



[EAI Online Seminar] COVID-19 and New World Order Series

## The Quad and a Path for South Korea

East Asia Institute (EAI)

### I. The Durability of the Quad

#### Conceptualizing the “Role” and “Function” of the Quad

- For two decades, multilateral forums and organizations in Asia have been the dominating problem-solving mechanism in Asia. In this regard, Dr. Evan A. Feigenbaum explains the inefficacy of doing so, emphasizing that “form” has excessively driven “function” within policy discourse in Asia as illustrated through pressing issues in Asia and flaws and the already existing architecture for economic partnership. For example, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) do not include India and the US, which is manifest of the claim that “form drives function” in Asia policy.
- The Quad, a minilateral security network across Asia, has become increasingly formalized, holding meetings and discussing an array of joint initiatives. Dr. Feigenbaum notes that the Quad may potentially fall into the same trap that its preceding networks have tumbled into – the presumption that formalization will yield successful solutions to problems pertaining to the network. Whether the group can work together as the firm core of an elastic regional architecture stands as a key challenge in proving its capacity. In this regard, Dr. Feigenbaum asserts that the Quad needs to redirect its focus toward functional action by the group on the most pressing issues in Asia to showcase its utility.
- This, however, does not necessarily indicate that the Quad should function as an ad-hoc coalition among member countries. Quad members need to share a common understanding and strive to be the first-movers working with other rotating coalitional partners to develop problem-solving capacities. Pressing issues such as climate change, counter-narcotics, maritime capacity building, and infrastructural issues cannot, in fact, be solved solely by the Quad members; they inevitably demand the participation of more countries.

#### The Quad: Containing China or Promoting Regional Cooperation?

- The Quad has been characterized as a security network to target and contain China and as a product of US strategy linking US-led alliances and security partnerships. However, perceptions towards identifying the Quad as such differ among member countries within the Quad.
- Professor Park explains that the Quad is facing the “Quad Dilemma.” While the US strives to maintain the Quad as a tool to contain China, it would only achieve its purpose if it operates it in a way that masks its purpose. The Quad, in fact, is not a cohesive multilateral coalition. India and Australia are not comfortable with the Quad being perceived as a mechanism to contain China.



## II. South Korea's Position on the Quad

### How can Seoul Balance its Position between Washington and Beijing?

- Korea's ambiguous position on matters pertaining to the US-China competition has yielded limited success. Ambassador Wi Sung-Lac and Professor Park state that the current political climate has made it clear that Korea must settle on an appropriate guiding principle for policy options amid the US-China competition.
- Ambassador Wi suggests that Korea should remain open to the emerging multilateral architecture promoted by the U.S. in the region, claiming that non-participation in Quad is not an option. In this regard, he provides a figurative illustration for the positioning of Seoul between the US and China. Noting that the U.S. is an ally and China is a partner that falls short of an ally, if the U.S. tries to pull Korea in the direction of 3 o'clock and China tries to pull Korea in the direction of 9 o'clock, Korea should choose a policy line closer to the U.S., at 1 o'clock or 1:30.
- The current mechanism undertaken by South Korea in its foreign policy discussion has not been able to yield coherent policies. Policy choices have been swayed by pressures imposed by Beijing and Washington. Artificial directions as such would help build healthier relationships with China and the US.
- Professor Park explains that South Korea would become a second-tier ally within the US-led alliance network if it chose to opt out of the Quad. However, Korea would unnecessarily provoke China and discourage Chinese participation on issues involving the North Korean nuclear crisis if it chose to participate in the Quad Plus. However, he claims that the Quad and Quad Plus are one of the many mechanisms in Asia for regional security and that the aforementioned networks have been highlighted out of proportion. To illustrate, South Korea has participated in the ASEAN+3 with the presence of China, but with the absence of the US. Taking this into account, South Korea should not feel compelled to not join the Quad Plus due to China's absence.
- He further emphasizes that South Korea should approach the issue entailing the Quad from an angle of strengthening the US security network, such as the Japan-ROK-U.S. trilateral security network that contributes to US-led Quad strategies. By solidifying it, South Korea can claim that it has taken a cooperative stance.
- Professor Park additionally stresses that South Korea should publicize its participation in the Quad Plus as its apt coordination with member countries would enable it to engage with China on issues in Northeast Asia.

### Future Implications for the ROK-US Alliance

- Upon the inauguration of President Biden, principal issues between the US and South Korea have primarily been bilateral. While the US currently views Asia through the prism of US-China relations, it should prioritize its Asia policy prior to focusing on China and do so in viewing US-ROK relations within the context of Asia.
- Noting that the Quad Plus is yet an informal institution, Washington has not requested Seoul's participation in the Quad Plus. While it is assumed that the US will ask to restore ROK-Japan relations to strengthen the trilateral alliance as an initiative for the Quad Plus, it is yet unlikely that the US would demand South Korea to participate.



## The Domain of Non-traditional Security

- Given the diverse set of interests among participating countries, the Quad pertains to issues on collective action in functional and non-security areas. Professor Park stresses that the Quad, in fact, is plural in regards to the diverse interests and positions of its members.
- Professor Park emphasizes that there is a fine line between participating and opting out of the Quad. For example, Korea should be highly selective in choosing areas of cooperation, such as the domain of maritime capacity building; joint initiatives with the US to provide used transportation and ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) assets may be conducive to China perceiving that Korea is fully cooperating with the U.S. However, there is a huge economic incentive for Korea to participate in maritime capacity building, as this often leads to Korea's arms export to these countries.
- South Korea can justify itself getting actively involved in a Quad Plus that deals with non-traditional security issues. Ambassador Wi claims that while South Korea can work with the Quad on economic, health, environmental, humanitarian issues at the initial stage, it could take a constructive role within the Quad for it to not evolve into an extreme anti-China alliance.
- Professor Park adds that there are nine potential ways to expand the Quad Plus outside of the existing Quad consultations. The criteria outlined by Professor Park are as follows: official meetings among high-ranking officers, infrastructure investment (Post-COVID economic reconstruction), maritime capacity building, vaccine experts group, climate change, critical and emerging technology, diversifying the supply chain, declaration of norms, values and democracy, and adding participants in the existing Quad-related military exercises.
- Dr. Feigenbaum also offers some cases of crucial challenges that Korea could participate in. These cases include supply chain resilience, governance of cross-border data access and transfers, countering disinformation, sharing public health and biomedical practices, and diversifying the use of green bonds and green credit products.

## III. The Future of the Quad System

### Challenges for the Quad: The Lack of Cohesion and Inclusivity

- Dr. Feigenbaum claims that it is yet too early to predict the future of Quad and Quad Plus, as they are still evolving. It is difficult to assume their power and influence in the immediate future as their agenda does not fully implicate the interests of the majority in the region. Also, given the lack of basis for collective security with India, Quad and Quad Plus are intrinsically self-limiting.
- The lack of cohesion among countries in the region can be illustrated through examples pertaining to cross-border data access and transfer. He explains that there has been a lack of agreement on the utilization of distinctive models of data access and transfer. The lack of cohesion in non-security issues, which appeared to promise the possibility of a trans-border coalition, is problematic.
- Nonetheless, Professor Park claims that it is necessary to keep the Quad in place for the region to accumulate experience of cooperation and trust and quickly shift to cooperation in a traditional security agenda when necessary.



### The Role of the US in Asia

- According to Dr. Feigenbaum, the US will continue to be the primary security provider in Asia until there is a firm basis for collective security, which can only be achieved when China and Japan decide to hold hands. It is important to understand that US leadership in the region should be based both on security and economic fronts.
- However, he also points out that the economic influence of the US in the region is slowly decreasing. That is, US investment is growing on an absolute scale but shrinking on a relative scale, which suggests its diminishing influence. The US should contemplate reestablishing itself as a standard-setting nation, that it has previously lost. If the Quad can play this role and the US can consequently apply its standard-setting agenda on various fronts through the Quad, it has the potential of repositioning itself as a standard-setter in the region. This can address the problem of mismatch between its security and economic strategies.■



#### IV. Speaker, Discussant, and Moderator Bios

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■ **Evan Feigenbaum** is Vice President for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was also the 2019-20 James R. Schlesinger Distinguished Professor at the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, where he is now a practitioner senior fellow. Initially an academic with a PhD in Chinese politics from Stanford University, his career has spanned government service, think tanks, the private sector, and three regions of Asia. From 2001 to 2009, he served at the U.S. State Department as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia (2007–2009), Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia (2006–2007), Member of the Policy Planning Staff with principal responsibility for East Asia and the Pacific (2001–2006), and an adviser on China to Deputy Secretary of State Robert B. Zoellick. He is the author of three books and monographs, including “The United States in the New Asia” and “China’s Techno-Warriors: National Security and Strategic Competition from the Nuclear to the Information Age.” as well as numerous articles and essays.

■ **Ambassador Sung-Lac Wi** is a visiting professor at the Korean National Diplomatic Academy. After receiving his BA and MA at the Department of International Relations at Seoul National University, he studied Russian affairs at the Pentagon-run School (DLI) in California. Ambassador received his Ph.D. in political science at the Institute of International Economics and Political Studies in Russia. He served in the Ministry of foreign affairs for 35 years and most recently was the Korean Ambassador to Russia. He served as the Director-General for the North American Affairs Bureau, Chief Negotiator in the Six-Party Talks, and the Special Representative for the Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs. His major publications include “The Russia Report” and “A Proposal to Upgrade Korean Diplomacy.”

■ **Jae Jeok Park** is a professor at the Graduate School of International and Area Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Dr. Park received his Ph.D. in International Relations at the Australian National University. He worked as a visiting professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security and a research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification. His main areas of research include the US-led alliance network in the Asia-Pacific, regional security order, Australian security policies, and US-North Korea relations.

■ **Sang-Yoon Ma** is a professor at the School of International Studies at the Catholic University of Korea. Dr. Ma received his DPhil degree in International Relations at the University of Oxford. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the Director-General for Policy Planning in 2016. He served as a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution and a Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. He also served as Dean of International Affairs at the Catholic University of Korea. His main areas of research include East Asian international politics, US foreign policy, Korea-US relations and the history of the Cold War. His major publication includes “From Enemy to Tacit Ally: The U.S. Approach to China during the Early Stages of Détente.”

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