CSDS-Asia Matters Podcast — 4/4/2022
Asia's Response to the War in Ukraine

Edited transcript

Host: Andrew Peaple
Guests: Ramon Pacheco Pardo, CSDS
Eva Pejsova, CSDS
Garima Mohan, German Marshall Fund of the United States

Andrew Peaple: Russia's invasion of Ukraine has not only brought dreadful suffering to the Ukrainian people, as well as heavy losses for the Russian army, it has also upended many of the assumptions that have guided international relations, arguably since the fall of the Soviet Union.

In this episode, we're going to examine the response in three of Asia's most prominent nations, Japan, India and Korea and assess the implications for their respective foreign policies. Joining us to do so we have first two familiar voices from the Centre for Security Diplomacy and Strategy at the Brussels School of Governance.

Eva Pejsova is the senior Japan Fellow at CSDS and **Ramon Pacheco Pardo** holds the Korea chair at the Centre. Welcome back to you, Eva.

Eva Pejsova: Hi, Andrew.

Andrew Peaple: And also to you Roman.

Ramon Pacheco Pardo: Hi, Andrew.

Andrew Peaple: And we also have with us **Garima Mohan**. Garima is a fellow in the Asia programme at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, where she leads work on India. Thank you so much for joining us and hello to you, Garima.

Garima Mohan: Very nice to be here.

Andrew Peaple: Well, thank you all for joining us. What I'd like to do is first come to each of you in turn to talk about the reaction to the war in the countries in which you specialise, and then come back for a more general discussion. So Eva, can I start with you and the response in Japan. Of course, Japan is a member of the G7, it has long held strategic ties to the US, but it's also spent several years, particularly under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, trying to improve its relations with Russia, with whom it still has territorial disputes that have lingered since World

War Two. Eva, Could you outline what the key points you've noted in Japan's reaction to Russia's invasion have been so far?

Eva Pejsova: Well, thank you for the question, Andrew. I think first of all, we need to notice the rather extraordinary speed and scale of the Japanese response. Japan was the first Indo-Pacific or Asian country to condemn very loudly the Russian aggression, and to join the Western sanctions. It also cut Russian banks from the SWIFT system, it sent financial, humanitarian and material support to Ukraine. And it even decided to accept Ukrainian refugees on its soil, which is frankly very unusual for a country that has been reputed for its reluctance towards immigration. So in many ways, we can talk of an awakening moment or a major turning point in Japanese politics and approach to security in general. Basically, it is as if Japan suddenly realised that war is a possibility, that some sort of military aggression can happen at any point in the region. In other words, if Russia can attack Ukraine, then China can try to seize Taiwan or the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands by force anytime, and that Japan needs to be ready.

And so on the one hand, it not only needs to very quickly reaffirm its attachment to the U.S. Alliance and the Western liberal democratic camp in general and prove to be a worthy partner; but also on the domestic front, it questions very much its capacity to respond to crisis, and the military readiness of its self defence forces. Now, this is especially important: as we know, Japan is currently preparing to update its national security strategy, which will be released at the end of the year. So we're likely to see some major upgrades, both in terms of spending and capabilities.

What I find also very important to note is the unprecedented level of public support. And in a way, you see that in Japan, but also in other Asian countries. In fact, there was a recent survey saying that 86% of the Japanese population support the government response, which is quite amazing. And you have certainly seen the footage of demonstrations in all major Japanese cities in the past few weeks. And that's very different from what we saw, for instance, in 2014, after the annexation of Crimea, which went much more unnoticed. Now, this could be due to the violent images that we see in the media of the war, partly, but also in the Japanese case, it is the connection to the nuclear threat that it represents, which as you can imagine, is an extremely sensitive topic in the country.

Andrew Peaple: What do you see as the likely impact on Japan's relations with Russia? As I referred to, those relations had been getting closer for a few years, and particularly those territorial disputes that Japan still has with Russia, the Kurile Islands to the north of Japan, where the status has been in question since the Second World War. Given that Russia has now invaded Ukraine, is there a fear in Japan that that sort of territorial disputes could be next on Russia's list?

Eva Pejsova: Absolutely, the reaction needs to be seen against the Japanese complex relationship with Russia in general. You mentioned the disputes for the northern territories in Japan, and the southern Kuriles in Russia, that are currently controlled by Russia — that's a point that has been preventing the two countries from signing a peace treaty after the Second

World War. The reaction of Russia has been almost immediate. Russia actually withdrew from the peace treaty negotiations, to which Japan loudly objected. But let's not forget that Japan is also dependent partly on Russian gas from Sakhalin. So what is interesting in the strong reaction is that Japan realises it comes with a cost. And in the case of the Kuriles, it almost seems that it's ready to cut the losses.

Andrew Peaple: Thank you, Eva. Turning to you Garima. India has attracted quite a lot of criticism for its stance on the war, particularly in abstaining on key votes at the United Nations condemning the Russian action. Can you explain for us India's position on the war and why it appears at least to be seeking to stay neutral?

Garima Mohan: Sure, Andrew, as you said, in the beginning of the podcast, the invasion of Ukraine has upended international relations and the political calculations countries are making. And this is very clear also in the Indian case, even though it might not be obvious from the outside. India is very concerned. And we have reasons to believe that Indian officials have taken a tough stand, including the prime minister in private conversations with Russia, but it has maintained steady neutrality in its positions in public.

As you mentioned, there are three reasons for that, first, is that there were 20,000 Indian students stuck in Ukraine, and they had to be evacuated and the Indian government had to negotiate safe passage with both Ukraine and Russia. This was also coming at a time of very crucial domestic elections in India. So the government could not afford to take any risks with this. Now that the students are out, I think there are more options on the table, as it were, for India. Second is the military dependency that India has on Russia, particularly in terms of equipment, spare parts, and technology. It's a very pressing concern for India right now, because of tensions with China on India's border. And I see that not a lot of Western coverage has covered this. And also there is a hesitancy on the part of the Indian Government to share the extent of the conflict on the border. But this is of course, playing a major role in India's calculations. What if Russia decides to, you know, not act on the defence contracts and stop supplies? Where would that leave India? And third is a slightly longer term calculation, where Delhi wants to preserve whatever remnants of leverage it still has with Moscow so that the Russians don't reach the conclusion that their only global partner is China. Now, India is surrounded by China, Russia and Pakistan and its neighbourhood and the relations between these three countries play an important role in India's overall calculus. It does not want to be surrounded by, say, three countries who are all hostile to India. I think this is the longer term implication.

What a lot of Western observers are not seeing is the domestic debate in India changing and it has changed as a result of this. A lot of the commentariat experts and media have questioned was it really necessary for India to abstain from procedural words in the UN? Is it necessary to not call this for what it is — an invasion — and stop using ‘both sides’ language? And there has been a lot of criticism of the government on that question. But overall, people do understand why India is so cautious.

It is leading to a rethink of India's Russia policy. India has already started diversifying who its key partners are. It's working more with the U.S. and France on defence equipment, even at the UN Security Council where Russia used to be an important partner for India, vetoing resolutions around Kashmir, for example. Now India has partners in the U.S. and France. So there's a lot of debate in New Delhi. What does this partnership with Russia mean? How does it impact India's strategic autonomy and a realisation, whether India likes it or not, that a Russia and China partnership is emerging. So there is a big rethink going on in New Delhi. And I think India's position is still evolving.

Andrew Peaple: As we record, it's just a few days after China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi has visited India, and Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov is going to visit there as well. It seems like China and Russia are on a diplomatic offensive to get more support from India. Do you think that's going to work? Do you think India could get more drawn into the Russian side? Conversely, of course, India is part of some of these new groupings in Asia such as the Quad — along with the US and Japan and Australia — that have been seen to be slightly more hostile to China. So it's a pretty interesting situation. Do you see that diplomatic offensive working?

Garima Mohan: Yeah, India's in a difficult position, I mean, it is in a bind. It seems like an effort by both Russia and China to portray India as in their block. The Chinese visit was to make sure that India attends the next BRICS summit and the Russia, India, China trilateral happens. But in terms of optics, it is certainly something that India does not want. So I would encourage your listeners to look at the official statements issued by the Indian government after the Chinese visit, where they clearly state that the bonhomie that China is trying to present does not exist; India's very cautious and until the time the Chinese-Indian border crisis is resolved, 'business as usual' will not take place. And I'm sure after the visit of Lavrov as well, India would issue its own statements giving its own account of the partnership and the visits, because it certainly does not want to be grouped in this grouping or be associated in any way with President Putin's imperialist ambitions.

And as you mentioned, India is also part of other groupings, including the Quad. It has, in recent times, invested a lot of time, energy and diplomatic resources in reinvigorating its partnerships with the West, with the United States, but also in Europe. And India is very keen to make sure that it can salvage these partnerships as well. It's a very tight rope for India to walk. But I see no way that India will just move over into the Russian camp. And this has been the core of India's foreign policy positions, basically, since the beginning, since the country gained independence. Of course, it's not always easy to be non aligned, and not to take any positions and say that we are working for our own interests, and nobody else's, as the Indian Foreign Minister says. But it's going to be increasingly difficult for for India to maintain the current position that it has

Andrew Peaple: Ramon, turning to you. The war in Ukraine has come at a time when South Korea has been preoccupied with its own presidential election, which was narrowly won by the conservative Yoon Seuk-yeol. What have we seen from Seoul in the response of the outgoing Moon administration, which of course will be in power until May? And how could that change when Yun takes office do you think?

Ramon Pacheco Pardo: In the case of Korea, the response was unsurprising. So Korea condemned, or President Moon condemned the invasion within 24 hours, which came after the US, Japan and Korea itself had issued a trilateral statement prior to the invasion, essentially warning Russia not to go ahead. And then Korea very quickly discussed that it was going to be joining sanctions imposed by the international community, especially by the US and the European Union, and then went ahead with them.

And I think there are three main reasons why Korea decided to do this, and why I think this will continue, once Yoon takes office in early May. The first reason is that if you look at the countries imposing sanctions on Russia, they're what Korea would call like-minded partners, you see values becoming more important in Korean foreign policy in recent years, to an extent that wasn't really the case, say, for example, a decade ago. So countries such as the US, European countries, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan as well. Korea was invited to attend the G7 last year and also the Summit for Democracy. So this has led the current president, President Moon, to take a more value-based foreign policy. It should also be said that in this case, the Korean public has been opposed to the invasion of Ukraine from the beginning. And you have seen a strong combination coming from civil society groups, demonstrations being organised in support of Ukraine, fundraising among the Korean people. So in a sense, there was this push coming from civil society for Korea to do more. And as you mentioned, the invasion came during the campaign to elect the new president and Yoon Seok-yeol, the president elect, also came very quickly in condemnation of the invasion.

There is a second reason which I think matters as well for Korean foreign policy. President Moon made very clear to the chaebols such as Samsung, LG — that have very strong economic interests in Russia — that they were going to suffer. Russia is the 12th largest trading partner for Korea. And this is not only about oil and gas from Russia going to Korea. It's actually much more about the Korean chaebol and the activities that they have in the Russian market, factories, for example, the sale of cars, mobile phones, etc, etc. This is interesting, the changing thinking among many Korean policymakers, both liberals and conservatives, that sometimes Korea will have to suffer due to his foreign policy decisions.

And I think there was a third important factor, which are the implications for Asia itself. The fact that Russia has been willing to invade Ukraine, but that China has taken a tougher stance, for example, with artificial island building in the South China Sea. This has been well noted in Korea. There has also been a discussion of course, about what if North Korea decides to strike on Korea? Again, I should say this has not been a mainstream discussion, but there have been pundits and experts who have been talking about how the international community came to the rescue of South Korea in 1950 and could come to the rescue of South Korea again, if there is a new invasion by North Korea, as unlikely as this may be.
And there's one last point that I would like to mention, that Korea has tried to court Russia when it came to, for example, support with its approach towards North Korea. But Korea has also had problems with Russia. There have been Russian cyber attacks on South Korean companies, South Korean government entities including, for example, on the day of the inauguration of the

Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games in 2018. So there have been some tensions with Russia in the past as well. And I think this helps also to tilt the balance towards Korea joining the sanctions against Russia and the current international combination. These will continue under Yoon, I don't see much change.

Andrew Peaple: Fascinating. Thank you, Ramon, I wanted to stay with that point you made about the implications of what's happened in Ukraine, what lessons Asian countries are learning for its own regional security. The West's response to the Korean crisis has been pretty strong in terms of economic sanctions, and they've offered some military support, but it's stopped well short of direct military intervention. How are the countries we're talking about today reading this in terms of their own region's security? Eva, could I start with you on that, please?

Eva Pejsova: On the one hand, I think most regional countries understand the Western calibrated response. So there is not so much criticism there. But on the other hand, of course, the one issue that is on everyone's mind, and it has been already suggested several times here, is Taiwan. So the question of an effective Western deterrence in the region has never been more acute. And there is much contingency planning, as we speak and since the beginning of the crisis, going on in the region and in Taiwan itself, which is carefully watching the situation and then learning lessons, but we'll see how that goes.

For Japan, the question of Taiwan is immediately related to the Senkaku/Diaoyu, and it's also related to an extent also to the South China Sea and to the Paracel Islands. So of course, it doesn't even stop at Taiwan. But let's face it, the expectations of the kind of Western military response in the case of a Taiwan contingency have always been questioned, and have always been rather moderate. It's been something that has been discussed for decades now, almost, and there are not very bright or clear expectations that the West will intervene militarily in that case. So I guess Taiwan understands that, Japan understands that, most of the regional countries do. So in part of the contingency planning going on, that is also what Taiwan will be preparing, or basically building up its own domestic capabilities and trying to defend itself better, knowing that there might not be necessarily a direct military response or support from the West.

Andrew Peaple: And Eva do you think that in Japan, this will shape the ongoing debate, the debate that's been going on for years, about the extent to which Japan needs to step up in terms of defending itself? And even do you think it could restart the debate about the nuclear deterrent? Because obviously, the war in Ukraine has raised that spectre, unfortunately, with Russia, talking about the use of nuclear weapons?

Eva Pejsova: Absolutely. It's related. Actually, we've seen four days after the beginning of the aggression, we heard the former Prime Minister Abe mentioning that maybe we should discuss the possibility of nuclear sharing with the United States which frankly was a completely taboo topic for the longest time. Now I'm not thinking that it will become a reality. But just the fact that we are even discussing the topic is already a great leap forward. And in general terms, absolutely, as I said, it is and will be a turning point for Japan's domestic capabilities, defence

and security capabilities. So we are certainly going to see an upgrade definitely, an increase in spending and an upgrade of defence capabilities in the months and years to come in Japan.

Andrew Peaple: Garima, many commentators in the West have argued that Russia's invasion is accelerating this big global split between democratic nations on the one hand led by the US, and autocracies such as Russia and China. And President Biden has talked about that as well as one of his signature foreign policies. What's the perspective from India on that, obviously, the world's largest democracy, but again, as you've explained, in this difficult position diplomatically as to how to present itself in this crisis. Does India feel like this is one of those pivotal moments where the world is splitting and that's that's adding to the pressures on the country?

Garima Mohan: That's an interesting question, Andrew. I think, first of all, the use of language of ideology and values, democracies versus authoritarian countries, does not go down very well in India, or indeed, in many other countries in Asia. When we talk of, you know, everybody's pivoting to the Indo Pacific, the Europeans are, the Americans are, countries in the Indo Pacific are not very comfortable with this categorization because a lot of countries are not perfect democracies, they are facing challenges, domestic politics is messy, And I don't think this categorization is very popular. So the fact that after this war on Ukraine, if we are to use this categorization, it would be difficult not just for India, but also for a number of other partners in Asia. That's one point.

And if I can come to the question that you had asked Eva earlier about what lessons are countries in Asia drawing? For India, this is quite a crucial moment, because it is also looking at how the world would react when inevitably conflict re-heats up on the India-China border in the Himalayas. I think for that India is really looking at what would be the reaction of the rest of the world. The last time the conflict heated up, the US was, of course, a key partner for India in condemning it in public, as well as helping in other ways behind the scenes, including intelligence sharing. And India has been trying to build stronger partnerships with the Europeans, with other countries, in order to somehow create a coalition to check China's assertiveness. This is a worry among Indian commentators and analysts now, that if a conflict was to come up between India and China, again, who would be the countries that stand up for India, given India's neutrality in the current conflict?

So that I think is a bigger question that India has on its mind: How to salvage its relations with partners in the West, and how to make sure that they see India as a reliable partner, so that when India needs them, they will be there as well. And for the time being, it is, at least officially, it is business as usual, between Europe and India ,and the US and India, but it is putting India in — as I said, that seems to be the theme of my comments for this podcast — India is in a difficult position.

Andrew Peaple: Do you think as well, there's a fear in India that because of the conflict in Ukraine, the US and the European Union's attention is going to be focused back on Europe in the future. I mean, obviously, we've seen recently, both the US and the EU, in theory, at least turning more of their attention towards the Indo Pacific and towards Asia and coming up with big

strategies for what they're going to do there and so on. Do you think there's a worry that that's all going to go out of the window again, for at least a couple of years, as the US and the EU get distracted again by what's going on in their own backyard?

Garima Mohan: Yeah, that's a very important point. And there has been a lot said about focusing on the Indo Pacific theatre versus Europe, and what does that mean. Of course, India understands that, in the short term, energies will be preoccupied and refocused on Europe. But in the long term, if, as a result of this crisis, we see the emergence of a stronger, more geopolitical Europe, that is, of course, in India's interest because then it can consider Europe as a valuable partner in the Indo Pacific as well. Now, the changes that we've seen, for example, in Germany, the debate on Germany taking a more proactive role in foreign policy, the fact that the EU considered delivering military equipment, these remarkable changes that we've seen in Europe…if they are sustained and built upon, and the end result is a more geopolitical Europe that is engaged with its neighbourhood, but also with the rest of the world — in the long term that is a good for India, it's a net positive. So the debate in India I think is slightly different from other US alliance partners. Perhaps they would be a bit more worried, but India's rather looking at the longer term picture.

Andrew Peaple: Ramon, I wonder what your perspective on that as well, or at least what the perspective is from Korea. Is there a concern that the West, and in particular the US's, attention will be drawn away from the region now. This seems a particularly pertinent point given that we've seen in recent weeks Kim Jong Un in North Korea stepping up missile tests and testing intercontinental ballistic missiles potentially — yet that sort of thing hasn't been top of the news agenda, at least in the West, because people have been focusing on Ukraine.

Ramon Pacheco Pardo: There is an understanding that obviously, the invasion of Ukraine merits the attention of the international community as a top issue for weeks and even months to com. But I think that the US has clearly sent messages to the Moon administration, but also to the incoming Yoon administration, that Korean peninsula issues, Northeast Asia and Asian matters more generally, are going to continue to be top of the agenda. There is this realisation in Korea now that Asian issues are closely linked to issues happening elsewhere. It's not that this line of thought was not there in South Korean thinking beforehand. But I think this has become very clear from the perspective of Korean policymakers, but also the perspective of Korean experts dealing with foreign policy issues. There is this discussion now about how they choose scenarios, ight? The Indo Pacific scenario and the European scenario are closely linked to each other, which if anything, is probably going to draw more attention from Europe to the Indo Pacific for years to come, and certainly once the worst of the Ukraine crisis is hopefully over. So that's where the discussion has gone.

It is true that if you look at the recent ICBM test that North Korea conducted, it was very interesting. There was this report that it wasn't top news in the US by any stretch of the imagination. It wasn't front page news in any US media at all. And the reaction from the Biden administration has been fairly timid, calling for a discussion in the UN Security Council that is going to go nowhere, because of China and Russia, of course; some sanctions, some extra

sanctions will be imposed on North Korea, but there is not going to be any fundamental change in the relationship between North Korea and the US as a result of this. And interestingly enough, this is seen as reassuring in the case of Korea, that the US is not going to give up on North Korea, because it is conducting missile tests. It is launching its verbal threats, of course, on the US, the international community, the incoming president Yoon Seok-yeol aswell, the US is going to continue to be engaged on North Korean issues.

And there is another aspect here, which is the Taiwan issue that we have mentioned several times today: that is crucial to understand the South Korean position as well, and why it is not really concerned that the invasion of Ukraine is going to draw attention away from the Indo Pacific. Because there's this understanding in Korea, that if anything happens inTaiwan, obviously this is going to have a spillover effect on the Korean peninsula. In the past, there has been this discussion between North Korea and China that we know about, that suggests that if China launches an invasion of Taiwan, then North Korea could decide to strike South Korea, and there would be two fronts at the same time. And this would weaken the position of the US and other countries in the region. So this actually, from a South Korean perspective, means that the invasion of Ukraine means potential actions that China might take in Taiwan would certainly draw more attention to the Korean peninsula, Northeast Asia more generally.

And there's one final point that I would like to point out, because there has been this feature in the discussion in South Korea. The fact that now we have these multilateral alliances, that to put it in very blunt terms, spans East and West, that that is part of these moves that the US has been making to bring together allies from different parts of the world. So there has been this talk in the US Congress, for example, about a nine-member intelligence sharing pact, right with the ‘Five Eyes’, Korea, Japan, India, and Germany, there has been this discussion about Korea potentially cooperating more closely with the Quad. The Biden administration has clearly been pressing for more trilateral cooperation between Korea, Japan and the US. And we see, for example, President-elect Yoon already holding discussions with the US, Japan or India, for example, about what his foreign policy is going to be. So there's this view that actually the Russian invasion of Ukraine is actually going to create stronger links between certain Asian countries and Europe and the US itself plus, as I said, Canada, Australia and New Zealand too.

Andrew Peaple: There's been a lot of speculation, a lot of coverage, a lot of discussion of China's reaction to the crisis, and in particular, it's sort of entente, I think we can call it, with Russia. Obviously, I don't want to ask you all directly about what you think about what China is thinking. But what I did want to ask is how the response of China is being seen in the capitals of the countries that you look at, how people are reading what China will be thinking. Will it see China as being emboldened by Russia's action? Or will it see China as potentially having to think twice now about taking more aggressive action, say in Taiwan itself, because of the obvious difficulties of carrying out an invasion of this sort? Garima, can I start with you on that? How was New Delhi reading what Beijing has been doing in the wake of Russia's invasion?

Garima Mohan: So this is very worrying for India, not so much for the Taiwan scenario, but for India's own neighbourhood. And as I mentioned in the beginning of my remarks, a long term

policy goal for India is to make sure that Russia does not move closer to China, and does not think that China is its only reliable partner in the region. Because a Russia-China nexus is very worrying for India, because it also includes a third partner Pakistan. Let's not forget, the Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Russia, just as the invasion started and since then, he has been saying that the country's very close to Moscow. And this is basically a really, really worrying scenario for India. So seeing the China-Russia partnership emerge stronger, even though it isn't quite clear where China stands in terms of supporting the invasion, and it has abstained from certain UN resolutions and voted against certain others…the development overall is not something that India wants. But there's also a realisation among policymakers in New Delhi that perhaps this is inevitable. And India quickly needs to go back to the drawing board and reassess its partnerships with both Russia and China.

Andrew Peaple: Eva, your thoughts on that? How is Japan seeing Beijing and what Beijing has been doing both before and after Russia's invasion?

Eva Pejsova: I think what's really important, or interesting to note on the Japanese side, is the almost 180 degree turn in its approach to this relationship. While in the past, it's been believed in Japan that basically building a positive engagement with Russia is precisely needed, because the more isolated Russia might be, the more likely it will actually get closer to China. And now we see the complete opposite, we see that we need to be tougher and tougher on Russia, precisely to create a precedent for China to show that we can be strong on China. So I think that that's one point that is important to note.

And the second, of course, is the question of what China will do, because that's still not very clear. It's been closely watched, but the Chinese response now is pretty much on everyone's mind. We can see it also, from the reports of the extraordinary NATO summit in Brussels: Apparently, China was the actor that was mentioned by all of the parties involved, and now it's been solicited to play a constructive role. So we are appealing to this potential role of China to be a game changer, trying to seduce, in a way, China to play a positive role in solving the crisis on the one hand; on the other hand, of course, warning it that if it provides material support to Russia, it would face secondary sanctions. But so far, we still don't know exactly what the Chinese position will be. Overall, Japan has very much chosen its camp, it is 100% aligned with the Western position, no matter what.

Andrew Peaple: Ramon, do you see a recalibration in Seoul of the probabilities here, the probabilities of China acting, not just in Taiwan, but in the South China Sea more broadly and in other territorial disputes that it has.

Ramon Pacheco Pardo: There is in the sense that one of the reasons why Korea was adamant in joining the sanctions was what would happen if there is some sort of confrontation with China, as we have discussed extensively over Taiwan or even over the South China Sea. And there's a similar decision about posting sanctions on China. And from my Korean perspective, Korea is not a minor [player] anymore. That's a perspective that many Korean policymakers have and this includes the economic position so of course. We all know that in 2016, Korea was on the

receiving end of sanctions from China after it decided to deploy the THAAD anti-missile system, but China is also dependent on some high tech goods coming from Korea, semiconductors, electric batteries, green chips, for example, that the Chinese are starting to buy from Korea as well. And the thinking in Seoul was, well if there isn't a scenario in which we have to confront China because of its aggression somewhere in the region, then Korea should be joining the sanctions; again, Korea will have to take the economic hit, but so be it, right. So in a sense there's this messaging not only towards Russia, which is quite direct, but also implicitly towards China, that if we come down to a similar situation in the future, Korea will be siding with the US, Europe and other Asian countries.

And the second point of discussion in Korea has been about these potential alliances within China, Russia and North Korea. Of course, they have been aligned in the UN Security Council for a long period of time, and China and Russia have been very supportive of North Korea, especially over the past two, three years, for example, with sanctions relief on Pyongyang. There is this discussion: What if this becomes more formalised, and we see China, Russia and North Korea having stronger relations in a more formal way, for example, launching coordinated cyber attacks on South Korea or some other country that is aligned with Korea, or on Korean companies as well, it’s not only in the government that this discussion is taking place in South Korea; and very interestingly, we saw Yoon, the president-elect, having a phone conversation with Xi Jinping a couple of days ago, which is a first in in Korean history, actually, that the Chinese president decided to talk to a president-elect before the president-elect actually takes office. And in this call, from what we know there was a discussion about Ukraine — of course, it wasn't the main topic of discussion, it was much more about economic relations, North Korea — but there was a discussion about Ukraine as well as part of this call. And that is quite interesting that you see a South Korean president-elect, someone who is not president yet, actually talking to the Chinese president about South Korea's position on Ukraine, this would have been unthinkable really a few years ago. So this is seen in Korea as part of the outcome of this crisis, right, how to send a message to China that any actions that it may take over Taiwan, or any other territorial issue in the Asian continent, or the waters of the Indo Pacific ,would actually have an effect on South Korea-China relations.

Andrew Peaple: Well, thank you, Ramon, for that absolutely fascinating insight. And thank you to all three of you for your insights as well. I think we've got a sense of some of the similarities in the reaction in major Asian countries, and some of the different perspectives, though, that are coming through. It really is upending international relations, and causing governments in all of these big countries to rethink where they stand and where the future may be headed. So thank you to all three of you for that excellent discussion.