

Impact of the Ukrainian War on South Korea's diplomacy in Central Asia

Eom Gu Ho

Abstract

Russia's invasion of Ukraine will have political and economic impacts in Central Asia. Politically, first, Central Asian countries will strengthen cooperation with neighbouring regional powers such as India, Turkey and Iran to hedge their political and economic security. Second, while China's influence in Central Asia will increase, SCO will be more economic cooperation organisation. Third, the future direction of Central Asian regionalism will be uncertain. Although it is unlikely, if Uzbekistan shows anti-Russian behaviour, regionalism in Central Asia may weaken. Fourth, it is unlikely that the US role will be expanded again in Central Asia after the Ukraine War. Economically, first, it is highly likely that the status and centripetal force of the Eurasian Economic Union will be weakened. Second, if Europe's anti-Russian energy policy is strengthened and green energy policies are accelerated, the renewable energy policies of Central Asian carbon-centered energy producing countries such as Kazakhstan in particular can be accelerated. Third, if the logistical obstacles of TSR persist, the bypass logistics infrastructure going to Central Asia through India, Iran, Pakistan, etc. instead of through Russia will be activated. It seems inevitable to shift Korea's diplomacy toward Central Asia to a certain level to organically link value-based diplomacy and economic security strategies. In this context, first, the existing diplomatic strategies and economic cooperation policies toward Central Asia must be freed from the tendency to view Central Asian countries only as a sphere of influence from Russia. Second, in a situation in which economic cooperation between Korea and Russia is inevitably severely curtailed due to western sanctions against Russia and geopolitical conflicts, it is necessary to strengthen economic cooperation with Central Asian countries as a means of circumventing economic cooperation with Russia. Third, there is a possibility that the northern policy of new governments may be weakened due to the Russia's invasion of Ukraine, thus the cooperation with Central Asian countries may also shrink. It will be necessary to maintain and develop the previous government's cooperation platform with Central Asian countries.

Keywords

Central Asia, Ukraine War, Diplomatic Policy, Korea

Introduction

This year marks the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties between South Korea and Central Asian countries. Since the Roh Tae-woo administration launched the Northern Policy in the late 1980s, successive governments have engaged in diplomatic relationship with Central Asia, focusing mainly on economic agendas such as securing new markets and natural resources in the region. The Roh Moo-hyun administration strengthened cooperation with Central Asia through the 'Comprehensive Central Asia Initiative',

Korea's first strategy toward Central Asia launched in 2004 with particular emphasis on energy security. President Lee Myung-bak continued cooperation with the region by

Graduate School of International Studies and Asia-Pacific Research Centre,
Hanyang University, Seoul, South Korea

Corresponding author:

Eom Gu Ho, Graduate School of International Studies and Asia-Pacific
Research Centre, Hanyang University, Seoul 04763, South Korea.



including Central Asia in his New Asia Initiative launched in 2009. Cooperation with Central Asia expanded to a new horizon in 2013 with President Park Geun-hye's Eurasia Initiative which focused on the development of transport, energy and trade networks in Eurasia. With the launch of the Eurasia Initiative, Central Asia and Russia, both located in the centre of the continent, emerging as key partners. The successive Moon Jae-in administration announced the New Northern Policy which coordinated various transportation, logistics, and energy cooperation with Eurasian countries within the framework of the 'Nine Bridges' plan. In addition, the Moon administration established the Northern Economic Cooperation Committee which further strengthened cooperation with Central Asia.

The cooperation between South Korea and Central Asia over the past 30 years has shown several noticeable characteristics. First, in terms of policy, cooperation with Central Asia was used as a means of expanding relations with Russia. In other words, South Korea tends to see Central Asia from a Russian perspective rather than from an Asian perspective. This is also true of South Korea Central Asian studies scholarship where research on the region is conducted mainly through the perspectives of Russia or the former Soviet Union. This trend of Russia researchers' segueing into Central Asian studies exists in Korea because the Russian language is still widely being used in Central Asia and Korean scholars believe that Russia's influence over Central Asia is still significant.

Second, there is a sizable Korean diaspora community of more than 300 thousand living in Central Asia. Therefore, unlike China or Japan, Korea could build an amicable image and promote people-to-people exchange more easily with Central Asian countries with the help of the diaspora community. However, there have been only a few instances when the 'Goryeo-in' or the Korean diaspora in the CIS region played a significant role in shaping South Korea's policy towards Central Asia.

Third, if the government is often the main agent of cooperation in Chinese collaboration with Central Asia, private companies take the lead in promoting cooperation in South Korean collaboration with the region. In the immediate years since Central Asia's independence, South Korean companies such as Daewoo Group invested in Uzbekistan and LG Electronics invested in Kazakhstan, instilling a positive image of Korean businesses in Central Asia. These investments were followed by large-scale investments in the energy sector such as gas and chemical plants. The success of Korean companies in Central Asia demonstrated to the Korean government that Central Asia is a region with great economic potential, serving as the driving force for establishing a "strategic partnership" with Uzbekistan in March 2006 and Kazakhstan in May 2009.

Fourth, in the intergovernmental cooperation programme, Korea combines China's pragmatism, which

places emphasis on the achievement of clearly defined goals and Japan's sentimental attachment, which focuses on development cooperation through human capacity building and government capability improvement (Dadabaev, 2019, 4). Korea's cooperation programmes promoted clearly targeted projects that would advance the interests of Korean businesses while also contribute to Central Asia's development through educations cooperation and ODAs. Of the five Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, are included in Korea's ODA priority-partners list.

Fifth, the presidential summits have served as the most important driving force for cooperation. Since first presidential summit meeting between President Roh Tae-woo and President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan at the Blue House on June 17, 1992, summit meetings between Korean and Central Asian leaders, especially those of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have been held regularly. Prior to the meetings, different agenda for economic cooperation were discussed. These discussions would later materialise into cooperative projects after the summits.

Sixth, instead of approaching Central Asia as a single entity, Korea has prioritised building relationship with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and to a lesser extent, with Turkmenistan, which are the most economically significant countries in the region. Most of the summit meetings and investments were concentrated on these three countries. As of 2020, Korea's exports to Central Asia amounted to \$3.9 billion, of which 51% were exports to Kazakhstan and 48% were exports to Uzbekistan. Exports to the other three countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) accounted for only 1% (see [Figure 1]). In recent years, cooperation with Uzbekistan has been the most active, with the bilateral relations elevated to the status of special strategic partnership in 2019.

Seventh, when entering Central Asia, Korean companies like their Japanese counterparts, make their own decisions about the local investment environment. This is different from Chinese companies entering Central Asia who are greatly influenced by intergovernmental agreements. In addition, Korean companies are more active than Japanese companies in seeking opportunities from negotiations during official government visits.

Lastly, Korea has maintained a relatively open attitude towards people-to-people exchanges. Compared to China and Japan, Korea is more open to visa issuance for foreign students and workers coming to the country. As a result, the number of Uzbeks residing in Korea is approximately 55 thousand (about 3% of all foreigners) which is the fifth largest group of foreigners living in Korea by ethnicity.

The COVID-19 crisis which lasted more than 2 years has resulted in an inevitable stagnation of exchanges and collaboration between Korea and Central Asia. Amidst of the global health crisis, the unexpected Russian invasion of

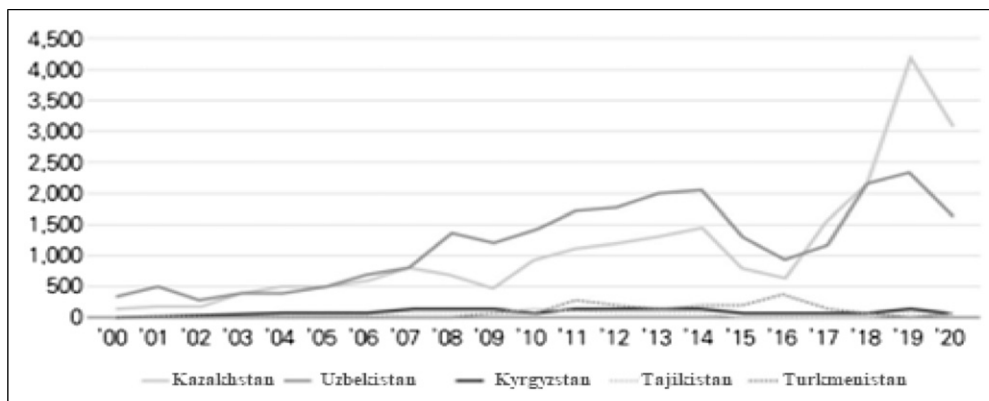


Figure 1. South Korea's trade with Central Asian countries.

Ukraine has increased the uncertainty in the global order as well as in the Eurasian regional order. Central Asian countries are also facing the challenge of building stability amidst uncertainties with government changes. Starting with Shavkat Mirziyoyev who succeeded Islam Karimov as the second President of Uzbekistan in 2016, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev succeeded Nursultan Nazarbayev as President of Kazakhstan in 2019. In Kyrgyzstan, Sadyr Japarov was elected as President in 2021 while in Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimukhammedov rose to the office in 2022. Tajikistan is also likely to achieve a power succession in the near future. Overall, Central Asia is in a period of internal and external upheaval. In Korea, the new administration headed by President Yun Seok-yeol is established. Therefore, it is timely to review the new South Korean government's policies towards Central Asia.

Political and Economic Impact of the Ukrainian War on Central Asia

The five Central Asian countries occupy a vast stretch of land which expands from Russia, China, India to the Middle East. Located at the heart of the Eurasian continent, the Central Asian countries are rapidly growing. Although neither fully democratic nor politically stable, these countries have well-adapted to the complex power relations shaped by neighbouring superpowers and regional hegemonies. In general, the Central Asian countries participate in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for security and in Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) for economic partnership, with Russia, the traditional regional power.¹ They also participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization led by China and Russia, Central Asia's two neighbouring great powers. However, Central Asian countries have also strove to balance the influence of these powers by engaging in multilateral dialogues and forums with the Western powers

such as the United State and the EU as well as with India, Turkey, Japan and Korea. These dialogues include US and Central Asian States' C5+1 Initiative (2015), EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting (2005), 'India-Central Asia Dialogue' (2019), Organization of Turkic States (OTS, 2009), Central Asia plus Japan Dialogue, (2004) and Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum (2007).

Central Asian countries are in a period of unprecedented changes. The global Cold War structure is gradually consolidating with the intensification of US-China competition, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Great powers are using economic leverage in geopolitical competition resulting in political polarisation accompanying the creation of bloc economy. The neo-continentalist Eurasian economic dynamics driven by the recognition that Russia could serve as a link between Europe and Asia in the context of globalisation, led to the emergence of regional blocs led by the Chinese OBOR and the Russian EAEU and their interconnection. The Russian invasion of Ukraine would disrupt if not seriously damage this neo-continentalist dynamics. This might adversely affect impact Central Asia's capacity to conduct balanced diplomacy.

A new layer of geo-economics and geopolitics has emerged in the Eurasian continent in the past two decades. Against the US Indo-Pacific strategy, China has attempted to build an alternative westward route from Asia to Europe via the Belt and Road Initiative. The United States that once thought that China would seamlessly integrate into the liberal world order now sees the Chinese initiative as posing a threat to its hegemony. In addition, the war in Ukraine demonstrates that the structure and norms of the future global order will be renegotiated in the Great Eurasia region.

Central Asian reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be described as cautious. There are differences in how each Central Asian countries react to the invasion, but in general they express concern and refrain from directly criticising Russia. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,

for example, abstained from the UN General Assembly resolution from March 2022, condemning the Russian invasion. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan did not participate at all. When the UN Human Rights Council suspended Russia's membership in April, 2022, Turkmenistan did not participate in the decision-making process while the other four opposed the suspension. It is noteworthy that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's reaction against the Russian invasion became more vocal compared to their reaction against the annexation of Crimea. Both countries explicitly refused to recognise the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk which Russia had requested. The Central Asian countries being former Soviet republics like Ukraine may have perceived the Russian invasion as a potential security threat.

Yet, it would be difficult for Central Asia to break away from their dependence on Russia in the near future. For Central Asia, Russia remains an essential security partner. Although China's influence appears to grow stronger in Central Asia, Russia remains the dominant regional player in the region's political, economic, and security realms. Russia has a stronger presence as a security partner for Central Asia especially now that the Taliban has regained control of Afghanistan since August 2021. The Russia-led CSTO is strengthening its partnership with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In addition, Central Asia's economy remains highly dependent on Russia. Approximately 37% of Kazakhstan's imports come from Russia. 29.6% of Tajikistan's imports, 29.3% of Kyrgyzstan's imports and 19.3% of Uzbekistan's import also come from Russia (Kazantsev et al., 2021). Regarding exports to Russia, 16% of Kyrgyzstan's and 12% of Kazakhstan's exports go to Russia. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan also rely heavily on remittances from migrant workers in Russia, accounting for around 31%, 27% and 12% of their GDP, respectively. The World Bank forecasts that remittances from Russia will fall by 21% for Uzbekistan, 22% for Tajikistan and 33% for Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, Kazakhstan relies on Russian pipeline for its European energy exports² while other Central Asian countries' dependence on Russian energy is also increasing. The energy grids located in northern Kazakhstan and southwestern Siberia still provide electricity to Kazakhstan, while Gazprom in Uzbekistan supplies gas to Kyrgyzstan. Lukoil announced its plan to explore and develop Uzbekistan's gas and oil reserves to improve the country's scarce supply of energy products. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan import petroleum and its by-products mostly from Russia. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, transports about 160,000 tons of oil every month by tanker to the Russian Caspian Sea port of Makhachkala and then to the Black Sea port, Novorossiysk.

In addition, Russia's support is important for maintaining legitimacy for Central Asia's authoritarian governments.

The January incident when President Tokayev of Kazakhstan restored control during an uprising through the CSTO intervention is demonstrative. The Russian support is also important for Turkmenistan where the office of presidency was recently handed to a son of the formal leader and also for Tajikistan that attempts to a similar presidential succession.

The war in Ukraine will have a profound political and economic impact on Central Asia in the future. First, a political point of view, the Central Asian countries will expand their collaboration with neighbouring regional powers such as India, Turkey and Iran to hedge political and economic security. India's position on the Ukraine war could serve as a major inflection point in international affairs. India is a leading state with a neutral if not sympathetic attitude toward Russia. India has already gained advantage due to the ongoing competition between the West and Russia by purchasing four-times as much of daily supply of Russian oil at a much lower price³ and has allowed Russian investors to buy bonds of Indian companies, strengthening its financial cooperation with Russia. India has relied on Russia for weapons and energy imports and thinks that Russia can play a positive role in resolving India's conflict with China. However, India is also maintaining friendly relations with the West and thus is unlikely to lean completely towards Russia. But this does not mean that India would give up its neutrality. For Central Asian countries who are members of the SCO, it is easier to strengthen cooperation with India which maintains its amicable relations with Russia. In 2019, India established the India-Central Asia Dialogue 5 + 1 and also discussed with its Central Asian partners a wide range of issues including Afghanistan during the third India-Central Asia Dialogue held in December 2021. Central Asia thinks that India, with multiple experiences of successfully conducting collaborative projects with Afghanistan, could help revolving the Afghanistan issue. At the moment, India is constructing a railway from Chabahar to Zahedan on the Iran-Afghan border. Uzbekistan has reached an agreement with India to connect Uzbekistan to India, Afghanistan and Iran via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) through Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.⁴

Turkey is a logical partner of the four Turkic-speaking Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan that share cultural and linguistic similarities. In addition, Turkey's role in international politics as a NATO member with strong ties with Europe helps Turkey to build solid cooperative relations with Central Asian countries. Turkey established the Organisation of Turkic States in 2009 to institutionalise cooperation among Turkic nations. For Central Asian countries, relations with Turkey have helped balance their relations with Russia and China. The Russian invasion of Ukraine may expand Turkey's role in the Eurasian region.

As a NATO member, Turkey is supplying military aids to Ukraine; however, it refused to participate in sanctions against Russia. Turkey is prepared to take advantage of its existing constructive relations with Russia and to fill the gap created by the withdrawal of Western companies from the Russian market. In addition, Russia's economic difficulties would contribute to expanding Turkey's role as Central Asia's economic partner. It is likely that Turkish businesses would encroach on sectors previously dominated by Russian businesses.

If Central Asia renews its interest in expanding its connectivity with the Southern Asian market, Iran's New East Policy would gain a significant momentum (Woods & Baker, 2022). Iran's connection with Central Asia not only allow Iran to access huge gas and oil reserves, but also to secure a transport network that connects landlocked western China and Central Asia with the Persian Gulf. Together, these measures could improve energy self-sufficiency and economic interdependence between Iran and Central Asian states.

The second impact of the Ukrainian war on Central Asia is the growing influence of China in Central Asia while the SCO would evolve into an economic organisation. The war would lead to a favourable outcome for China. The second half of the Biden administration would mostly likely be dominated by a major security conflict between the US and Russia, making it difficult for the US to focus on China issues as the priority foreign policy agenda. In addition, sanctions imposed on Russia will make Russia more dependent on China, increasing China's influence in Eurasia.

The Chinese financial support made possible major infrastructure construction projects in Central Asia over the past two decades. Despite this, the enormous burden of infrastructure loans imposed on participating Eurasian countries built antipathy toward Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. In addition, the recent representation of Central Asia as a part of Chinese historical territory in Chinese textbooks and the brutal treatment of Muslim population in western China caused widespread concern and outrage among Central Asian countries.

Nevertheless, Russia's economic difficulties caused by Western sanctions will reduce Russia's economic role in Central Asia strengthening Chinese economic influence in the region. What should be noted here is the future Sino-Russian relations and the role of the SCO in Central Asia. The duel system of Russia taking the lead in security and China in economy would mostly likely remain in a broad framework. However, even though China recognises Russia's role as the security guarantor in Central Asia and adheres to the non-interference principle, the BRI investment led Chinese involvement in regional security issues inevitable. Aware of SCO's inadequate framework for security partnership, China has instead promoted bilateral military cooperation with five Central Asian countries. In

2016, China announced a new initiative called Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism that includes Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan to strengthen security in Afghanistan and Central Asia. This is the first security bloc in the region where Russia does not participate. Russia is also revitalising bilateral security cooperation with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the two Central Asian states that are not members of the CSTO. Since 2017, Uzbekistan can purchase military equipment from Russia at a domestic price. Uzbekistan has participated in a joint military exercise renewed for the first time since 2005. Russia and Uzbekistan agreed to provide mutual access to each other's airspace to military aircraft. However, even though both Russia and China seeks to strengthen bilateral military cooperation with Central countries, it is unlikely that Russian and Chinese security competition would surface after the war. At the moment the Russia–China security cooperation is based on the overlapping strategic interests to stabilise Afghanistan. In addition, China might hesitant to assume a bigger role in regional security in order to avoid confrontation with Russia. In addition, the fact that the CSTO and not the SCO intervened in the Kazakh uprising which was officially-announced as an act of terror implies the SCO's limitation as a security organisation. While supporting Russia politically China also must accommodate the demand of the SCO member-states that wish to distance themselves from Russia since its invasion. Therefore, it is most likely that SCO will further expand its partnership with the Middle East and South Asia and seek new economic rather than security opportunities.

The third political impact of the war on Central Asia is the increased uncertainty in Central Asian regionalism. As Central Asian countries look at the Russian invasion of Ukraine, they will find that regional solidarity is the best solution to many problems. After Shavkat Mirziyoyev took office as President of Uzbekistan in 2016, Central Asian regionalism gained a new impetus, as exemplified by the 'Central Asia Leaders summit', which has not been held for nearly 20 years. The summit has been refurbished three times since 2018. After the first Central Asia Summit held in Nursultan, Kazakhstan in 2018, the momentum of strengthening regional cooperation became more visible, followed by the second meeting in Samarkant, Uzbekistan in 2019. The third round was held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan in August 2021. After the Ukraine war, Russia's image in Central Asia has deteriorated, and regionalism in Central Asia can be weakened according to different positions of the countries in their relationship with Russia. Uzbekistan, which has been relatively independent from Russia so far, has the potential to become an important variable in the continuation of regionalism. Since the inauguration of President Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan has been working to improve relations with Russia. He joined the Eurasian Economic Union as an observer and participated in

joint training with the CSTO. The possibility of a sudden change in Uzbekistan's stance toward Russia does not appear to be high at this time. However, if Russia's political and economic pressure on Central Asia becomes too strong, Uzbekistan may be the first to deviate from the pro-Russian line, and in this case, the newly created Central Asian regionalism will weaken again.

A fourth political impact is that the role of the US is unlikely to be re-expanded to Central Asia after the Ukraine war. Due to the Ukraine crisis, the US faces the two enemies on a global level: Russia in Europe and China in Asia. Therefore, it will have little room to influence Central Asia. With the withdrawal from Afghanistan, Central Asian countries' trust in the US has been broken. The US can be only in the position to exert its influence Central Asia only when it remains influential in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, neighbouring Central Asia. However, considering India's recent response to Russia, such possibility is low.

If we look at the economic impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Central Asia, first, since the currency of Central Asian countries is highly linked to the rouble, the damage caused by the exchange rate depreciation will be huge, followed by the collapse of the labour market in Russia. Second, it is highly likely that the status of the Eurasian Economic Union and its centripetal force will be weakened. This is because there is a high possibility that Russian investment projects in the region that receive financial support are likely to be cancelled due to sanctions against Russia. If the sanctions hit the energy sector, Kazakhstan's exports of oil and gas to Europe via Russia could also be affected. Under such circumstances, the Russian government banned the export of wheat, rye, barley, and corn to the Eurasian Economic Union until June 30, 2022, and banned the export of white sugar and raw sugar until August 31 of the same year, which clearly had a negative impact on its trust in Russia. Also, in the future, Russia, in a situation where it is difficult to use dollars, is likely to force Eurasian Economic Union members to use roubles. Central Asian countries cannot help but worry about the possibility of Russia's pressure on them by enhancing their economic dependence on Russia through building an industrial value chain that utilises Central Asian countries for low-value industries, where the cost of production is high, while reserving high-value industries for itself. If this situation becomes a reality, the centripetal force of the Eurasian Economic Union will be weakened.

Third, if Europe's energy policy to reduce dependence on Russia and renewable energy policies strengthens, the renewable energy policies of Central Asian carbon-centered energy producers, such as, in particular, Kazakhstan, can be accelerated.

Fourth, if the logistical obstacles of TSR persist, logistics infrastructure to Central Asia via India, Iran, Pakistan and etc., which bypass Russia, will be activated.

Since 1979 Central Asia has relied on the Soviet-era route to the north due to the civil war in Afghanistan and western sanctions against Iran, as well as a new route to the east crossing the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus due to the emergence of a new West or Belt and Road Initiative. The Ukraine war will force Central Asia to become more active in linking a new southern transport route, which has been heavily debated. Above all, India proposed the Iranian port of Chabahar as a part of the INSTC and made an agreement with Central Asian leaders to link it to Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. Turkmenistan also recognises Chabahar as a key part of the Eurasian transport route, including the Caspian port of Turkmenbashi. In addition, Uzbekistan signed a trade agreement in July 2021, which allows connections to all five Central Asian countries through Pakistan's ports of Gwadar and Karachi.

Suggestions for Korea's Diplomatic Policy toward Central Asia

If the confrontation between the Western democratic camp and the so-called revisionist camp intensifies due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the intensifying competition between the United States and China, thus, economic resources are weaponised, and the supply chain is eroded, the Korean government have to strengthen values-based diplomacy to a certain level. In other words, there is no choice but to increase the proportion of economic security factors in the formulation of foreign policy. It seems inevitable to shift Korea's diplomacy toward Central Asia to a certain degree to organically link values-based diplomacy and economic security strategy. In this context, I would like to suggest several directions.

First, the existing foreign policy toward Central Asia and economic cooperation policies should be free from the tendency to view Central Asia only as Russia's sphere of influence. Central Asia had no choice but to be greatly influenced by neighbouring powers Russia and China. This is why Korea has so far focused on economic cooperation rather than diplomatic and security cooperation. However, Central Asian countries are showing a tendency to advance democratisation reforms compared to the previous regimes as they undergo regime changes. President Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan's emphasis on human rights reform or President Tokayev of Kazakhstan's emphasis on a 'hearing state' suggests that a regime change tends to raise the level of people's demands for democratisation and make some progress. Also, Central Asian countries will possibly try to reduce their dependence on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine, not only economically but also in terms of security. Therefore, Korean diplomacy with Central Asia has come to a stage to consider the aspect of values-based diplomacy.

However, since Central Asia's dependence on Russia and China will continue for a considerable period of time, it is necessary to develop values-based diplomacy as gradually as possible. It may be a realistic values-based diplomacy measure to start with the current issue of human security at first, approaching fundamental issues such as democracy and human rights step by step. It may also be a good idea to explore a new role in resolving regional disputes, unique to Central Asia, such as water resource cooperation.

In terms of economy and logistics, it is crucial to view Central Asia in connection with the southern economic corridors such as India, Pakistan, Turkey and Iran, rather than merely in relation with Russia. These countries, which have relatively good relations with Russia, will fill vacuum, where Russia's economic role is diminishing in Central Asia. South Korea's southern policy toward Indo-Southeast Asia needs to be linked with Central Asian policy. If the US lifts Iran's sanctions, Iran can be a potentially important economic cooperation partner for Korea. In this case, it is necessary to establish an investment strategy, linking Central Asia, which has a small domestic market, with Iran, which has a large domestic market. India is also important because it is not only a market as huge as China, but also it has recently strengthened cooperation with Central Asia. Since it can also serve as a gateway for Central Asian logistics, it is necessary to devise an external economic strategy linking the India-Pakistan-Southeast Asian axis and the India-Iranian-Central Asian axis.

Second, in a situation where economic cooperation between Korea and Russia is inevitably reduced significantly due to sanctions against Russia and geopolitical conflicts, it is necessary to strengthen economic cooperation with Central Asia as a means of circumventing economic cooperation with Russia. It is necessary to consider establishing export production bases to Russia in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan, both the Eurasian Economic Union members, or linking export logistics to Russia by using the newly revitalised Southern Economic Corridor logistics network. In the future, depending on the development of anti-Russian sanctions, it may be possible to consider settlements against Russia through Korean companies, located in Central Asia.

Third, the continuity of diplomacy with Central Asia needs to be emphasised. There is a possibility that the cooperation in Central Asia, which has been a key area of the Northern policy of Korea along with Russia, will shrink due to the Ukraine war, as well as Korean Northern policy of successive governments. In addition, if there is a change of government, the policies of the previous government may be deliberately neglected. A policy that has been maintained irrespective of the regime's inclinations, like the Northern Policy, is rare. It is true that the Moon Jae-in administration's New Northern Policy did not achieve the results it was originally intended to, but the expansion of cooperation platforms with Central Asian countries is an achievement.

Such platforms should be maintained and developed. The 'Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum' created in 2007 at the vice minister level was upgraded to the ministerial level in 2021; and in 2020, the Korea-Central Asia Business Council was established between the Korea International Trade Association and the Chambers of Commerce of five Central Asian countries. Also, in the case of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which are key partners among them, a joint working group was established from 2019; a business council was also established with Turkmenistan. By utilising the communication platform, it is necessary to discover new economic cooperation projects during the complex transition period.

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Notes

1. Turkmenistan, a permanently-neutral country, does not participate in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Uzbekistan, on the other hand, withdrew from CSTO in 2012 but participated in a joint military exercise with Russia in August 2021, after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Regarding the EAEU participation, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are full members of the organisation while Uzbekistan is an observer.
2. According to the Caspian Sea Pipeline Consortium (CPC), the 1500km-long pipeline is built which transfers oil from Kazakhstan's three major oil-fields—Tengiz, Kashagan and Karachaganak—to the Russian ports in Novorossiysk along the Black sea.
3. Russia's share of India's crude oil imports is currently only 1–2%, but is likely to increase in the future. See 'India's oil import from Russia minuscule, legitimate energy transactions can't be politicised, says Centre', *The Economic Times*. May 4, 2022. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/indias-oil-import-from-russia-minuscule-legitimate-energy-transactions-cant-be-politicised-says-centre/articleshow/91319009.cms?from=mdr>
4. 'Uzbekistan keen to connect India via Afghanistan & Iran', *The Economic Times*. December 4, 2019. <https://m.economictimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/uzbekistan-keen-to-connect-india-via-afghanistan-iran/articleshow/72923860.cms>

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