

# The Ukrainian Crisis and Russia-U.S. Conflict: Background and Policy Implications for the Korean Peninsula



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Russia launched a blitzkrieg invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Russia had continued to escalate security tensions since October 2021, redeploying large numbers of troops near the Ukrainian border. These movements prompted diplomatic negotiations between Russia and the West, including the U.S.-Russian summit in Geneva on June 16, 2021. However, eight months of diplomatic efforts between Russia and the West failed to yield practical results, culminating in the use of the extreme means of war.

As is already well known, the background of Russia's invasion of Ukraine was ostensibly to restrain NATO's eastern expansion policy and block Ukraine's NATO accession. But more importantly, from a macroscopic point of view, the essential driving force of this war is the clash of geopolitical interests between the great powers over the establishment of the European security order. By using its military force against NATO's policy

of eastern expansion, Russia has caused a great disruption in the European security order of the 21st century. As a result, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a significant event that can fundamentally change the nature of Russia's relations with the West.

Since the Biden's administration took office on the 20th of January 2021, bilateral relations between the United States and Russia have deteriorated further. Russia and the United States basically hold different positions in the world order (multipolar versus unipolar), geopolitical interests (post-Soviet space versus Europe and the Indo-Pacific region), and norms of values (authoritarianism versus democracy). Moreover, while Russia criticizes the U.S. unilateralism and unipolar hegemony on the global level, the U.S. regards Russia as Europe's biggest security threat and revisionist force.

The Ukrainian crisis and Russia-U.S. conflict can provide important policy implications for South Korea. This is especially true in that the external environments of Ukraine and the Korean Peninsula, which are located between great powers, share many similarities. In addition, and more importantly, this event will inevitably have a huge impact on the global economic and security order. This crisis is related to the continued geopolitical competition between the United States and Russia, the strengthening of the Atlantic alliance between the United States and the European Union, the increase in NATO's future role and status in the European security order, Russia's challenge to building the European security order, and the change in relations between Russia and the West.

Considering the above, the policy implications for the Ukrainian crisis and Russia-U.S. conflict can be summarized as follows.

First, there is a possibility that a so-called "new Cold War" confrontational structure will be formed on the Korean Peninsula. This assumes the deterioration of Russia-U.S. relations and strengthening of strategic cooperation between Russia and China in the context of U.S.-China strategic competition. Ultimately, the dynamics of the U.S.-China-Russia triangle can act as an important variable in international relations in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula.

Second, the crisis in Ukraine could have a negative impact on North Korea's denuclearization process. This is because the dissolution of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum of Understanding will make the existence of nuclear weapons more important to North Korea for its national security and system maintenance.

Third, in the course of Russia's foreign policy implementation, military force is being actively used as a key means of realizing national interests. Representative examples include the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the CSTO intervention in the Kazakh anti-government protests in January 2021. Therefore, it can be said that the probability of igniting security tensions and military competition in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula has increased.

Fourth, the crisis in Ukraine and Russia-U.S. conflict will act as a significant constraint factor on the Korean government's northern policy. This is because South Korea has been designated as a non-friendly country by Russia because of its active participation in Western sanctions against Russia. As a result, Korea-Russia relations will inevitably remain in a stalemate for the time being. [KIEP](#)