



The 2021 NATO Summit: Revitalized alliance and its implications

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The 2021 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) summit was held in Brussels on June 14-after the 2019 London summit. The 2021 NATO summit received a lot of attention for it was the first summit for President Biden, who has stressed to revitalize the alliance since his inauguration, to attend. This paper briefly summarizes the significance and implications of the 2021 NATO summit.

NATO is a multilateral political and military alliance of 30 Western countries (the United States, Canada, and 28 European countries). In 1949, amidst the Cold War, 12 countries (2 North American countries, the U.S., Canada, and 10 European countries) established a collective security organization to curb Soviet expansion and military attacks. Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which forms the basis of NATO, guarantees "collective security" as it considers attacks on a single member state as attacks on the entire member state. For the last 72 years, NATO has focused on strengthening collective defense and deterrence against security threats spent about 40 years during the Cold War and 30 years after the Cold War. As the number of former Soviet and Eastern European countries wanting to join NATO has steadily increased since the end of the Cold War, NATO became a collective security body for 30 countries today.

In the past four years, NATO's cross-Atlantic relations have experienced unprecedented conflicts and separation. The leader of the U.S., the most influential member state, had expressed uncertainty about NATO's values and collective security obligations. In particular, the U.S. leader did not hesitate to say that "rich European allies entrust their security to the burden of U.S. taxpayers." He also unofficially hinted that the U.S. would withdraw. Although the U.S. military presence in Europe and the European security budget have not been reduced under the Trump administration, the rhetoric about the transactional alliance has made European leaders uncertain about the alliance. In an interview with a media outlet in 2019, French President

Francois Macron assessed NATO as "brain-dead."

The 2021 NATO summit has received significance and suggestions in the following aspects:

Firstly, NATO's European allies expect President Joe Biden and the U.S. to play a unified role again. In a meeting with NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg before the summit, President Biden called Article 5 of the Washington Treaty a "sacred obligation" and reaffirmed that "the U.S. will be with it." Perhaps, there should be a promise that there will not be another Trump-type U.S. president 4 or 8 years later.

Secondly, the communique of the 2021 NATO summit consists of 79 literary circles. This is in contrast to the 9 literary circles of 2019. In terms of content, NATO's purpose and role as a Western collective security organization will be revitalized. While discussing the 2030 alliance vision that was prepared by the Secretary-General, the two sides agreed to adopt a new NATO concept at the Madrid summit in 2022. The current 'strategic concept' was adopted in 2010 and it does not include the complexity of subsequent security concepts (cybersecurity, climate security, health security, hybrid warfare, counterintelligence campaigns, etc.) and regional and global challenges from China and Russia. In the past four years, the two sides of the Atlantic could not seek new strategic concepts. Finally, the Defense Innovation Accelerator and a NATO Innovation Fund (NATO Innovation Fund) were established for closer cybersecurity and technology cooperation among member states. They are NATO's common financial resources that will enable NATO to compete with and technologically surpass China and Russia. NATO's role in climate security was also emphasized in the communique. As the Trump administration withdrew from the Paris Convention, the issue was not addressed at the last summit in 2019.

Thirdly, the 2021 NATO leaders finally called China's "offensive behavior" a "systematic challenge" to the "international order and alliance security based on the rule of law." China, an Asian country within NATO, was officially mentioned for the first time at the 2019 summit. At that time, however, China's "relevance" was only gradually increasing. The 2021 Joint Communique discussed NATO's policy direction toward China. This means that China's actions are challenging the security of 30 European and Atlantic member states and the security of one billion citizens. Concerned about China's coercive policies, opaque military modernization methods, and counterintelligence campaigns, NATO urged China to support international pledges and take responsible action within the international system. In response, China's representative office in the EU responded, "Don't use China's legitimate interests and rights in bloc politics." There are likely to be differences of opinion on specific ways to respond to China's future challenges within NATO members. However, the 2021 NATO Communique at least represented the priorities of the alliance and the scope for territorial transformation.

Fourthly, the burden-sharing issue, which was controversial under the Trump administration, was not on the agenda this time. This is in contrast to the 2019 communique, which demanded 2% GDP in defense spending. The possibility of discord arising from this problem is unlikely during the Biden administration. It is uncertain whether all member states will achieve 2% by 2024, the target year for NATO under the pandemic economy, but the direction is expected to be maintained. The financial resources needed to revitalize the alliance should be solved wisely.

The 2021 NATO summit, the Cornwell G7 summit (6.11-13), and the Brussels EU-U.S. summit (6.15) definitely signaled the revitalization of relations among the Transatlantic Alliance and partners who share the values of democracy.

In order to improve the efficiency and legitimacy of the goals of multilateral summits that took place in 2021, global solidarity with non-North Atlantic democracies must be formed. Accordingly, South Korea, Japan, Australia, and South Africa were been invited to the 2021 G7 summit. South Korea, which respects individual freedom, human rights, and democracy, should expand its opportunity to contribute to global prosperity and peace by cooperating with Western solidarity.

As South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand are NATO partners in the Asia-Pacific region, South Korea fits in NATO's regional cooperation framework. South Korea also needs to diversify its security cooperation and information exchange. In addition, cooperating in non-traditional military sectors such as cyber security is becoming more important in terms of collective security. In conclusion, South Korea must note that although the G-7 summit, the EU-U.S. summit, and the NATO summit in 2021 showed varying interests and nuances, they all showed a new level of vigilance against China.

※ *Translator's note: This is a third party's unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*

※ *This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.*