments with questions about the utility of their traditional national security toolkits, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated that traditional national security toolkits really do matter and precisely which tools are most effective on the battlefield. Governments in Northeast Asia have internalized those lessons and are moving quickly to build war-winning capabilities, often with multiyear development and procurement timelines.

Finally, Beijing’s ideational, diplomatic, and economic support and consideration of direct military assistance for Moscow all point to longer-lasting alignments and counter-alignments in the region that are being institutionalized in new agreements, treaties, and operational planning. These will not be undone or relaxed without a demonstrable change in China’s own strategic trajectory, which few expect to occur under Xi.

As this essay shows, these effects are evident in the ways that Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea), and Taiwan, as well as China, are each assessing the geopolitical implications of the Ukraine war, their assumptions about the nature of conflict in Northeast Asia going forward, and the lessons they draw in terms of building their own national security toolkits. At the same time, earlier constraints have not entirely disappeared. Demographic and financial limitations, lingering historical issues, internal politics, and changes of leadership will all be disruptive to these new national security trends at the micro level. Even with the
shock of the Ukraine invasion, one would not expect the national security establishments of the United States’ Northeast Asian friends and allies to deliver anything close to perfect solution sets. But they might just be good enough to preserve the peace.

And we do not yet know how this all ends, of course. While bloody stalemate seems the most likely near-term scenario in Ukraine, there are other plausible scenarios that range from Putin’s sudden fall from power to the use of Russian tactical nuclear weapons to even the defeat of Ukraine, as unlikely as that seems today. Tokyo, Seoul, and Taipei will be watching to understand what the unfolding conflict says about Putin’s success on the battlefield, Chinese intentions, and U.S. staying power.

**Japan: Abe’s Point Proven**

Putin’s invasion of Ukraine did not lead to discontinuity in Japan’s grand strategy, with the exception of its policy toward Russia itself. If anything, the war proved the validity of the assumptions behind Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s seminal 2013 National Security Strategy, which set the context for increasing defense budgets, greater external balancing through the Quad, and revised interpretations of Japan’s constitution to allow greater military integration with allies and expanded investment in a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.” But if the Ukraine war has not changed the direction of the grand strategy set during the Abe years, it definitely has shifted its pursuit into high gear.

The first and most immediate question for Tokyo after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was diplomatic. As prime minister, Abe cultivated a relationship with Putin in the hopes of weaning Russia away from China and creating more leverage vis-à-vis Beijing. There were many skeptics of this strategy within the foreign ministry and certainly the business community, which had limited interest in the risky investments in the Russian Far East needed to lubricate any diplomatic settlement over the disputed Northern Territories and deliver the “Russia card” for Abe. The skeptics in the foreign ministry probably had the ear of then foreign minister Fumio Kishida, who, as current prime minister, determined in the wake of the invasion that Tokyo would abandon its earlier outreach to Moscow and stand squarely with Washington and the G-7. Front of mind for Kishida’s government were the lessons Beijing would learn from the international community’s response to Putin’s actions and any success Russia enjoyed on the battlefield. As Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi
put it immediately after the invasion to explain why Japan would impose heavy sanctions on Russia, “China is watching.”

Japan’s diplomatic stance has hewn closely with that of the United States and NATO ever since. Senior Japanese officials and cabinet members have condemned Russian attacks on civilian targets “in the strongest terms”; dismissed proposals for a peace agreement that keeps Russia in control of occupied territories as an “unjust peace” and a “terrible precedent for the rest of the planet”; and expressed particular alarm at Russia’s dangerous reference to the use of nuclear weapons—an issue of national identity for Japan given its own history. Particularly noteworthy was the participation of Kishida and other leaders from the “Asia-Pacific 4” (now referred to as the “Indo-Pacific 4”), U.S. allies Japan, Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand, in the June 2022 NATO Summit.

This diplomatic stance generally reflects public sentiment—polls show that 89% of Japanese are closely following the war, compared to the global average of 70%; and 80% of Japanese respondents expressed concern about China in the wake of Putin’s invasion (though that is not a significant uptick of concern about China, which was already high before the war).

In terms of material support, Japan has been relatively less forthcoming than the NATO allies or Australia but more obliging than in any other international security crisis since September 11. In 2022, Japan provided

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4 At the G-20 India Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, Japanese state minister for foreign affairs Kenji Yamada stated “Shimin ya juyo infura e no kanai wa danjite yonin dekizu, Nihon wa mottomo tsuyoi kotoba de bokyo o hinan suru” (Attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure are absolutely unacceptable, and Japan condemns the outrage in the strongest terms). “‘Mottomo tsuyoi kotoba’ de Rosia hinan G-20 de Yamada gaimu fuku daijin” [At the G-20, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Yamada Condemned Russia in the “Strongest Possible Terms”], Jiji, March 3, 2023 ~ https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=20230303004578&q=pol.


$600 million in financial assistance and $700 million in humanitarian support consisting of nonlethal equipment such as bulletproof vests, helmets, communication equipment, and humanitarian airlift support, and Tokyo pledged in February 2023 to give another $5.5 billion.\(^9\) In addition, as of this writing, Japan had accepted 2,314 displaced Ukrainians, which is low by comparison with Europe but high by Japan’s historical standards.\(^10\) For a time, the most conspicuous lagging indicator was the fact that Prime Minister Kishida remained the only G-7 leader to not visit Ukraine. Though Presidents Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron received a domestic boost for doing so, the Japanese public opposed a visit on balance (45% were opposed compared to 39% in favor).\(^11\) However, this did not deter Kishida, who made a surprise but high-profile visit to meet with President Zelensky in Kyiv on March 21, 2023. The prime minister’s timing and venue were rich with geopolitical symbolism. He arrived the day after Chinese president Xi Jinping’s visit to Moscow, which allowed Kishida the opportunity to dismiss Xi’s supposed peace proposal as a one-sided play to Russian interests in consolidating gains from the war. Moreover, Kishida visited Bucha, the site of the Russian forces’ most egregious war crimes against Ukrainian civilians. This deliberate foray by a Japanese prime minister into the geopolitical narrative was almost unprecedented, as was the clear identification of Kishida with values of democracy and human rights.

Despite polls against the visit, Kishida knew he was on solid political ground at home because of the Japanese public’s recognition that the catastrophe meted on Ukraine and Europe could also happen to them in Northeast Asia. Polls conducted by the Cabinet Office after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine revealed that the number of Japanese citizens interested in defense issues increased to 78.2%, the highest number on record, while those who said there was a danger of Japan being involved in a war increased 0.7 percentage points to 86.2%—a small increase but in a question without much room for upward movement. As a result, those arguing that


the defense forces should be strengthened increased to 41.5%, the highest result ever recorded.\textsuperscript{12}

The Kishida government had been preparing the way for an increase in defense spending to support Abe’s strategy in the wake of China’s assertive military posture even before the war began. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) issued a strategy paper in April 2021 calling for an increase in defense spending to 2% of GDP (from a current nominal level of about 1%, or about 1.25% by NATO standards).\textsuperscript{13} What political leaders in Tokyo could not quite judge was the actual level of public support for the increase, which would have to come from one of three unattractive options: increased deficit spending, increased taxes, or cuts in social welfare spending. When polls were taken on the 2% figure after Kishida officially announced it in Japan’s new 2022 National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and (five-year) Defense Buildup Program, polls showed that a majority of the public supported the goal.\textsuperscript{14} While the assassination of Abe in July 2022 spurred the LDP leadership to push for the increased defense spending, the Ukraine invasion most likely drove public support because of the reminder it sent about the danger of major-power war. Japan’s new defense plan also introduced the possession of counterstrike capabilities to preempt attacks—a new role for Japan, which has traditionally defined its mission as being the “shield” to the U.S. “spear.” The Kishida administration’s preview of the new defense plan in late February 2023 made it clear that Japan plans to spend significantly on procuring 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States, a significant number of surface-to-surface missiles whose utility (at shorter ranges) has been proven on the battlefield in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{15}

However, there are also headwinds facing this effort to build more deterrent capabilities. While the public supports increased spending in

\textsuperscript{12} “Jieitai ni kanshin ‘aru’ ga 78.2%, Kako saiko ni naikaku-fu seronchosa” [78.2% of Respondents “Are” Interested in the Self-Defense Forces, a Record High], Mainichi shimbun, March 7, 2023 ~ https://mainichi.jp/articles/20230307/k00/00m/010/128000c.
\textsuperscript{14} “Kishida naikaku shiji 36-pasento boei-hi-zo sansei 51-pasento” [36% in Favor of Kishida Cabinet, 51% in Favor of Increasing Defense Spending], NHK, December 13, 2022 ~ https://www.nhk.or.jp/kaisetsu-blog/700/477346.html.
\textsuperscript{15} “Tomahoku konyu 400-patsu yotei, shusho ga teiji Beikoku-sei misairu” [Plans to Purchase 400 Tomahawks, Prime Minister Presents U.S.-Made Missiles], Nikkei shimbun, February 27, 2023 ~ https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOUA2745K0X20C23A2000000.
principle, it is divided on how to pay for this spending, with no clear majority favoring any one method—34% think the defense budget should come from the reduction of other budget items, 15% support the issuance of government bonds, and only 9% support a tax increase.\footnote{\textit{Boei-hi-zo zaigen ‘ta yosan no sakugen’ 34-pasento kokusai 15%, zozei 9-pasento} [Increase in Defense Spending “Reduction of Other Budgets” 34%, Government Bonds 15%, Tax Increase 9%], \textit{Nikkei shimbun}, October 31, 2022 — https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOUA282P80Y2A021C2000000.} Given that the powerful Ministry of Finance is adamant that there should be no further deficit spending, this sets up a major bureaucratic and political battle in Tokyo. At the same time, the goal of introducing a greater strike capability in Japan is colliding with an unprecedented demand for missile production for Ukraine, NATO, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, and the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. Estimates are that U.S. manufacturers are years behind demand, and the prospect of Japanese production coming online is even longer-term.

Nevertheless, the direction of Japan’s increased defense effort is now irreversible. The collapse of Putin’s regime or his military in Ukraine might send a cautionary signal to Beijing, but few Japanese officials expect that it would change China’s coercive military strategy, even if it does sensitize the Central Military Commission to the risk of war with the West and Moscow’s shortcomings as an ally. Russia’s threat to use nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war, coupled with North Korea’s growing pace of missile tests and China’s pursuit of nuclear parity with the United States over the next decade, will keep pressure on the United States to engage in “nuclear sharing” with Japan to provide greater confidence in the credibility of extended deterrence. Should Russia actually use nuclear weapons, this would be an even greater shock to Japan than the war itself and would spur greater debate about dual-keyed U.S. nuclear weapons in Japan, if not independent Japanese nuclear weapons (opposition to nuclear weapons is close to 80% in Japanese polling). In short, the degree to which the Ukraine war spurs Japan to develop its defense capabilities remains to be seen, but it will certainly be more and not less.

South Korea: An End to Strategic Ambiguity

When Putin’s forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Moon Jae-in was in his fifth and final year as the ROK’s president. Moon’s government was still stubbornly adhering to a diplomatic approach characterized by what was unofficially labeled “strategic ambiguity” in the emerging
geopolitical competition with China and a myopic preoccupation with accommodating North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in pursuit of a peace agreement or peace mechanism for the Korean Peninsula. The political ground beneath the Moon government on those issues had already begun to shift dramatically, however, with the South Korean public approaching Japanese levels of distrust of China—83% of South Koreans say they have no confidence in Chinese president Xi—and broad skepticism about Pyongyang’s intentions.17 Moon did mention the importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait in his first summit with Biden in May 2021,18 but consistent with his government’s approach to North Korea, the statement was interpreted as a transactional effort to win the new U.S. administration’s support for a more accommodating approach to Pyongyang, something that was not forthcoming from Washington.

To his credit, Moon did take a stance aligning closely with the United States and NATO after the attack on Ukraine, telling President Volodymyr Zelensky that “Ukraine’s sovereignty and territory should be preserved.”19 However, he steered slightly away from the U.S. or Japanese position by echoing Beijing’s line that “Korea supports peaceful efforts through dialogue” and subsequently focusing in his domestic messaging on the war’s impact on the ROK economy rather than the implications for the international system—where the implications were obviously detrimental to his government’s vision for diplomacy toward Pyongyang and Beijing.20

Moon’s successor, President Yoon Suk-yeol, set a tone that has been better received in Washington, Tokyo, Canberra, and NATO capitals. Yoon’s government has been more explicit about the connection between the violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and the geopolitical competition unfolding in Asia. This reflects his conservative party’s stronger affinity for the U.S.-ROK alliance and suspicion of Chinese intentions on the Korean Peninsula and in Asia more broadly. This more robust vision of Seoul’s ability

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20 Shin, “Moon Says Ukraine’s Sovereignty Must Be Respected.”
to shape the regional environment and its rejection of strategic ambiguity was captured in the Yoon government’s December 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy and subsequent efforts at reconciliation with Japan. And it has trended with emerging public opinion after the Ukraine invasion as well. According to Ipsos polling, 78% of South Koreans support sanctions on Russia despite the pain for the ROK economy, and Pew polls show a 25% jump to 83% of South Koreans considering the United States a “reliable partner.” In a world where major war is now a visible reality, the security guarantee of the United States has become seen as both essential and reliable.

Yet, how reliable is also a nagging question. In the wake of Pyongyang’s unceasing escalation of ballistic missile tests and (secondarily) Putin’s nuclear saber-rattling, the ROK public’s interest in independent nuclear weapons development exploded—Gallup polling in February 2023 showed 78% of respondents in favor and 73% thinking Seoul has the ability to do so on its own. In reality, an independent nuclear weapons program in South Korea would likely trigger international sanctions and thus prove technologically and diplomatically challenging, if not entirely counterproductive, since it would undermine extended U.S. deterrence and cut off the ROK from the Nuclear Suppliers Group. However, the political pressures are significant enough that Washington has been forced to broaden its official dialogue with Seoul about nuclear weapons and the role of extended deterrence in bilateral strategic planning.

In terms of material support for Ukraine, South Korea provided the third-most robust package from the Asia-Pacific after Australia and Japan, with $130 million in 2023 and the provision of bulletproof vests, helmets, medical supplies, and ready-to-eat meals. The lack of lethal aid to Ukraine has stood out, however, since South Korea has far fewer legal, policy, or

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cultural constraints on arms exports and yet is only supplying nonlethal supplies similar to those coming from Japan. In fact, ROK military aid has been important but below the radar. South Korea has emerged as a major exporter of weapons to Eastern Europe, and, in March 2023, Seoul revealed that it would allow the re-export of weapons from Poland to Ukraine, even if many of the howitzers and other weapons in question are still in delivery to Warsaw. U.S. ammunition supplied to Ukraine also draws on purchases from South Korea, which has excellent production facilities given the immediate threat from the North. Still, direct support to Ukraine’s military pales in comparison with that from U.S. ally Australia (although Australians may feel a stronger connection to Europe). In addition, the constraints on freedom of action that the Moon government exaggerated—namely concern about China’s reaction—are not completely absent for Yoon. Any government in Seoul needs to be careful not to trigger Chinese or Russian countermoves, such as arming North Korea or obstructing diplomacy with Pyongyang. The Yoon government’s below-the-radar support for Ukraine is a reminder of the constraints posed by the threat from the North.

Taiwan: Rushing to Become a Trusted Porcupine

Taiwan’s worldview has been most profoundly shaken by the war in Ukraine, given the obvious parallels between the two outgunned democracies facing dangerous authoritarian leaders who covet their territory. Ukrainian flags adorned Taipei after the invasion, and President Tsai Ing-wen used social media to show strong affinity and support for Ukraine. Taiwan also pledged $56 million in 2023 for Ukrainian infrastructure support and donated 700 tons of humanitarian relief and 27 tons of medical supplies in the war’s first year.

When this author was sent to Taipei in early March 2022 by the Biden administration as part of a bipartisan, nonofficial delegation of former officials, it was clear that President Tsai and her senior officials had been

27 See, for example, Tsai Ing-wen, Twitter, February 24, 2023 ~ https://twitter.com/iingwen/status/1629065381358755867?cxt=HHwWhMDUpYnNzpstAAAA.
reflecting deeply on the implications of the Ukraine war for Taiwan. The lessons they appeared to have gleaned are threefold.

First, Taiwan must strengthen its military capabilities to become a “porcupine” that would be too difficult for China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to swallow. This means moving beyond a reliance on expensive platforms such as submarines and fighter jets to develop asymmetrical capabilities as the United States has been urging for years. The military, dominated by the Kuomintang (KMT), had resisted the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leadership’s push in this direction, and the DPP itself lacked sufficient defense expertise to make the case convincingly. But in 2022, Ukraine’s military made it for them: large platforms make for large targets, while small mobile units armed with drones and tactical surface-to-surface missiles like the Javelin anti-tank system can decimate invading columns from a larger adversary. The challenge for Taiwan’s military—which after the Ukraine invasion purchased $619 million in missiles from the United States—is that U.S. production is backlogged from rising demand. Nevertheless, the Ukraine war proved decisive in Taipei’s debate over platforms versus asymmetrical capabilities. Tsai’s government also concluded, and the KMT leadership agreed, that Taiwan’s four-month conscription period is insufficient to prepare citizens to defend their territory in wartime, and, in late December 2022, Taiwan officially extended compulsory military service to one year.

The second lesson is diplomatic. For decades, governments in Taipei directed their diplomatic resources first at Washington and second at Tokyo, or at the small number of Pacific Island and Central American nations that recognized Taiwan rather than China. Tsai’s government had been looking at a broader landscape for engagement with the world, led initially by the capable foreign minister David Dawei Lee and his New Southbound Policy for economic and social connectivity with South

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When the United States mobilized the advanced industrial economies to impose sanctions on Russia after the invasion of Ukraine, it struck leaders in Taipei that connectivity with Europe, Australia, and Canada is far more important to deterrence and dissuasion than earlier appreciated. The Biden administration’s successful inclusion of references to stability in the Taiwan Strait in joint statements with NATO, the European Union, the ROK, and other allies and partners has sent an important signal of global solidarity to Beijing. Even if few of these nations would actually provide military assistance to Taiwan in a contingency, the precedent set by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine demonstrates that they might impose other significant costs on Beijing for aggression.

Finally, the example of Zelensky for Tsai herself has been powerful. Tsai served as head of the Mainland Affairs Council and as premier under former president Chen Shui-bian, and she saw how her boss’s push for independence-leaning policies isolated Taipei from even close supporters in Washington, not to mention the major democracies in Europe and Asia. The peril demonstrated by the Ukraine war and a growing operational tempo by the PLA around Taiwan would lend little latitude for playing independence themes that might resonate with the more strongly identifying DPP support base, the so-called deep greens. In a crisis, Tsai would need to be Zelensky—the principled and democratic victim—and not the *casus belli* that many in Washington, Tokyo, and Brussels feared Chen might have been. This aim to connect better with the major powers will ultimately contribute to greater stability in the Taiwan Strait, not only because of the dissuasion signal it might send to Beijing but also because it will reinforce Taipei’s prudence on cross-strait issues.

Taiwan faces challenges in implementing this new strategic approach, however. Tsai’s narrative about standing with Ukraine and Taiwan’s embeddedness in the democratic camp was blunted domestically by pro-Beijing social media campaigns, including from the so-called deep-blue base of the KMT, that raised doubts about whether the United States would actually defend Taiwan, given that there are no U.S. “boots on the ground” in Ukraine. Taiwan officials worried that this social media assault was gaining momentum as the war progressed, despite the Taiwanese people’s natural affinity for the Ukrainian people. The pro-DPP media has fought back against this narrative, arguing as the *Taipei Times* did, for

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example, in February 2023, that “Taiwan is not Ukraine. Taiwan is more significant to the global community...Taiwan is technologically more crucial than Ukraine, as it is an IT center and plays an indispensable role in the global supply chain of semiconductors.”

U.S. legislation authorizing $10 billion in lending arrangements to expedite arms purchases and other measures from Washington helped reinforce U.S. support for Taiwan. By the time of writing, public opinion had grown more optimistic, with 42% of respondents believing that the United States would respond militarily to an attack on Taiwan from the mainland—a significant increase over the previous year when large majorities were doubtful about the prospects of U.S. intervention. Yet those who did not believe that the United States would respond militarily still have the edge with 46.5% of respondents. In any crisis in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing will seek to attack the resolve of the people on Taiwan, and these numbers indicate a continued vulnerability in the true center of gravity in cross-strait relations.

Beijing’s Lessons and Alignment of the Democracies

The three variables that will most impact the future strategic direction of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan after the Ukraine war are battlefield results in Ukraine—which we cannot yet know for certain; U.S. staying power—which appears solid enough for now; and China’s own reading of the implications of the Ukraine war.

The last of these three variables is also the clearest. China under former president Hu Jintao might have read the alignment of global democracies against Russia as an indication that restraint and reassurance by Beijing are necessary to prevent further counterbalancing against China. But that does not appear to be the lesson Xi’s China is drawing. The “no limits” partnership Xi and Putin announced just before the invasion in 2022 has had limits only with respect to visible arms transfers from China to Russia. In economic, diplomatic, and propaganda terms, Beijing is clearly aligning more closely with Russia rather than establishing distance or seeking to reassure other states in the international system. And, as U.S. secretary of state Antony Blinken’s remarks in early March 2023 indicate, there is a constant danger that Beijing might cross the line and provide lethal equipment directly

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34 Lin Ching-yin and Evelyn Kao, “Public Increasingly Optimistic about U.S. Troops Coming to Taiwan’s Aid: Poll,” Focus Taiwan, February 21, 2023 ~ https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202302210026.
to Moscow.\textsuperscript{35} For Tokyo, Seoul, and other U.S. allies and partners, there appears to be little prospect for a wedge strategy that would separate Moscow and Beijing. Putin is prepared to become the junior partner in Asia in pursuit of his revanchist vision for Europe, and Xi is prepared to accept the liability of Russian actions in Europe as he seeks to undermine the U.S. strategic position on China’s periphery. This reality will keep propelling the United States’ allies and partners in Northeast Asia down the path of greater counterstrike capability and geopolitical alignment with both Washington and each other.

Beijing also appears to be drawing military lessons from the battlefield. While Chinese analysts reassure themselves that the PLA is better prepared for combat than Russia, the reality is that the PLA has not experienced actual combat for over forty years. Russia’s reversals add caution to any PLA plans that assume invasion scenarios would be successful against Taiwan. But Chinese military analysts are also drawing conclusions about how to defeat the asymmetrical advantages Ukrainian forces have demonstrated on the battlefield. Experts in China are particularly fixated on defeating Starlink and other commercial or dual-use satellites that have allowed Ukrainian forces to locate and destroy Russian tank formations.\textsuperscript{36} Having tested an anti-satellite missile in 2007 (causing dangerous space debris in the process), Beijing appears poised to expand the threat to both military and commercial use of space, which will in turn accelerate U.S. allies’ focus on defense in that domain. Also dangerous for the United States and its allies would be any conclusion by Beijing that it should reduce the warning time before an attack. Putin telegraphed his intentions for a long time in advance, allowing the United States, NATO, and Ukraine to build international solidarity and battlefield advantages. A minimal warning\textit{coup de main} would be a dangerous temptation for Beijing and would likely force the United States and its allies to tighten joint readiness. (The U.S.-Korea joint and combined command relationship was necessitated in large part by the need to “fight tonight” without warning on the Korean Peninsula.)

In short, the global chess game started in Ukraine is not yet over. And, for Asia, the most important next moves might be China’s.

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