

## Chapter 2 Russia's Aggression against Ukraine and International Response

### Section 1 Russia's invasion of Ukraine

On February 24, 2022, President Putin launched an armed invasion of Ukraine, including the capital city of Kyiv, in what he called a “special military operation”. Western countries immediately declared this an invasion of Ukraine by Russia and imposed economic sanctions on an unprecedented scale, while continuing to provide arms and other military assistance to Ukraine as it fights against the Russian invasion with some successes. The military support from Western countries has been bearing fruit and, since September, the Ukrainian military has been engaged in a counteroffensive. On September 21, President Putin issued a partial mobilization order in view of his army's disadvantageous situation, but confusion continues as many Russians evading the order are trying to flee the country. Amid such situation, Russia unilaterally declared the annexation of four provinces in eastern and southern Ukraine on September 30, and since October has been escalating the war without a clear exit strategy, including missile attacks on Ukrainian cities in retaliation for the bombing of a bridge connecting Crimea and mainland Russia or for the destruction of infrastructure. On the other hand, Ukrainian forces have largely pushed back Russian forces in the southern Kherson Oblast and the eastern Donetsk Oblast since November, and the war remains in flux.

#### Putin's war in unexpected situation

As military clashes between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian factions in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine calling themselves the “Donetsk People's Republic” and the “Lugansk People's Republic” escalated from 2021, Russia insisted that NATO membership for Ukraine would never be accepted and deployed 100,000 troops around the border to apply pressure. On January 10, 2022, the US and Russia held a “strategic stability dialogue” and, on January 21, a meeting between the US and



A view shows the building of a theatre destroyed in the course of Ukraine-Russia conflict in the southern port city of Mariupol, Ukraine April 10, 2022. Picture taken with a drone. REUTERS/Pavel Klimov (Ukraine)

Russian foreign ministers took place, but no agreement was reached to ease tensions. France, the United Kingdom, and Germany also held talks with Russia to avert war, and at the end of January the United States warned the Ukrainian government of an imminent Russian military invasion, moving its embassy

from the capital Kyiv to the western city of Lviv on February 14. Russia, meanwhile, held a meeting of its Security Council on February 21 and rejected the idea that it should continue diplomatic negotiations with the West on the Ukrainian issue, deciding instead to recognize the independence of the two “People’s Republics” in the Donbass region. The Russian parliament also recognized the independence of both regions.

On February 24, 2022, President Putin declared that, in accordance with the request of the two “People’s Republics” of the Donbass region, he would launch a “special military operation” aimed at protecting the region’s population and demilitarizing and denazifying Ukraine, and the Russian military offensive throughout Ukraine began. Immediately after the war began, Russian troops invaded the Donbass region, the area around the capital Kyiv, the northern Ukrainian oblast of Kharkiv, and the southern oblasts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia and occupied the Chornobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plants. However, the Russians delayed the start of the invasion because the US and UK had disclosed Russian invasion plans in advance, and the soil was muddy due to melting snow, making it difficult for the Russians to advance. With Western support, the Ukrainian military maintained its air defense network, which prevented the Russians from dropping paratroopers into Kyiv and providing air support to their ground troops, leading to their withdrawal from the area around the capital Kyiv at the end of March. At that time, massacres and other atrocities were revealed in Bucha near Kyiv and other areas from which Russian troops had retreated, sending shockwaves through the international community. The ceasefire talks between Russia and Ukraine, which had been ongoing since the beginning of the war, was held in Istanbul on March 29 for the fifth time, but no further talks took place after the issue at Bucha came to light.

After failing in their attempt at assaulting Kyiv, the Russian forces redressed their posture. While they lost their maritime superiority in the Black Sea as evidenced by the sinking of their flagship Moskva, in May they captured Mariupol, a strategic point between eastern and southern Ukraine, and in July they declared control over the entire Luhansk Oblast. In the Russian-occupied areas of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, a military-civil administration was established. Residents were issued Russian passports, and de facto Russification was pursued, including the circulation of the Russian ruble as currency and the start of Russian TV and radio broadcasting. Meanwhile, Ukraine received military assistance from Western countries, especially the United States, including the provision of multiple rocket launchers and anti-radar weapons, and launched counterattacks in Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Kherson oblasts. Since September, Ukrainian forces have retaken most of Kharkiv Oblast and are conducting recapture operations in Luhansk and Kherson oblasts.

On July 14, Russia, outmatched by the Ukrainian military's counterattack, established a de facto economic mobilization system targeting military industries and, on September 21, it issued a partial mobilization decree and began calling up military reservists. However, this partial mobilization order caused chaos, with many citizens who resisted the call to arms fleeing the country. In the meantime, on September 30, President Putin signed a treaty incorporating the "Donetsk People's Republic," the "Lugansk People's Republic," and the oblasts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia into a new federal entity of Russia and emphasized the "military gains" made by the "special military operation" to the Russian public. The annexation of these regions was also aimed at intimidating the Ukrainian military by insisting that any large-scale attack on "Russian territory" would be met with retaliation, including by nuclear weapons, and thereby forcing it to relax its counterattack.

Despite these Russian intentions, however, the Ukrainian military offensive in the south and east of the country continues. On October 8, a bridge connecting the Crimean Peninsula and the Russian mainland was blown up, and Russia declared this an attack by Ukraine and carried out large-scale missile and drone attacks in various parts of Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv, as retaliation. The war has since re-expanded regionally, with attacks continuing to destroy infrastructure, particularly in major cities. Russia also strengthened its wartime regime by imposing martial law on October 19 in the four eastern and southern provinces of Ukraine that it had unilaterally declared annexed, but the Russian military did not manage to turn the tables, and on November 9 the Russian defense minister ordered a retreat from the right bank of the Dnipro River in the Kherson Oblast. The war situation has become increasingly fluid.

#### Russian foreign policy

Immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, the Western powers imposed several rounds of sanctions against Russia on an unprecedented scale (see Section 2). Faced with these moves, the Russian government announced on March 7 that it would take countermeasures against countries participating in the sanctions, designating them as "unfriendly countries". By limiting gas supplies to "unfriendly countries" to those paid for in rubles, gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria, which refused to pay in rubles, were suspended at the end of April. Russia has also continued to put pressure on countries that have joined in sanctions against Russia by using its own energy resources as a weapon in its diplomatic strategy, for example, by restricting gas supplies via the Nord Stream pipelines and forcibly transferring the operating company of Sakhalin's oil and gas development project to a newly-established company owned by the Russian government. There was also an exchange of accusations between Russia and the West over the blowup of the Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 pipelines in September.

While relations with the West have decisively deteriorated, Russia is working to strengthen its ties with

China and other countries of BRICS, the Middle East, and Africa. Foreign Minister Lavrov visited China and India in late March and early April, and four African countries (Egypt, Congo, Uganda and Ethiopia) in late July. President Putin visited China in early February before the invasion and, since the invasion began, he has attended BRICS meetings online, met with the chair of the African Union, the president of Turkmenistan, and the president of Indonesia, who visited Russia, and has himself visited Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iran and Uzbekistan. In mid-September, on the occasion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Tashkent, the first face-to-face China-Russia summit since the outbreak of war was held, underscoring the strategic unity of the two countries vis-à-vis the United States.

So far, these diplomatic efforts seem to have succeeded in keeping these countries from joining the sanctions against Russia initiated by Western countries, but they have yet to secure active support for Russia. Rather, there are signs that even friendly countries are trying to distance themselves to a certain extent: at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum held in mid-June, Kazakhstan's President Tokayev condemned Putin's Russia for recognizing the independence of the Donbass region and, at the SCO Summit, China and India notably expressed concern over the invasion of Ukraine (see Section 3 and Section 4). In addition, at a summit meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a military alliance led by Russia, held on November 23, various countries voiced a series of objections to the war against Ukraine, and the chairing country Armenia refused to sign the joint declaration, giving the impression that Russia's centripetal force is on the decline.

### **Economic sanctions against Russia and their impact**

Despite the sanctions imposed by Western countries and the withdrawal of foreign companies from the Russian market, the Russian economy has so far remained calm on the surface. Although Western countries have reduced their imports of energy resources, Russia has increased its income from resource exports as resource prices have soared and countries not joining sanctions have increased their imports from Russia with relatively lower price. Financial sanctions have led to the recognition of defaults on Russian government bonds, but it is difficult to say that this has had a significant effect. Although the ruble plunged immediately after the sanctions were imposed, the central bank took defensive measures to support the price by its purchase, and the exchange rates against the dollar and the euro are both at their highest levels in five years. Commodity prices have not experienced the sharp inflation that was initially anticipated. Immediately after the sanctions took effect, there was a temporary panic as citizens hoarded goods, but the inflation rate has been declining since April. Following Western foreign companies' withdrawal from the Russian market, Russian companies often took over their operations. Since June, however, there has been increasing press coverage that reports the effects of the sanctions are gradually

appearing, particularly in the industrial sector. President Putin also acknowledged at the July 18 Cabinet meeting that it has become difficult to obtain foreign high-tech products.

The fact that the sanctions are not felt to be negatively affecting the lives of the Russian people themselves much has led to high levels of support for President Putin and the war in Ukraine. According to various polls, Putin's approval rating has remained in the high 70s, and support for the war in Ukraine has also remained in the 70s, although it has declined somewhat since the partial mobilization order was issued on September 21. Some observers have pointed out that the Russian government has kept a close eye on the anti-war activities of its citizens since the outbreak of war and has exerted extensive pressure on them, resulting in an increasing number of cases in which Russians do not respond truthfully in these polls, but all polls indicate a high level of support for Vladimir Putin.

Some observers in Russia believe that the more pressure from the West, the more the Russian public will rally around the president and support his actions. It has also been pointed out that Russia has been subject to Western sanctions since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the population becoming "accustomed to sanctions" is one reason why political dissatisfaction with the Putin administration has not grown. On the other hand, some analysts believe that if the war in Ukraine and the confrontation with the West intensify in



Relatives and acquaintances of Russian reservists react at a gathering point in the course of partial mobilisation of troops, aimed to support the country's military campaign in Ukraine, in the town of Gatchina in Leningrad Region, Russia October 1, 2022. REUTERS/Igor Russak (Russia)

future and have a serious impact on Russian society and economy, political dissatisfaction will grow among the population, which may eventually turn into political protest in unexpected ways. The issuance of the partial mobilization order has caused anxiety among the population that it may lead to further mobilization, and numerous people have fled Russia. There is also a growing, albeit slight, call among the population for peace negotiations to be prioritized over the continuation of the war. It remains to be seen how this confusion and change in public awareness will affect the political situation in Russia and, by extension, the Putin regime.

## Perspective

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine continues to this day, despite President Vladimir Putin's expectation for a short-term end to the conflict. Although the Russian government initially pretended that it was a "special military operation," the partial mobilization of reserve forces became inevitable as it became clear that the Russian military was outmatched, and the conflict is now turning into an all-out war. For the first six months or so after the war began, the Russian people may have tried to believe that the war in Ukraine was limited and that it was happening somewhere far away and had nothing to do with their lives, as the regime advertised, but the war suddenly came to be perceived as a reality after the partial mobilization order was issued. It remains to be seen how the war situation will further affect these changes in perception and acceptance in Russia.

Despite the confusion over the partial mobilization order, there has not been a great upsurge in calls against the war or for a ceasefire, and so far there have been no moves from the Russian side to cease the fighting. The Ukrainian side also has no reason to propose a ceasefire, given the success of its counteroffensive operations in the east and south. For the time being, the current state of fighting is expected to continue.

Since the war of aggression in Ukraine was started by President Putin, and is thus often referred to as "Putin's war," it is up to him to decide how the war will end. With the war having become a quagmire, however, the conflict between the forces supporting the war and those seeking peace has become more pronounced in Putin's circle, and he himself has lost sight of a clear exit strategy. For now, he may seek a ceasefire mediated by a country with appropriate influence. Ultimately, it will be important for the US and Russia to engage in dialogue and find a solution that is acceptable to Ukraine. ■

## Section 2 Response of Western countries

The Western nations, emphasizing the rules-based international order and opposing any change in the status quo by force, have launched swift and large-scale assistance to Ukraine and unprecedented sanctions against Russia, coordinating through the frameworks based on shared values such as the G7, the EU, and NATO. These moves are a sign of determination to maintain the US-led international order. At the same time, international relations have taken on the appearance of an intensifying confrontation between democracy and authoritarianism. However, as the war drags on, public discontent in the face of the energy crisis and soaring prices is affecting the domestic politics and foreign policies of Western countries. There are differences in the degree of these countries' responses, and the resilience of democracy as well as the sustainability of the West's support for Ukraine are being tested.

### Values and alliances

Western countries have deepened their unity and coordination through frameworks based on shared values such as the G7, NATO, and the EU. The G7 held a number of flexible foreign ministerial and summit meetings immediately after the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and, in lock-step with each other, they have put forward one sanction after another against Russia. In addition, Western countries, including Japan, quickly launched unprecedented measures and military assistance in support of Ukraine. Some countries, such as Germany, even made a major shift in their own security policies.



dpatop - 28 June 2022, Bavaria, Elmau: U.S. President Joe Biden, Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of Great Britain, Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the EU Commission, Charles Michel, President of the EU Council, Mario Draghi, Prime Minister of Italy, Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, Emmanuel Macron, President of France, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD), on the last day of the three-day G7 summit. At the end of the summit, the topics will be the new world order after the Russian attack on Ukraine and the topic of digitalization. Photo: Michael Kappeler/dpa

Before the start of the Russian aggression, US President Joe Biden consistently declared that he would not deploy troops to Ukraine and showed a stance of avoiding direct intervention, but he tried to deter Russian actions by actively providing information based on highly accurate intelligence to Ukraine and the international community. In particular, he countered Russian disinformation by disclosing information that anticipated Russian actions in advance. After the invasion began, the United States repeatedly provided overwhelming military assistance, including through passing of a lend-lease act that

made it possible to lend military supplies to Ukraine quickly, and clearly stated that it would continue to provide support.

European countries have also joined the United States in supporting Ukraine. Along with the US, the UK took the lead in actively supporting Ukraine, providing arms on a scale second only to that of the US. While Germany had long been reluctant to build up its military power, Chancellor Olaf Scholz promised on February 27 to achieve NATO's "2% of GDP" target to strengthen Germany's own defense capability, and also decided to provide self-propelled anti-aircraft guns to Ukraine, reversing its previously passive policy toward providing arms to Ukraine. The EU actively supported Ukraine by deciding to provide approximately 1.5 billion euros in military assistance, which included the provision of fighter aircraft. This was the first time the EU had provided such assistance to a party to a conflict. In addition, the US has taken the lead in establishing a NATO-led coordinating group to coordinate individual countries' support, and Western countries are coordinating their support for Ukraine with each other.

Sweden and Finland, in a major shift in their security policies from neutrality and military non-alignment, applied for NATO membership in May; NATO began the membership application process for both countries at the end of June. Poland's active provision of arms, on par with that of the Baltic states, reaffirmed the country's importance as a base for Ukrainian military assistance. NATO member states agreed at the June NATO summit on the need to significantly strengthen their deterrence and defense capabilities. For the first time in history, the leaders of Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand were invited to the meeting, and Prime Minister Kishida of Japan participated. The leaders discussed Russia's aggression against Ukraine as well as the changing balance of power in East Asia.

Based on the strong sense of crisis that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow" (Prime Minister Kishida's keynote speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue), Japan announced a policy of drastically strengthening its defense capabilities. In a major shift from its previous diplomatic stance toward Russia, Japan, along with the other G7 nations, implemented sanctions against Russia and made clear its policy of support for Ukraine. The provision of defense equipment to Ukraine, including bulletproof vests, helmets, protective masks, protective clothing, and small drones, was the first such provision to a party to a conflict.

### **Unprecedented economic sanctions against Russia**

Western countries were also quick to launch unprecedented economic sanctions against Russia. On February 22, prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, German Chancellor Scholz announced that he would be suspending the undersea pipeline Nord Stream 2 project with the aim of constraining Russia's



resource revenues. Subsequently, when Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, the G7 and other governments implemented a series of economic sanctions in close coordination against Russia and Belarus. These sanctions included exclusion from the SWIFT international payments network, freezing of assets of oligarchs and other entities, de facto export bans on commodities and luxuries, revocation of MFN status, and restrictions on imports of energy, diamonds, and other goods. The G7 also agreed to introduce a framework to cap the import price of Russian oil to prevent Russia from financing its war effort, while the EU also reached a political agreement at a special European Council meeting in May to ban imports of Russian crude oil and petroleum products, except for imports via pipeline, by year-end. Based on coordination through the G7, Japan also carried out a series of measures, including freezing assets, strengthening export controls, revoking MFN status, and introducing import control measures.

These sanctions were designed primarily by the G7 countries, but were also imposed by non-G7 countries (Switzerland, Australia, South Korea, etc.). However, it also became clear that it would be difficult to ensure wider international coordination of sanctions against Russia as China, India, and other countries continued to purchase Russian oil.

Some private companies in the US, Japan, Europe, and elsewhere voluntarily ceased commercial transactions with Russian companies and operations in Russia. This so-called “voluntary restraint” was a phenomenon not seen in the economic sanctions previously implemented by Western countries, and highlighted the seriousness with which private companies viewed the potential business risks posed by Russia.

### Democracy and war

Public discontent in the face of the energy crisis and skyrocketing prices, along with the protracted war, has affected the domestic and foreign policies of Western countries. While there have been differences among Western countries over military aid to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia from the outset, domestic political unrest has the potential to disrupt these countries' alignments. Along with the sustainability of



A combination picture shows people queuing outside Moscow's first McDonald's restaurant during its opening in Moscow, Russia January 31, 1990 (top), and people gathering near the new restaurant "Vkusno & tochka", which opened following McDonald's Corp company's exit from the Russian market, in Moscow, Russia June 12, 2022. REUTERS/Corbis/Evgenia Novozhenina (Russia)

support for Ukraine, the resilience of democracy is also being tested.

While Western countries have imposed sanctions targeting Russia's energy resources, Russia has also used energy as a tool to threaten the EU, resulting in energy supply shortages. The sharp decline in food exports from Russia and Ukraine has also had an impact, resulting in high inflation and energy crises in many countries. Record inflation has occurred in the US, with the consumer price index hitting its highest level in 40 years. Voter dissatisfaction with high gasoline prices was particularly strong, leading to a drop in support for the Biden administration. In response to energy supply shortages, the US approached Saudi Arabia, one of the world's leading oil producers but, in October, OPEC Plus decided to make a coordinated production cut, symbolizing the decline of US influence (see Section 5). The Biden administration's response to inflation was not well-received by voters and was one of the key issues, along with the abortion issue, in the November midterm elections where voters' assessment of the current administration were revealed. In December, Ukrainian President Zelensky visited the United States, having left Ukraine for the first time since the Russian military invasion. President Biden noted the continued support to Ukraine during the summit meeting. In addition, President Zelensky delivered a speech to members of both the Senate and House representatives in which he called for the US's continued support, stressing the importance of defending democracy. This is expected that President Zelensky wanted to stress the importance of the continued support, understanding that the Republican party will take the majority in the House in January 2023.

The EU is facing a quadruple whammy of high energy and food prices, a trade deficit, a weak euro, and a gas crisis. In preparation for the supply cutoff of Russian gas, member states are being required to voluntarily reduce their natural gas consumption by 15% from August to the end of March 2023. Securing new and stable energy supply sources has thus become an urgent task for each country, and a sharp rise in energy prices has been observed. Dissatisfaction among the poor, who are most affected by this, led to major breakthroughs by the radical right and left in France in the presidential election in April and the National Assembly election in June. Reelected President Emmanuel Macron has stressed the importance of maintaining channels of dialogue with President Vladimir Putin both before and after the start of the war. In the UK, Liz Truss, who advocated for a significant tax cut, won the leadership election of the ruling Conservative Party and became prime minister. However, her tax cut policy lacked financial backing and led to market turmoil, with Truss' early resignation to take responsibility a sign of the turmoil in British politics; nevertheless, the UK has consistently maintained strong support for Ukraine. Instability of democracy was also seen in Italy, as Prime Minister Mario Draghi resigned following the defection of the Five Star Movement, the main party in the coalition, and a right-wing government was formed in the general election in September. While the economic plight of the poor thus became clearly

a common political issue for all countries, even a radical right-wing government such as Italy's has not wavered in its position on support for Ukraine, pledging new arms aid in October.

#### **Perspective**

In response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began in February, Western countries imposed unprecedentedly extensive economic sanctions on Russia. While some regard Western sanctions as having been effective in reducing Russia's capability to continue war fighting, others have questioned whether the sanctions have gone far enough to make changes in the views of Russia's domestic political elites and the general public. Another negative impact of sanctions against Russia has been pointed out that Western countries, the initiators of the sanctions themselves, have been hit hard by the repercussions. Against this backdrop, the election results in Europe have reflected the uncertainty in people's lives stemming from inflation and soaring energy prices, leading to the rise of far-right and far-left parties. In addition, there are large differences in each country's ability to mobilize public finances to fight inflation, and these differences in economic strength are beginning to attract criticism for leading to differences in energy and other prices among countries. The US is the largest supporter of Ukraine, and voter backing of this support for Ukraine remains high. However, in early October ahead of the midterm elections, Kevin McCarthy, the top Republican leader in the House of Representatives, stated with an eye on retaking the House that "the US will not give Ukraine a 'blank check'", signaling discord. As the conflict drags on, the sustainability of Western unity in support of Ukraine is being tested. ■

### **Section 3 China's response and Sino-Russian relations**

Amid criticism from Western countries regarding human rights issues, China invited President Vladimir Putin to the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics and a joint statement was issued at the summit meeting that impressed the world with the good relationship between the two leaders and their countries. China attached importance to its relations with Russia from strategic viewpoint to counter the United States, displaying their relations as the “honeymoon”. However, as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine drags on, the reality that the relationship between the two countries is not monolithic has come to the fore. Confronting the Taiwan issue and domestic ethnic problems, China cannot fully support Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and is faced with the difficult decision of whether to strengthen its ties with Russia in anticipation of its strategic interests vis-à-vis the United States.

#### **China-Russia “honeymoon” and emerging cracks in relations**

In early February, just before Russia invaded Ukraine, President Putin visited China to attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics as a guest of honor and held a summit meeting with President Xi Jinping. The Sino-Russian joint statement issued on that occasion stated that “friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation” in a staged display of a honeymoon relationship, giving observers around the world the impression that Sino-Russian bonds were tighter than ever.

It is unclear whether President Putin informed President Xi of the invasion plan at this summit meeting. At the Munich Security Conference held just before the outbreak of war, Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed, “the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of each country should be respected and maintained. This is the basic rule of international relations. This is the main purpose of the UN Charter, and it is also the principal position that China has consistently taken. The Ukraine issue is no exception.” In addition, The Chinese Embassy in Ukraine did not issue an evacuation advisory either before or after the outbreak of war. From these facts, it can be inferred that either the Chinese had not been notified in advance or, even if they had, they assumed that it would not necessarily lead to a large-scale war.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, China has maintained cooperative relations with Russia, but has been cautious in expressing its own attitude. Officially, China has adopted a neutral stance, saying, for example, that concerned parties should “push for an appropriate resolution of the crisis,” but it has not actively mediated between Russia and Ukraine, in effect maintaining a pro-Russian stance. China has not aligned itself with Western sanctions against Russia and, indeed, it has been strengthening its economic ties with Russia by continuing to purchase oil and other natural resources from Russia and expanding the scale of trade between China and Russia, thereby indirectly weakening the effects of the sanctions. China

has not voiced direct accusation of Russia, nor has it called the “special military operation” invasion. Until around March, European countries had been hoping and encouraging China to play a mediating role, but China had not shown any positive movement in this direction.

Nevertheless, China has not fully supported or aligned itself with Russia. China does not supply arms to Russia and does not provide military support. In the UN, China has abstained from several resolutions condemning Russia while Belarus and North Korea have opposed them. In addition, China has maintained a delicate distance from Russia in the BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and other multilateral frameworks in which China and Russia participate by supporting the resolution of disputes through dialogue, while demonstrating the unity of China and Russia externally without isolating Russia. In September, as Ukraine stepped up its counteroffensive, the first face-to-face meeting between the leaders of China and Russia since the military invasion took place on the occasion of the SCO summit, and President Putin praised China's position on Ukraine as “balanced”. At the same time, Putin also referred during the meeting to “questions and concerns” from China, suggesting that these messages had been conveyed to Russia from the Chinese side. As the war has dragged on and the situation on the ground has changed, Chinese dissatisfaction with Russia has intensified, and differences in positions between China and Russia appear to be surfacing. At the online China-Russia summit held at the end of December, President Xi referred to the expansion of cooperation with Russia and other issues, but said he would maintain an “objective and fair position” on the situation in Ukraine, suggesting a possible diplomatic solution.

### **China cannot fully support Russia**

Several factors may be behind this Chinese stance. First, it is impossible for China to officially come out in support of Russia. Russia's recent aggression clearly deviates from the spirit of the UN Charter, and it is not consistent with China's traditional position, which emphasizes national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia held a “referendum based on the right to national self-determination” in the occupied areas of four provinces in eastern and southern Ukraine and declared the annexation of the four provinces based on the “results” of the referendum, a move unacceptable to China given its problems with the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Taiwan. China cannot fully support Russia because of its own internal political issues.

Moreover, the influence of Russia, which is isolated internationally and subject to strong economic sanctions, is evidently declining, and it would be too risky to keep in complete step with Russia. In addition, China has had good relations with Ukraine in the past. China's first aircraft carrier, Liaoning, was purchased from Ukraine, which had suspended construction of the carrier then named Varyag. 2013 saw

the signing of the China-Ukraine Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which includes a provision that China will provide Ukraine with adequate security guarantees in the event that Ukraine faces a nuclear threat. Thus, China also had to consider its relationship with Ukraine.

On the other hand, China also has reasons to strengthen its relationship with Russia. First, it is to counter the United States from a strategic standpoint.

Although Russia's economic position is

gradually declining, it remains a major power in terms of military power, international influence, and resource supply. For China, a stable cooperative relationship with Russia is essential in order to engage in strategic competition with the United States. The fact that China has repeatedly criticized the US in connection with Russia's invasion of Ukraine clearly demonstrates the importance of the perspective of countering the US.

Another important factor is the intentions of President Xi. During his 10-year rule, President Xi has pursued the concentration of power and has come to play a central role in the foreign policy decision-making process. With regard to relations with Russia in particular, he has deepened direct exchanges with President Putin, including dozens of meetings, and a strong personal relationship of trust has been formed between the two leaders, contributing to the strengthening of bilateral relations. In addition, both China and Russia are under strong pressure from the US and the logic of the two countries toward the US is common in many respects. Therefore, US intervention in the Ukraine situation likely engendered a natural Chinese empathy for Russia. Given these facts, it can be assumed that President Xi's personal sentiments are largely reflected in China's policy toward Russia.

### Perspective

China's attitude toward Russia's aggression against Ukraine has greatly undermined China's credibility in the international community. The discrepancy between the principles of maintaining sovereignty and respecting territorial integrity that China has been loudly advocating and China's words and actions this time is obvious, and it has become widely known to the international community that China's theory of



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks with Chinese President Xi Jinping before an extended-format meeting of heads of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit (SCO) member states in Samarkand, Uzbekistan September 16, 2022. Sputnik/Sergey Bobylev/Pool via REUTERS ATTENTION EDITORS - THIS IMAGE WAS PROVIDED BY A THIRD PARTY. TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY (Uzbekistan)

principles is not accompanied by substance. China finds it beneficial to cooperate with Russia in terms of countering the US, but it cannot fully support Russia in light of China's domestic ethnic problems. This dilemma has manifested itself in China's ambiguous attitude, and the international community's view of China has become increasingly severe. Ten months have passed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine began and China continues to strengthen its ties with Russia, but relations with Russia could also pose a major risk for China. It remains to be seen how China's dissatisfaction with Russia, which became clear in September, will change if the war becomes more protracted and the course of the war turns against Russia. ■

## Section 4 Response of India and ASEAN countries

Numerous developing countries, caught between Japan and Western countries opposed to Russia's aggression against Ukraine that have imposed strong sanctions against Russia on the one hand and Russia-leaning countries such as China on the other, have been responding in their own ways with the primary goal of securing their own interests based on their respective national circumstances. While India shares the common value of democracy with the West and is a member of the Quad, it is also heavily dependent on Russia in terms of security, a circumstance that compels India to steer a course that gives due consideration to both the West and Russia. The ASEAN countries have not been able to present a united position, as they took divergent and shifting positions in addressing each of the resolutions condemning Russia at the UN. These countries taking their own independent lines have become a growing presence in the international community as the "Global South".

### India faces difficulty in steering its course

In response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, India has noted the importance of the rule of law and the principle of territorial integrity, and Prime Minister Modi has directly told President Putin that this is "no time for war". However, India has abstained from all draft resolutions condemning Russia at the UN Security Council and General Assembly, urging settlement of the issue through dialogue and diplomacy. India has also maintained its pursuit of national interests on the economic front



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attend a meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan September 16, 2022. Sputnik/Sergey Bobylev/Pool via REUTERS ATTENTION EDITORS - THIS IMAGE WAS PROVIDED BY A THIRD PARTY. (Uzbekistan)

by increasing imports of cheap Russian crude oil without participating in sanctions against Russia. The value of Russian fossil fuel exports to India was 5.7 times higher in July-August than in February-March 2022, the highest of any country, and the importance of Russia as a crude oil procurement source is increasing for India.

While these actions by India have frustrated Quad countries and others seeking to strengthen relations with India as a partner in democracy, there are circumstances unique to India behind these actions. India has depended on Russia for a large part of its weapons systems since the Cold War era and has developed diplomatic and security cooperation with Russia, which is also a supplier of fertilizers and energy. In



addition to this historical relationship, India, which has territorial disputes with China and Pakistan, is concerned that any worsening of its relations with Russia could undermine its own vital national interests by, for instance, strengthening of ties between Russia and China.

On the other hand, India also considers its dependence on Russia a risk factor and has been working to diversify its defense equipment procurement sources in recent years. It has accelerated this move since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and its statements with Western countries (the US in April, the UK in April and October, and France in May) reflect this stance. India has been participating in Russian strategic exercises since 2019 and also took part in the Vostok 2022 strategic exercise held in the Russian Far East in September, but it showed consideration for Japan and the United States by reducing the size of its delegation and limiting the scope of its participation compared to the exercise held in western Russia in 2021. On the occasion of this exercise, a meeting between Chinese and Indian army commanders was held to ease tensions over disputed border areas, but in December, the two sides clashed again, resulting in casualties. Thus, there has been no substantial improvement in Sino-Indian relations. Against this backdrop, the joint US-India exercise in November was conducted in an area only about 100 km away from the Sino-Indian Line of Actual Control, and is believed to have been intended to deter China. The confrontation with China remains a top national security priority for India, which aims to strengthen cooperation with the West even while maintaining relations with Russia to prevent excessive rapprochement between China and Russia.

### **ASEAN countries divided in their responses**

ASEAN as a whole has failed to come up with a unified response, leaving each country to make its own decisions, and each country's response has been on a case-by-case basis. Most (eight out of ten) ASEAN countries supported the UN General Assembly resolution in March demanding immediate withdrawal of Russian troops, but only the Philippines and Myanmar voted in favor of the April resolution calling for the suspension of Russia's membership in the Human Rights Council. In addition, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam abstained from an October resolution declaring Russia's declaration of annexation of four Ukrainian provinces invalid. Singapore, which follows a policy of balanced diplomacy, opposes actions that undermine international law and order, and was the only ASEAN member to issue a statement condemning Russia and to impose economic sanctions against Russia. The Philippines and Vietnam are increasingly concerned that, if Russia succeeds in changing the status quo by force in Ukraine, China may take similar action in the South China Sea, but the two countries' responses have differed. In the Philippines, the Marcos administration formed in May has issued harsh statements describing Russian military attack as "aggression" and cancelled a contract to purchase Russian-made combat helicopters, but it has also approached Russia regarding the purchase of fuel and fertilizers. Vietnam, on the other

hand, abstained from the UN General Assembly resolution because, like Laos, it has had close ties with Russia in areas such as arms procurement since the days of the former Soviet Union. Myanmar's ambassador from the Suu Kyi administration voted in favor of all the UN resolutions but the country's military government issued a statement supporting the invasion of Ukraine and praising President Putin. Indonesia, a leading member of ASEAN, focused on ensuring the success of the G20 meetings as the G20 chair, but it endorsed the March and October resolutions. APEC chair Thailand voted in favor of the March resolution but abstained from the October resolution. ASEAN chair Cambodia, which maintains good relations with both Russia and China, has pursued a foreign policy based on law and the UN Charter. As Cambodia is not economically or militarily dependent on Russia, it co-sponsored the March resolution, voted in favor of the October resolution and has shown a positive attitude toward accepting displaced persons from Ukraine.

### Perspective

Countries that do not take sides with either the West or China/Russia have their own unique circumstances. While India is concerned about strengthening of relations between China and Russia given India's border issue with China, it remains to be seen to what extent India will keep pace with the West and other Quad countries as a democratic nation while maintaining its strategic autonomy. ASEAN countries have traditionally taken different positions on many political issues and their responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine were also divided. ASEAN's policy coordination in response to international crises is expected to remain difficult as the member countries will continue to pursue policies that focus on their relations with Russia and on the impact of energy/food crises and price hikes on themselves. As the war drags on, continued engagement and support by Japan for India, ASEAN member states and other countries in the "Global South" will become all the more important. ■

## **Section 5 Impacts on Middle Eastern and African countries and responses**

The Ukraine crisis destabilized global resource markets and caused widespread price hikes. This is because both Russia and Ukraine were resource-rich countries in the food, fertilizer, and energy sectors. Although prices had already risen globally due to economic recovery from the COVID pandemic and monetary easing mainly in the US, the overall price index through 2022 soared and remained high, reaching twice the 2016 average according to IMF. Directly hit by this situation was the Middle East and Africa region, which has been dependent on grain imports from the two countries across the Black Sea. As competition develops among the major powers for stable supplies of food, fertilizer and energy while new energy politics emerges, the lives of people in the region are severely affected, causing fears of further political instability.

### **Black Sea blockade and food insecurity/crisis in the Middle East and Africa**

The blockade of the Black Sea following Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused food insecurity in the Middle East and Africa, further destabilizing a region that has long suffered from conflicts, refugee problems, the COVID pandemic, and financial crises. According to the WFP, as of the end of December, some 345 million people in 82 countries around the world faced acute food insecurity, and the figure swells to more than 800 million if the number of people suffering from chronic food shortages is included. The top 12 countries suffering from severe food insecurity were all in the Middle East and Africa, with the exception of Haiti.

The "Black Sea Grain Initiative" among the UN, Turkey, Russia and Ukraine was signed in Istanbul on July 22 and extended for another 120 days on November 19. Grain and fertilizer exports from three Ukrainian ports resumed and, as of the end of December, approximately 16 million tons of grain and other food items have been shipped. Whereas around 80% of the initial cargo ships were headed to high-income and middle-income destinations such as European countries and China, emergency food shipments, especially to the Horn of Africa region hit by the worst drought in 40 years and other conflict areas, are urgently awaited.

### **Economic sanctions against Russia and Middle East energy and economic policies**

The West has been hit by the effect of the economic sanctions it has imposed against Russia, a major energy resource producer; de-Russification, in addition to de-carbonization, have become global keywords in 2022. While the weight of the Middle East in US diplomacy was already on the decline due to the global trend toward decarbonization and the US shale gas revolution, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries having OPEC+ channels with Russia have become key players in stabilizing oil prices in the global market.

During President Biden's July trip to the Middle East, his visit to Saudi Arabia, with which tensions over human rights issues had been high, attracted particular attention. Turkish-Saudi relations improved after Turkish prosecutors suspended the trial of Saudi defendants accused of assassinating the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but President Biden remained critical of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. The Ukraine crisis had caused oil prices to spike in March (over \$120 a barrel), and President Biden shelved the human rights issue in trying to secure increased oil production and stable prices from Saudi Arabia. However, a coordinated production cut was decided at the October OPEC+ meeting, highlighting a closer relationship between Saudi Arabia and Russia.

With the ongoing shutdown of the "Nord Stream" natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany, new competitive relationships and connectivity are being formed among Europe, Russia, China and the Middle East over natural gas. Noteworthy developments include an Israel-Lebanon maritime demarcation deal in relation to Mediterranean natural gas development (October), Russia's proposal to expand natural gas supply to Europe via Turkey (October), UAE and Qatar gas exports deals to Europe (September and November respectively), long-term contracts between China and Qatar for the supply of four million tons of natural gas (November), and an agreement between Israel and Morocco to develop gas fields based on the Abraham Accords (November). This trend is expected to continue.

On the other hand, the global trend toward decarbonization in progress even before the Ukraine crisis has been pushing GCC countries to shift their industrial structure. In particular, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are accelerating their research and development and investment in large-scale solar power, wind power, green hydrogen and other projects, and their impact on the international energy market is also garnering attention.

### **"Balanced diplomacy" among regional powers and the shifting balance of power among the US, China and Russia**

With the US presence in the Middle East declining, including the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021, and with negotiations on the Iran nuclear agreement stalling, a realignment of the regional order toward "post-JCPOA" is underway. In addition to the rapprochement among Iran, Russia and Turkey symbolized by the photo of President Raisi, President Putin, and President Erdogan in Tehran, China has been strengthening its presence in the region.

Furthermore, what has become apparent with the war in Ukraine is the weight of the Global South. The world is not simply divided into West and East; many countries, including those in the Middle East and Africa, are practicing "balanced diplomacy" to protect their respective national interests and

behaving differently from the West. On the battlefield, Ukraine with the Turkish Bayraktar TB2 military drone and Russia with the Iranian Shahed 136 loitering munition have been attacking each other, while mercenaries and volunteer soldiers trickle into Ukraine from Syria, which has been ravaged by war for over a decade. To evade sanctions, Russian capital is pouring into real estate and financial markets as well as tourist destinations in Turkey and the UAE. Even Israel, a close ally of the US, is pursuing its own foreign policy, being host to large numbers of immigrants from both countries. Saudi Arabia, which has made a deal with Russia, also moves rapidly closer to China, welcoming President Xi Jinping to its capital in December, concluding a bilateral comprehensive agreement, and hosting the first China-Arab summit.



APTOPIX : Russian President Vladimir Putin, left, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, center, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pose for a photo prior to their talks at the Saadabad palace, in Tehran, Iran, Tuesday, July 19, 2022. (Sergei Savostyanov, Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via AP)

As if in response, President Biden held the US-Africa Summit in Washington, DC, where he announced a total of \$55 billion in support for Africa and endorsed the African Union's entry into the G20. The balance of power among the US, China and Russia in the Middle East and Africa will continue to shift.

### Perspective

As the Ukraine crisis has made clear, global supply chains for strategic resources such as food, fertilizer and energy are not rock-solid. It will be necessary to urgently strengthen production, supply, and cooperation framework in every country and region. In addition, India's population will overtake China's to become the world's largest in 2023, and Africa's population will continue to grow. The presence of the Global South is expected to expand further with this demographic transformation. ■