

Russia Making Inroads into US-China Power Struggle: Mask Diplomacy as a Case Example

By HIROSE Yoko

Introduction

In 2020, the issue of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) [hereafter referred to as the "COVID-19 problem"] caused significant confusion in the world and created negative impacts on much "connectivity" that is also heavily related to geoeconomics. Consequently, there has been almost no cross-border traffic. However, it is also true that a new style of diplomacy has emerged. These new styles are the so-called "mask diplomacy" and "vaccine diplomacy," which were actively deployed by China and Russia (India also entered the vaccine diplomacy a little later).

Because most European and North American countries have been unable to afford their coronavirus response and ensure vaccines, many countries have appreciated the mask and vaccine diplomacy of China and Russia. As diplomatic strategies, it could be said that they were successful.

Mask diplomacy means the provision of masks, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and medical supplies to other countries. In addition to these, Russia has strengthened diplomatic relations by dispatching military personnel to carry out disinfection, treatment, and so on. China, which contained the COVID-19 problem at an early stage, was a country that deployed mask diplomacy. Russia also deployed a particularly aggressive and broad mask diplomacy until the end of March 2020, before the country suffered a serious outbreak of the coronavirus infection.

On the other hand, "vaccine diplomacy" has been expanding its influence by providing vaccines, which is a major factor in overcoming the COVID-19 problem. In particular, it is desirable for a vaccine to be inexpensive, easy to transport and store (i.e., it is desirable that the temperature required for storage is not lower), and highly effective. "Sputnik V," the first vaccine approved in the world by Russia on August 11, 2020, meets all of these requirements (as of the end of February, 2021, Russia has developed and approved three vaccines.) In particular, a paper was published in the British Medical Journal, The Lancet, on February 2, 2021, stating that Sputnik V was found to be effective by 91.6% at the final stage of clinical trials (studies). The storage temperature of Sputnik V is -18°C (-75°C ($\pm 15^{\circ}\text{C}$) for Pfizer's and -20°C ($\pm 5^{\circ}\text{C}$) for Moderna's), making it relatively easy to transport, and it is also said that freeze-drying of Sputnik V will become feasible in spring, so that it can be transported and stored at normal refrigerator temperatures. The price is also lower than that of the vaccines produced in America and Europe (two doses of the vaccination cost \$20, about half the price of the American and European counterparts). Currently, the need for two doses of a vaccinations is the bottleneck, so development of Sputnik Light, which requires only one vaccination, is also gaining popularity. The mask and vaccine diplomacy of China and Russia have had a great impact in Europe,

Asia, Africa, and South America, including the Balkans, where assistance was not provided by the EU.

Since vaccine diplomacy is still in progress, and it is difficult to analyze in the present situation, this report focuses on Russian mask diplomacy and demonstrates how Russia has deployed mask diplomacy and aimed to expand its influence while making inroads into the US-China power struggle under the COVID-19 catastrophe.

Mask Diplomacy

Russia shares a long border with China, which is the source of COVID-19, and has been in a particularly close honeymoon phase of its relationship with China after the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. However, it closed off its borders early, was quite successful in preventing the spread of infection by the end of March, and deployed mask diplomacy on a large scale at that time. In the end however, even Russia fell victim to the pandemic in April, and the country's mask diplomacy stagnated. However, during the mask diplomacy, Russia sent relief goods, medical supplies and professionals, among other aid to various countries.

While some countries (e.g. Serbia in particular) significantly benefited from the mask diplomacy and appreciated Russia, there were also many criticisms stating that a "Russian ulterior motive" was behind "its assistance diplomacy." Therefore, I would like to first summarize the aims of Russia.

First, it is information gathering. A good example is assistance provided to Italy. Russia sent a support unit to Italy, where the infection had spread, before the pandemic occurred in Russia, and it is believed that rather than for assistance, it was for collecting information and materials to consider the response to the pandemic in Russia.

Second, by providing assistance, Russia aimed to lift or weaken the current economic sanctions against Russia. It can be said that this is an aim primarily directed at the United States. The United States has imposed the most serious sanctions on Russia, but Russia strongly hopes the sanctions will be lifted. It is also said that Russia is calculating that if it let Italy "owe" Russia by providing assistance, it may lead the lifting of the sanctions against it. Russia is also advertising its assistance in the media in a flashy way. It also seems that Russia aimed to provide assistance so that it would lead to the encouragement of political division in the United States to create the impression of the weakness of the United States internationally.

Third, another aim is to divide Europe. Russia's assistance stands out in the former communist countries, which are non-EU and non-NATO member countries, and even those member countries that are still not familiar with the EU or are pro-Russian. These countries cannot receive assistance from the EU or NATO, and if they receive assistance from Russia, their gratitude and intimacy for Russia will be strengthened, while their distrust for other European and North American countries will be intensified. Russia is trying to further deepen the distortions and cracks that have originally existed in the EU and NATO, and create a decisive division of Europe. Similar to the second point aforementioned, Russia also used the media to advertise its assistance to Europe in a flashy way, and even create a manipulated image of Russia being the only country that Europe can rely on.

The fourth aim is for former Soviet Union countries, excluding anti-Russian countries, and those countries that becoming a "friendly country" are strategically advantageous in their relations with the

United States and China. The background to this is clearly Russia's desire to gain a positive impression from others in order to maintain and expand its influence.

Assistance Diplomacy Aim 1: Information Gathering

Italy was the first country to experience the COVID-19 catastrophe in Europe. On March 21, Italian President Giuseppe Conte and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a telephone meeting. On the 23rd to 25th, Russia dispatched 15 military transport aircrafts fully loaded with relief goods to provide medical assistance. From the 27th, experts from Russia and Italy jointly disinfected accommodation for the elderly, installed equipment in intensive care units, and conducted other assistance. By the beginning of May when the Russian army was withdrawn from Italy, Russian and Italian joint forces disinfected facilities for the elderly in more than 90 living quarters in Lombardy state, and also investigated many facilities and roads.

The assistance was reported in Russia in a glorious way, while in Italy, the ulterior motives of Russia were focused on and the aid was not considered purely as charity. It is said that Russia has two aims. First is to let Italy "owe" Russia through the aid it provided in order to freeze the sanctions against Russia, and second is to gather information.

Russia sent medical supplies, including 600 ventilators, in addition to 100 military medical units which included soldiers led by Major-General Sergey Kikot, military doctors, virologists and epidemiologists. In Italy, when the relief goods were received, an accusation from an insider surfaced stating that the relief goods from Russia were not suitable for use in Italy, raising doubt over the "good intentions" of Russia. For example, Italian media, e.g. La Stampa, reported that most of the things sent as relief goods were meaningless to treat COVID-19, or 80 percent of Russian assistance was completely useless. On the other hand, the military's medical units, which were sent as "human assistance," were able to learn about the reality of the infection and how it can be effectively contained in Italy, where the spread of the infection was ahead of Russia, and to apply that knowledge to prevention and treatment in Russia. In addition, Italy is a NATO member country and, if Russia was active in Italy, it was also able to grasp the trends of NATO security forces.

For this reason, in Italy, there were some claims that Russian assistance was "espionage."

The Italian authorities expressed their gratitude in a joint communication between the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the information source of La Stampa is said to be the Ministry of Defense, so the real intention of the Italian government cannot be grasped completely.

In any case, Russia, of course, strongly opposed such claims from Italy, and the Russian ambassador, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Defense Minister and others made public criticisms. Certainly, Russia had the speculation that it wanted to aim for a higher presence in Europe while opposing China. There is also the fact that Russia and Italy have had a good relationship in history, and Italy was not perfectly aligned with the sanctions against Russia, so Italy has been a pro-Russian country in the EU. In addition, assistance to other countries is generally accepted as positive internationally. Therefore, all of Russia's assistance to Italy cannot be condemned as bad, but in conclusion, it did give a negative impression.

Assistance Diplomacy Aim 2: Lifting of Sanctions and Political Division within the United States

On the other hand, President Putin proposed assistance for medical supplies to the United States, where the infection was spreading. And, based on the agreement reached by the President of the United States and the Russian Federation via telephone, Russia dispatched a military transport aircraft (Antonov 124) to the United States on April 1, fully loaded with medical supplies including ventilators, antiseptic solutions, masks, and goggles. The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) also said that it has provided a testing system that can test 20 people per hour, developed in cooperation with Japan and Russia.

This deployment is similar to the case of Italy, but there was in fact a "difference" that is considered to be intentional. The medical supply aid for the United States included more substantial supplies, such as masks, that were not included for Italy.

Moreover, if the U.S. was indebted to Russia due to the Russiagate issue, etc. then President Donald Trump (at that time), who would have definitely been criticized, took the stance of "the United States purchased them." Note that the amount that the United States paid to Russia is unknown, but the Russian Foreign Ministry said that half of the amount was paid by the United States and the other half by the RDIF. At the very least, the United States did not seem to have paid the full price. If there was also a gift from Russia, Putin may have cooperated in saving the face of Trump who continued to take the stance that the U.S. purchased the medical supplies, without denying Trump's stance. If so, it could also be said that Trump owed Putin.

On the other hand, it has been said that the medical supplies supplied by Russia to the United States also include those produced by subsidiaries of companies which are subject to the United States' sanctions against Russia. Specifically, among the 45 ventilators supplied by Russia, there were many "Aventa-M"¹ models, which were manufactured by UPZ, a company owned by KRET of Rostec Holdings in Russia, which is on the U.S. sanctions list. The fact that the United States "purchased" the supplies could be perceived as the United States having already violated its own sanctions against Russia, and could be used a card for Russia to ask the United States to "lift the sanctions." In other words, it could be said that Russia held a variety of cards by providing assistance to the United States. In fact, Russian RT and other media outlets are actively hyped up about that.

As a result, although it did not become a major issue in the United States in the spread of the pandemic, it was expected that the Democratic Party and other parties, which were skeptical about the relationship between the Trump administration and Russia, opposed the Trump administration due to the Russiagate issue and other factors. Therefore, it is also quite likely that Russia was looking for a political division of the United States.

In addition, for Russia, the secondary effect was that the assistance to Italy demonstrated the powerlessness of the EU and its solidarity by showing a visual representation that Russia stood up because the EU could not save Italy. In addition, the fact that the U.S. government has "purchased" medical supplies from Russian companies that are subject to the U.S. sanctions against Russia also has an effect indicating a weakened United States, and it seems to be said that Russia's international

¹ In mid-May, the same ventilator model caused a fire accident at two Russian hospitals, killing six people. In response to this, the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) told the Moscow Times that Russian ventilators were kept as spares and were unused.

position has become stronger. Moreover, Russia's vital medical supplies to the United States, which were in need of by the Russian people for the fight against the coronavirus, has become a point of highlighting the "mercy" of Russia (although Russian dissidents are strongly criticizing the government for its diplomatic strategy that ignores the troubled situation of the Russian people. In fact, when the spread of the infection in Russia became more serious after April, medical supplies also became significantly scarce. This led to outrage from medical personnel.) Russia's media (TV, newspapers, Internet news, etc.) spread information about Russia providing support for Europe and North America. In addition, with the hashtag "#RussiaHelps," an enormous number of tweets were made on Twitter to appreciate the assistance of Russia, and the image of "even in Europe and North America, Russia is the only one people can rely on" also spread.

Furthermore, it is said that the fact that all of these relief supplies were transported by military transport aircrafts rather than by private aircrafts also proves Russia's strategic intentions. Russia has been subject to economic sanctions as a result of Russia's annexation of Crimea and subsequent secret maneuvers in the crisis in Ukraine. However, the Russian "military" was able to provide the fact that they did good deeds by transporting relief goods. It could be said that Russia also thought that the fact would become a step toward enhancing the image of the Russian military, and consequently lead to the sanctions against Russia being lifted.

Assistance Diplomacy Aim 3: Division of Europe—Using the Military

Another objective concerning foreign assistance on the novel coronavirus issue in Russia seems to be the "division of Europe." Russia is not necessarily hostile against the EU, but just rebels against "anti-Russian" movements, and it seems that Russia thinks that cooperation and partnership with the EU are rather desirable. For example, the "Eurasian Union" proposed by Putin in 2012 was considered to aim at a regional association like the EU, aiming to unite Asia and the EU.

However, Russia has extremely strongly rebelled against NATO. To begin with, NATO, a legacy of the Cold War, is still present after the end of the Cold War and should have disappeared (the Soviet Union-led "Warsaw Treaty Organization," which existed against NATO in the Cold War era, dissolved in July 1991 before the collapse of the Soviet Union). It is unforgivable for Russia that NATO continues to expand further. This is because, although Western countries have denied such a fact, former President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, asserted, "the integration of East and West Germany in November 1989 was admitted based on the promise that NATO would not expand, setting Germany as the last member country." For Russia, NATO expansion is nothing other than Western countries' act of treachery against Russia.

And Russia has strived to prevent the expansion of the EU and particularly NATO to the circle of influence. For example, Russia has engaged in activities that attract potential member countries of the EU and NATO (e.g. Serbia in particular) toward Russia, e.g., by providing aid, and has also attempted a coup d'etat (e.g. Montenegro just before joining NATO).

In the COVID-19 catastrophe, Russia's strategy is still well-established, and by strengthening its relationship with Serbia through aid, it seems that Russia has countered China, which had also made its approach to Serbia more prominent, and at the same time tried to achieve Serbia's separation from the EU. Serbia is a potential member country of the EU and NATO, but it has the domestic Kosovo

problem and it is currently difficult to join either association.

Before we consider Russia's aid to Serbia, let's first look at what kind of assistance China has provided to Serbia, which Russia seemed to irritate. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic requested a Chinese ambassador to Serbia for "assistance as a sibling country" from China because "the EU is not providing assistance and is trying to shut out countries like Serbia that hope to join the EU." On March 21 after the request was made, China dispatched a single Airbus aircraft fully loaded with masks and protective clothing to Serbia.

Vucic also requested Putin for assistance, and Russia immediately took action. Following a telephone conference between the two presidents on April 2, assistance was provided on the basis of an agreement by the "two supreme commanders," as emphasized by Serbian Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin, following the "Military Technology Agreement" between the two countries. According to Vulin, the aid from Russia and its military not only responded to COVID-19 but also contributed to strengthen the Serbian military and increase air defense as a result.

Russia's assistance, which began with 11 military aircrafts dispatched from April 3 to 4, was far more than that of China, although it was about two weeks behind the Chinese assistance. Russia sent out more than 40 soldiers, 87 military doctors and virologists, four units of special military equipment, and medical and protective equipment. At the request of the local government, Russian military experts worked together with the Serbian military to disinfect 156 various infrastructure facilities in 30 different cities, including medical institutions, police stations, and student dormitories, and prepared about 255 buildings and facilities. In addition, the Russian medical team, in cooperation with local commanders, expanded the establishment of a treatment center to the capital, the suburbs of the capital, local major cities, and even smaller villages, and trained Serbian medical personnel. In addition, military doctors and virologists from the Russian radiological, chemical, and biological protection units worked together with local doctors to help treat infected persons.

In response to Serbia's request, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations provided more than 3,000 sets of firefighter equipment to Serbia.

The assistance was highly appreciated and continued to be provided until the withdrawal began on May 16. Subsequently, test kits developed in Russia were also provided.

This aid as countermeasures to COVID-19 was called "protective mask" diplomacy in the Balkan region, and as of at least May, the EU had not provided assistance², and China's assistance was not provided in a large scale, thus establishing a dominant position for Russia. In other words, Russia took a step ahead in the geoeconomics and geopolitical situation, in which Europe, Russia, and China competes for influence in the Balkans.

I will examine this composition in a little more detail.

First of all, properly speaking, Serbia wanted assistance from the EU, but the EU did not respond,

² However, the EU announced on May 6 that it would provide new financial assistance for countermeasures against COVID-19 to Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia in the Balkans, which hope to join the EU. The EU also asserted that its assistance was superior to the assistance countermeasures against COVID-19 provided by any other country or region because it would promote democratization and economic development of the target countries.

so Serbia requested assistance from China and Russia. If European and North American countries hospitably provided assistance to the Balkan region, the three-pole aid battle for the region would have been more fierce.

Second, while China took the approach of humanitarian assistance to provide purely medical supplies, Russia blatantly took a military approach. The Russian military has been responsible mainly for assisting Serbia, and its soldiers and medical military personnel have entered the war against COVID-19 in Serbia in a way that was incorporated into the Serbian military's operations. If the COVID-19 catastrophe ceases, the Russian military is likely to remain in Serbia, and in fact, the Russian military's newspaper, "Krasnaya Zvezda," widely argued that both Russia and Serbia forms a "united front" that not only deals with the COVID-19 problem but also other problems.

Third, Putin ordered the Russian Defense Ministry to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina in a similar way to Serbia. Bosnia-Herzegovina is also a potential member country of the EU and NATO, but there are still some hurdles to joining them because they have experienced a fierce civil war and are in the process of establishing the nation. It can be undoubtedly said that because Putin has given such an order, Russia's assistance in Serbia was successful and very effective for Russia's national interests.

Note that, in response to the order of President Putin, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu ordered the military to provide assistance to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and three military aircrafts, loaded with 24 Russian soldiers and five pieces of equipment were dispatched.

In addition to the aforementioned assistance to Italy, the military's assistance was provided even in Armenia (to be mentioned later), and it is likely to be said that the military's role in the foreign strategy has increased significantly with the COVID-19 problem.

In fact, Russian private medicine is said to be inferior to that of the medical system of the military sector. One of the reasons for that is the extremely low salaries for medical professionals in the private sector. It may have been thought that Russia has provided assistance mainly using the Russian military from the viewpoint of providing high quality medical care promptly, but it is worth noting that Russia has used the military for the mask diplomacy.

However, NATO warned that Chinese and Russian mask diplomacy was a "hybrid warfare."³ On April 15, 2020, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, "While Russian military activities continue, we will take all necessary steps to protect NATO forces and operations." When asked about the response to the "aggressive" publicity of China and Russia, he replied that the best countermeasure against false information was free and transparent coverage, mentioning the need for preparation for the hybrid warfare. Ambassador Hutchison of the U.S. Mission to NATO also said at a conference on April 14 that she was concerned about the false information that China and Russia are sending out. In addition to that, she said that she considered said information as a part of the hybrid warfare.

Assistance Diplomacy Aim 4: Securing Friendly Countries and Expanding

³ For the hybrid warfare in Russia, see Yoko Hirose "Hybrid Warfare - New National Strategy of Russia" Kodansha, 2021.

Influence

In Russia's diplomatic strategy, maintaining the former Soviet Union as the circle of influence is the most important objective. Moreover, strengthening relations with the following countries could be another important objective to strengthen the international influence of Russia: the former communist areas where the Soviet Union once had an influence, countries that could stir things up for European and North American countries, particularly the United States and the NATO, i.e. the EU, NATO member countries and potential member countries, countries allied with or geographically close to the U.S., anti-U.S. states, geopolitically important countries, and other countries. Russia has also deployed mask diplomacy to these countries.

There are some cases where Russia has offered aid, and others where Russia has received a request for aid which include, for example, Spain and 12 Middle Eastern and African countries such as Egypt, Syria, Libya, Qatar, Morocco, and Tunisia. Although the provision of goods to these countries is mainly prominent, there are many cases in which military dispatching has been carried out. Cases include the aforementioned Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Armenia, which is a former friendly country of the Soviet Union for Russia but had a slightly different relationship with Russia after the political change in 2018.

In Armenia, in addition to the COVID-19 test kit, Ural Federal University and the Research Institute of Influenza of the Russian Ministry of Health have jointly developed an antiviral, "Triazavirin," tested in China as a therapeutic drug for COVID-19⁴. Other medical supplies were also provided. Moreover, a Russian military official arrived in Armenia on April 7, the next day of the bilateral summit on April 6, and conducted preventive operations at the military base. On April 8, a meeting between the foreign ministers of both countries was also held.

In addition, the outstanding goods provided are the COVID-19 test kit developed in Russia. On March 20, the Russian Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing announced that it will provide more than 100,000 test kits to the Eurasian Economic Union and CIS member states, namely Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Iran, Mongolia, North Korea, Egypt, Serbia, Venezuela, and other friendly countries. In many cases, additional assistance was provided to these countries to which the test kits were provided. 500 test devices for COVID-19 diagnosis were also sent to Iran. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus also received medical supplies in addition to the testing system for conducting more than 50,000 tests. North Korea has also received 1,500 Russian-made COVID-19 diagnostic test devices⁵. Venezuela has also received special humanitarian support goods.

And, of course, the earliest assistance was provided to China, a friendly country that has become more closely related to Russia in recent years. China was given 34 tons worth of masks and protective clothing by Russian military aircraft in February.

However, since around July, the aid battle between China and Russia has become more prominent in Central Asia on the novel coronavirus issue. There are many unclear parts concerning the infection status in Central Asia, for example, Turkmenistan continues to assert zero infections and even bans

⁴ "Triazavirin" was also provided to Korea and Italy, and the provision to Turkmenistan was made for a fee. In the official view of Turkmenistan, infection of COVID-19 has not occurred, which can be said to be quite strange. It is believed that a substantial spread of the infection has in fact occurred.

⁵ In North Korea, there is no infection notionally.

the use of the words novel corona. In reality however, it is said that every country is in a fairly serious situation. Medical staff and medical facilities are proving to be insufficient in all Central Asian countries. Therefore, China and Russia have started the aid battle. To begin with, for Central Asia, there is the fact that China and Russia, on the surface, stated there would be a collaborative effort between both of the mega-projects, but have in fact developed a significant power struggle⁶. Russia was the first to take action, sending a medical team to Kazakhstan (89,000 infected people at the end of July), which had the worst situation, on July 6, and to Kyrgyzstan (35,000 infected people at the end of July) on July 22. The Russian COVID-19 infection status at that time was the fourth worst in the world. Under such a severe situation, it is said that the reason why Russia had started such move was because it was concerned about China. In recent years, the influence of China has increased, and Russia had originally intended to avoid China's influence on Central Asia. Under such a situation, Russia and China should have been in the stance of maintaining a cooperative relationship by differentiating their fields of influence: the political and military influence of Russia and the economic influence of China. However, China's recent expansion has also extended to the political and military sectors, and Russia is no longer letting China behave freely.

On the other hand, China held a foreign-ministerial television conference with the five Central Asian countries on July 16 to discuss the novel coronavirus issue, and proposed that China offer its cooperation in the quarantine education of medical staff of each country. China is considering large-scale economic assistance as well as medical assistance, and is also discussing plans including one to assume some of the costs of infrastructure construction currently in progress for the Belt and Road Initiative project. However, it is considered that while this plan seems to provide assistance to Central Asian countries, it is an expedient for China to quickly make a success of the Belt and Road Initiative project. However, such an intrusive Chinese policy eventually would raise anti-China awareness in societies of Central Asia (Central Asian governments are friendly to China, but citizens are concerned with the issue of China's Uighur oppression and debt traps. There is a strong tendency to have an anti-China sentiment), and for China, it might be as if they're causing a potential bomb to go off.

When viewing the situation as a whole, given the historical relationship, Russia seems to have a better chance of winning this game.

Furthermore, the case of assistance for Moldova is also very interesting. In addition to providing test kits to Moldova, joint aid with China was also carried out. Russian Aerospace Forces transported about 40 tons worth of medical supplies in total from China to Moldova in the middle of April, emphasizing that this is the first joint humanitarian action of Russia and China in the countermeasures to COVID-19.

The joint project was also conducted with WHO. In response to the request of Djibouti, which had been in trouble not only with the COVID-19 catastrophe but also with flooding, Russia and WHO sent out 13.5 tons worth of humanitarian aid to Djibouti on April 29 as the action project. This included more than 20 multipurpose medical modules and tents to form two medical units. Moreover, it is also said that Russia is taking advantage of the aid to develop new "markets." For Russia, which has lost many "markets" due to economic sanctions caused by the Ukrainian crisis, it would be desirable for Russia to develop new markets on this opportunity. Furthermore, not only economic partnerships with

⁶ For more information, see Yoko Hirose "Strategy of Russia and China against the United States" Chikuma Shinsho, 2018.

other countries but also political relationships that could expand the area of influence of Russia could be deepened. Therefore, this should have also become an important incentive for Russia.

Afterword

Thus, it is good to say that the new style of diplomacy born in the COVID-19 catastrophe has had a great impact on the US-China power struggle and the global geoeconomic situation. Russia has had economic sanctions heavily imposed on it by European and North American countries since the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, in addition to serious international isolation. However, it could be said that this was an opportunity for Russia to regain its influence.

In addition, since it is currently underway, this report hopes that the analysis will be a future issue, but vaccine diplomacy might hold the key to diplomacy for the time being. In particular, this is because it is predicted that it will take four to five years for vaccines to reach all parts of the globe and for collective immunity to spread worldwide. It is also predicted that securing vaccines will be a serious issue for many countries for the time being.

As the COVID-19 catastrophe continues, the development of mask and vaccine diplomacy, and the geoeconomic influences of these diplomacies will continue to require close monitoring.

(This is the English translation of an article written by HIROSE Yoko, Professor, Keio University, which originally appeared on the e-Forum “Giron-Hyakushutsu” of GFJ on April 1, 2021.)