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THE POSITION OF JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA REGARDING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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Abstract

The article reveals the position and actions of Japan and South Korea regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war after February 24, 2022. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 prompted mostly symbolic sanctions from Japan and did not distract Tokyo from its aspiration to improve relations with Moscow. However, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has caused tension in relations between Tokyo and Moscow. Japan is the center of support for Ukraine in the Asia-Pacific region, which is extremely important for our country, since this state belongs to the G7 and is one of the leading economies in the world.

In contrast, South Korea's reaction was mixed. When the war broke out, Seoul's response was vague and mixed, prompting a wave of international criticism that the government did not seem to understand or know how to respond to. The first response of the administration of South Korean President Moon Jae-in was fear for South Korean exports to Russia. For several days, it was unclear whether Seoul would support the sanctions regime. South Korea took action only when the US began threatening trade exclusions on goods needed by exporters.

Today, in the Asian context, South Korea and Japan are among the few countries that have provided the most comprehensive support to Ukraine and its partners after February 24, 2022. The Republic of Korea and Japan condemned Russia, imposed sanctions against Moscow, and provided Kyiv with aid and non-lethal military equipment. In addition, South Korea also transferred weapons to Ukraine to repel a Russian invasion, even if these transfers were made through third parties. South Korea and Japan's pro-Ukrainian position and consequent anti-Russian stance is a result of their strong alliance with the United States and growing security ties with other Western countries, their need to prevent North Korea and China from contemplating similar actions, and their desire to inform that similar events in the region would be undesirable.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian war, Japan, South Korea, financial assistance, non-lethal military equipment

ПОЗИЦІЯ ЯПОНІЇ ТА ПІВДЕННОЇ КОРЕЇ ЩОДО РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

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Анотація

Стаття розкриває позицію та дії Японії і Південної Кореї щодо російсько-української війни після 24 лютого 2022 р. Анексія Криму Росією у 2014 р. викликала здебільшого символічні санкції з боку Японії та не відвернула Токіо від його прагнення покращити відносини з Москвою. Однак повномасштабне вторгнення Росії в Україну спричинило напругу у відносинах між Токіо та Москвою. Японія є центром підтримки України в Азіатсько-Тихоокеанському регіоні, що є надзвичайно важливим для нашої країни, оскільки ця держава входить до G7 та є однією з провідних економік світу.

Натомість реакція Південної Кореї була неоднозначною. Коли почалася війна, відповідь Сеула була розпливчастою та неоднозначною, викликавши хвилю міжнародної критики, яку уряд, схоже, не розумів і не знав, як відповісти. Першою відповіддю адміністрації президента Південної Кореї Мун Чже Іна став страх за південнокорейський експорт до Росії. Кілька днів було незрозуміло, чи підтримає Сеул режим санкцій. Південна Корея вжила заходів лише тоді, коли США почали погрожувати виключенням з торгівлі товарів, необхідних експортерам.

Сьогодні в азіатському контексті Південна Корея та Японія є одними з небагатьох країн, які надали найбільш повну підтримку Україні та її партнерам після 24 лютого 2022 р. Республіка Корея та Японія засудили дії Росії, запровадивши санкції проти Москви та допомогли Києву з нелегальною технікою. Крім того, Південна Корея також передавала Україні зброю для відбиття російського вторгнення, навіть якщо ці передачі здійснювалися через третіх осіб. Прокраїнська позиція Південної Кореї та Японії та, як наслідок, антиросійська позиція є результатом їх міцного альянсу зі Сполученими Штатами та зростаючих зв'язків у сфері безпеки з іншими західними країнами. Як Японія, так і Південна Корея, надаючи допомогу Україні, прагнуть запобігти повторення сценарію у випадку з Північною Кореєю та Китаєм. Країни постійно наголошують на тому, що подібні заходи у регіоні були б небажаними.

Ключові слова: російсько-українська війна, Японія, Південна Корея, фінансова допомога, нелетальна військова техніка

Problem statement. The Russian-Ukrainian war is a distant conflict for Japan and South Korea, involving cultures different from this region, and its impact is most felt in Eastern Europe. Russia's grievances and motivations are mostly about the West, particularly the post-Cold War European settlement that significantly reduced Russian power there.

But there are also Asian implications, which Japan, to its credit, seems to have understood. Despite the long hesitation to impose sanctions – which contrasts with the regular application of sanctions by its American ally – Tokyo appears to have decided that this Russian aggression must be punished. The Russian invasion is blatant imperialism. If Russia absorbed its smaller neighbor, as the world watched silently, it would send a powerful signal to China that it could do the same to Taiwan. This would be a direct threat to Japan's security. And Russian tactics – targeted shelling of civilian areas – became a moral shock.

In contrast, South Korea's reaction was mixed. When the war broke out, Seoul's response was vague and mixed, prompting a wave of international criticism that the government did not seem to understand or know how to respond to. The first response of the administration of South Korean President Moon Jae-in was fear for South Korean exports to Russia. For several days, it was unclear whether Seoul would support the sanctions regime. South Korea took action only when the US began threatening trade exclusions on goods needed by exporters.

Analysis of previous research and publications. The position of Japan and South Korea after the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine is the subject of analysis by a lot of scientists and journalist. In particular, it is worth highlighting the works of such authors as N. Hyun-woo (Hyun-woo, 2023), A. Kuhn (Kuhn, 2022), B. Surdel (Surdel, 2022), T. Stangarone (Stangarone, 2023) in which the authors emphasize the change in the position of the above-mentioned countries in relation to Russia. They emphasize the importance of providing assistance to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people in order to overcome Russian aggressive actions.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the position of Japan and South Korea regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war after February 24, 2022.

Research methods and techniques. The study of the position of Japan and South Korea regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war was carried out using the methods of analysis, synthesis and generalization, analytical, institutional, structural-functional and comparative analyses. To achieve the goal, the authors used a complex of general scientific (analysis and synthesis, collection, processing and analysis of materials on this topic, generalization method) and special methods (problematic-chronological, content analysis) research. Thus, the problem-chronological method made it possible to trace the actions of the Japanese and South Korean governments regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war after February 24, 2022.

Presenting main material. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 prompted mostly symbolic sanctions from Japan and did not distract Tokyo from its aspiration to improve relations with Moscow. However, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has caused tension in relations between Tokyo and Moscow. The Japanese government not only actively supports Ukraine, but has also increased its rhetoric regarding the disputed northern territories, which Russia calls the southern Kuril Islands.

Currently, Japan is the center of support for Ukraine in the Asia-Pacific region, which is extremely important for our country, since this state belongs to the G7 and is one of the leading economies in the world.

According to the Ukraine's Ambassador to Japan S. Korsunskyi, the statement of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida about the readiness of the Japanese government, together with the G7 countries in solidarity to take appropriate steps towards Russia, caused "a psychic reaction" of Russian diplomacy (Pozytsiia Yaponii shchodo Ukrainy, October 12, 2023).

The manifestation of Russia's reaction to Japan's position regarding the war in Ukraine means the termination of negotiations with Japan as for the work on the text of the peace treaty due to Japan's "unfriendly positions". By "unfriendly position", the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation means the Japanese government's clear and unconditional support of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and recognition of the invasion of the Russian Federation into the territory of Ukraine as aggression.

At the end of March 2022, Russia began military exercises in the Kuril Islands, which started several days after peace treaty negotiations between Russia and Japan were stopped.

The day before, the Russian Ministry of Defense reported that servicemen of the Army Corps of the Eastern Military District were preparing for a control check in the Kuril Islands.

They practiced repelling a naval landing of a hypothetical enemy, the skills in preparing anti-tank missile systems to open fire, carried out terrain reconnaissance tasks, and trained to strike enemy military equipment and aircraft.

The exercises involved 3,000 servicemen and several hundred military and special equipment, including self-propelled artillery systems Giatsint-S, mortars Sani, unmanned aerial vehicles Orlan-10 and Eleron-3.

Japan's response was declaring the wording "illegally occupied" regarding the Kuril Islands in the annual diplomatic guide Blue Book of Diplomacy. It is noted that the wording "illegally occupied" about these territories appeared in the document for the first time since 2003. The draft of Blue Book of Diplomacy 2022 also states that these islands are an integral part of the territory of Japan, which has not been in the document since 2011 (Russia conducts military drills, March 26, 2022).

Thus, such a move by Tokyo reflects its departure from the policy of reconciliation with Moscow. The policy of "reconciliation" was characteristic during the time of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who tried to conduct a dialogue between Japan and Russia on the return of the northern territories. And since Moscow reacts very painfully to any steps regarding the Ukrainian issue, this support from Japan in 2014 was symbolic.

In the spring of 2022, a survey by the Kyodo news agency showed that 86 percent of Japanese people were in favor of imposing sanctions against Russia. By October 2022, only 5 percent of respondents said they would "feel goodwill" toward Russia, which was the lowest level since surveying on this issue began in 1978. If there had been any pressure to take a hard line against Russia, it came from the public, not from Washington.

The United States and Japan reacted quite harshly to the "uncertainty" of PRC's policy towards the Russian Federation, as well as to the intensification of provocative actions of the DPRK with the support of Russia.

Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine was one of the priority issues on the agenda of the meeting of the US-Japan Security Advisory Committee ("2+2") on January 11, 2023 in Washington, which was attended by US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin, Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Hayashi Yoshimasa and Japanese Minister of Defense Hamada Yasukazu.

In a joint statement, the United States and Japan announced the strengthening of their alliance to counter threats from North Korea and China, which they called the biggest security challenge in the region. In addition, representatives of Washington and Tokyo sharply condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Both states confirmed their unwavering support for Ukraine and discussed next steps in providing assistance to Ukraine's energy sector (Secretary Blinken's Meeting, January 11, 2023).

The Japanese government did not limit itself to sanctions against Russia and Belarus, but provided significant assistance to war-torn Ukraine. It included financial assistance in the amount of 1.1 billion US dollars. Japan has also strengthened Ukraine's defense potential by sending, among other things, drones, bulletproof vests, helmets, winter combat uniforms, tents, food rations, binoculars, medical supplies and civilian equipment to Kyiv.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also offered Japan's assistance in the future reconstruction of Ukraine. Ukrainians themselves consider Japan's unique experience in rebuilding cities and infrastructure after the great earthquake and tsunami in 2011 to be especially valuable. Particularly important is the technology of the Japanese for sorting and processing waste, which can be used in Ukraine as well.

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, was invited to speak (via video link) in the Japanese Parliament, and his speech was warmly received by the Japanese media and society. The concern of Ukrainians associated with Russian attacks on the territory of the nuclear power plant resonates well with the sentiments of the Japanese, who suffered

from the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011. Japan, which has traditionally been reluctant to accept migrants, has taken in more than 2,000 refugees from Ukraine and helped them resettle and find work. Public opinion polls show that Japanese society unequivocally supports such actions. Private Japanese companies, including such giants as Rakuten, provided assistance to Ukrainians (Surdel, 2022).

In March 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Kyiv, where he promised strong support to the President of Ukraine, speaking about reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

It is worth noting that the Kremlin may believe that the Japanese public and government actually oppose sanctions against Russia and only joined them under the pressure from the United States. However, Tokyo is extremely concerned about the precedent Russia's aggression could set for other authoritarian states, making this seemingly remote conflict no less than a matter of national security for Japan.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, South Korea quickly supported attempts to impose sanctions against Moscow. Seoul agreed to strengthen US and European Union export controls on strategic goods while extending those export controls to Belarus for its support of the Russian invasion. Seoul also supported the removal of some Russian banks from the SWIFT international payments system, and private cryptocurrency exchanges also restricted the access of IP addresses in Russia to exchanges in South Korea.

However, as noted by the Korean researcher V. Cha, the Republic of Korea did not immediately support the Ukrainian side. The initial reaction of the Moon Jae-in administration to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as V. Cha emphasizes, "was cool". Korea was the most prominent back-passer in the first days of the match with Ukraine. At that time, South Korea did not participate in the US sanctions against Russia. This was taking into account economic relations with Russia. When the war in Ukraine began, President Moon Jae-in did not condemn the Russian invasion and he did not mention President Putin by name. Instead, he passively said that "the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine must be guaranteed" and "this must be resolved through dialogue and negotiations, not war".

The Korean government's response this time also sparkled speculations in Washington political circles. Compared to other liberal democracies such as Australia and Japan, it is difficult to perceive Korea as a country that can be trusted and relied upon. There is a fear that Korea's position in the international community will be narrowed. The Moon Jae-in administration's position that Russia should be supported for bringing change in North Korea has become laughable as North Korea has launched one ballistic missile after another this year. It took South Korea four days to join multilateral sanctions against Russia (Cha, April 16, 2022).

Although South Korea is not part of US or European sanctions on Russian energy exports, it has significantly reduced imports of Russian fossil fuels. Imports of Russian crude and petroleum products have fallen by more than 70 percent in volume, while LNG imports have fallen by 40 percent over the past 12 months. Only the imports of coal from Russia have increased.

South Korea also took measures to provide humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. In the first months of the war, Seoul provided 100 million US dollars in aid related to emergency medical care, vaccines for children, power generators, and security support for Ukrainian nuclear plants. Seoul also provided generators for 3 million US dollars to help Ukraine cope with its energy problems this winter, and participated in a UNICEF program to help Ukrainian refugees.

On the anniversary of the Russian invasion, South Korea promised to provide Ukraine with an additional 130 million US dollars in aid. In addition to providing financial assistance to Ukraine, these funds are expected to support the restoration of the Ukrainian power grid, demining and projects on airspace organization for reconstruction. In total,

South Korea pledged to provide about 230 million US dollars for direct assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees (Stangarone, March 15, 2023).

South Korea, however, does not want to directly export weapons to Ukraine. South Korean laws prohibit the export of weapons to countries involved in the conflict, but North Korea is an additional factor. The former Moon administration was concerned about deterioration of relations with Russia, which the Moon government considered a potential partner in bringing North Korea back into negotiations over Pyongyang's nuclear program. There is a concern in the current Yoon administration that Russia might respond to South Korea's military support for Ukraine by providing North Korea with advanced aircraft or other technology needed by Pyongyang to advance its weapons programs.

Instead of sending weapons directly to Ukraine, South Korea took a different route. Seoul has allowed the export of parts or weapons containing South Korean parts but which are not entirely Korean weapons systems. It also sold munitions to the United States to give to Ukraine and as it is reported it is conducting negotiations about selling additional munitions to Washington.

With Ukraine needing more munitions than American and European arms manufacturers can produce, South Korea is under increasing pressure from European officials to provide weapons directly to Ukraine.

The ROK government's decision to provide only non-lethal weapons to Ukraine reflected the political and security risks South Korea faced due to Russia's influence over North Korea. Addressing the South Korean Parliament via video link in 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyi appealed to South Korea for military assistance, noting in particular that South Korea could provide indispensable assistance such as armored vehicles, anti-aircraft, anti-tank and anti-ship weapons. However, even after this request, South Korea decided to send a second round of non-lethal aid worth 1.6 million US dollars, including bulletproof vests, helmets, medical supplies and food (Smith & Choi, April 11, 2022).

During a telephone conversation between South Korean Minister of Defense Suh Wook and his Ukrainian counterpart, it was explained that there are "restrictions on the provision of lethal weapons systems to Ukraine" given the security situation in South Korea and the potential impact on South Korea's state of military readiness (Kang & Song, April 11, 2022).

In particular, military experts noted the difficulty of supplying a specific weapon that Ukraine is interested in purchasing – the Chongun surface-to-air missiles, which can hit approaching aircraft and ballistic missile targets. Due to a lack of supplies, they would have to be sent from the South Korean military, which could cause a gap in military readiness. In addition, much of the early technology for the production of weapons was transferred from Russia, which created additional complications. In other words, the provision of lethal weapons by South Korea could incentivize Russia to transfer its advanced weapons or technology to North Korea (Kuhn, April 28, 2022).

Despite these concerns, the change of government to the Yoon Suk Yeol administration led to a further intensification of South Korea's response. Less than two weeks after Yoon's inauguration, he welcomed US President Joe Biden in South Korea, where the two sides held a summit. The Joint Statement reflected the expansion of the alliance's scope, stating that the alliance "has matured into a deep and comprehensive strategic relationship". Regarding Ukraine, the parties noted that Russia's aggression against Ukraine poses a threat to the rules-based international order and that both sides have responded by imposing sanctions and export controls, as well as providing humanitarian aid (U.S.-ROK, May 21, 2021).

South Korean Vice Minister of Defense Shin Beomchul took part in the second virtual contact group on defense issues of Ukraine, which was organized by the US Secretary of Defense. The contact group was formed in April, its monthly meetings are held by about 40 countries, including NATO members and Japan. During the meeting, Shin shared South Korea's efforts to provide humanitarian and non-lethal assistance to Ukraine (Vice Defense Minister, May 25, 2022).

Although providing non-lethal assistance was still South Korea's official position, there were some indications that South Korea was reconsidering the possibility of providing lethal weapons through third parties. In particular, Canada asked about South Korea's export of 155 mm artillery shells due to a shortage of ammunition. Then the exported shells will be delivered to Ukraine. While there had been no official decision as of August, the Yoon government's grounds for rejecting such a request seem weak, especially given that in the same week South Korea approved negotiations to export K4 machine guns to Poland, which was sending weapons to Ukraine (Ji, May 31, 2022).

Ultimately, indeed, South Korea agreed to have Poland deliver South Korean-made weapons to Ukraine at some point in June-July, although an exact date could not be determined at the time of writing this article. In other words, Seoul agreed to provide arms to Kyiv through third parties, since weapons supplies from Poland to Ukraine could only take place with the approval of Yoon's government. In addition, on July 27, South Korea signed an agreement with Poland to provide the NATO member with up to 1,000 tanks, 600 howitzers and 50 fighter jets starting in late 2022. Potentially, some of these weapons may be transferred to Ukraine (Smith, July 29, 2022).

From South Korea's perspective, providing military support to Ukraine through NATO members was based on the sale of its weapons to NATO countries, including Norway, Poland or the United Kingdom, after Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014. In other words, South Korea has already been helping NATO members deter possible aggression from Russia since the Park Geun-hye administration. However, providing lethal weapons to Ukraine through third parties would help Seoul strengthen political-diplomatic and military ties with NATO, as well as increase weapons sales, which South Korean politicians consider an engine of economic growth.

Also during Yoon's administration, a delegation led by Special Envoy Kim Gi-hyun visited Europe for a five-day visit, meeting with members of the European Commission, NATO, and heads of states in France. The visit was significant not only because it was the first delegation sent abroad during Yoon's presidency, but it was also the first time South Korea had sent such a large delegation to Europe so early in a presidential term. The meetings reaffirmed the strategic partnership between South Korea and the EU and committed to seeking measures to develop values-based relations (Report of EU Envoy Kim Gi-hyun's visit, June 9, 2022).

During the meetings with NATO and France, both sides, respectively, discussed the situation in Ukraine and ways to strengthen cooperation on this issue (How Ukraine, May 2, 2022).

According to T. Stangarone, in light of South Korea's restrictions on arms exports, it can take three steps to support the military efforts in Ukraine. Seoul could conduct a high-level review of which weapons systems contain South Korean components and grant prior approval for the transfer of those items – similar to the permission South Korea gave Poland for the transfer of Krab howitzers to Ukraine. This will help ensure that weapons systems that are not entirely South Korean will be transferred to Ukraine if necessary (Stangarone, March 15, 2023).

South Korea may also try to replenish the stockpiles of other countries, similar to the supply of ammunition to the United States. Finally, Seoul could also take steps to ensure that South Korea, even if it is unable to provide lethal assistance, plays a leading role in providing non-lethal aid such as bulletproof vests, night vision goggles and other items that Ukraine needs in its war effort.

South Korea's concerns about Russia's ability to transfer sensitive weapons technology should be taken seriously, but it should also be balanced with the deeper geopolitical changes caused by the war. Relations between North Korea and Russia are already deepening. North Korea has reportedly supplied weapons to Russia's Wagner group, and Russia no longer reports data on the trade, meaning Moscow may also no longer enforce UN sanctions on North Korea. South Korea may also tighten export control

measures. After all, Russia uses imports from third countries, such as Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Belarus, to circumvent sanctions.

In 2023, relations between South Korea and Russia are rapidly deteriorating. Moscow reacted sharply to President Yoon Suk Yeol's words that Seoul could provide military assistance to Ukraine if a situation arises that the international community cannot tolerate. Apparently, South Korea has changed its policy towards Ukraine, having seen more benefit from responding to US and European calls to provide military support to Kyiv, rather than maintaining cool relations with Russia (Hyun-woo, April 20, 2023).

Thus, in the Asian context, South Korea and Japan are among the few countries that have provided the most comprehensive support to Ukraine and its partners after February 24, 2022. The Republic of Korea and Japan condemned Russia, imposed sanctions against Moscow, and provided Kyiv with aid and non-lethal military equipment. In addition, South Korea also transferred weapons to Ukraine to repel a Russian invasion, even if these transfers were made through third parties. South Korea and Japan's pro-Ukrainian position and consequent anti-Russian stance is a result of their strong alliance with the United States and growing security ties with other Western countries, their need to prevent North Korea and China from contemplating similar actions, and their desire to inform that similar events in the region would be undesirable.

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