

# South Korea's Perspective on Quad Plus and Evolving Indo-Pacific Security Architecture

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## Abstract

As South Korea prioritizes maintaining its foreign policy autonomy during the US–China great power rivalry, Seoul's priority is not fully compatible with US grander strategic motivation of building a networked security network that includes Quad Plus. Joining Quad Plus could present a geopolitical challenge to Seoul as it signals a resolve among Indo-Pacific democracies in countering China. For now, South Korea prefer to foster a more inclusive international order that accommodates every country in the region to hedge the risk of great-power decoupling and disengagement. Meanwhile, South Korea is willing to deepen the US–ROK alliance cooperation and support the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy to be channeled through its implementation of the New Southern Policy.

## Introduction

As the great-power competition has become heightened, the United States has reiterated its resolve to tighten its defense ties with allies and strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific into a networked security architecture. Initially introduced in the US Department of Defense's *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* in 2019, the concept of a networked security architecture is defined as “a network of interwoven bilateral, minilateral and multilateral defense arrangement between the US and regional allies and partners, and that also partly include China.”<sup>1</sup> US officials' recent remarks on this point are more instructive. During the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum on 31 August 2020, the US Deputy Secretary of State, Stephen Biegun, mentioned that four countries in the region—the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—would work together as “a bulwark against a challenge from China” and would invite more countries to align in a more structured manner.<sup>2</sup> Secretary of Defense Mark Esper also stated that “we are encouraging Indo-Pacific nations to expand their own intra-regional security relationship and networks of like-minded partners,”<sup>3</sup> which reaffirms the US strategic interest to multilateralize the US-led hub-and-spoke bilateral alliance system into a networked security architecture.<sup>4</sup> This networked security architecture does not imply that all the security relationships in the Indo-Pacific theater should be unified as an Asian NATO

under US stewardship. Instead, minilateral and multilateral institutions complement the existing hub-and-spoke bilateral alliance system.

That said, such remarks rather suggest that Washington sees building this architecture as an opportunity of reemphasizing US leadership challenged by revisionist China and attempts to slow down the pace of geopolitical flux with a more extensive web of like-minded Indo-Pacific democracies. Indeed, the regional balance of power is shifting adversely for the United States, as allies are declining relative to regional competitors such as China and Russia.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, China's selective revisionism of the US-led order has met mixed responses from regional countries, ranging from resistance to accommodation.<sup>6</sup> Such allied decline has not only made it more difficult for the United States to provide regional security and stability but also weakened the hard power that sustains the US-led liberal order. Hence the US message is clear: Washington is now probing the willingness of allies and strategic partners to join a like-minded democratic coalition preparing for a post-pandemic geopolitical confrontation with China.

Allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, however, are reluctant to join the United States in confrontation with China. While the US–China competition now seems to have become a new organizing principle of US foreign policy, the prospect of complete decoupling and disengagement between two great powers seems remote so far. Even within the United States it is still debated whether the rivalry with China should be conceptualized as an existential struggle that must be universally fought in every corner of the world.<sup>7</sup> As there is little consensus on the ultimate end state of the current competition, allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, albeit concerned over Chinese revisionism, are hesitant to join the United States in allied confrontation.

Additionally, forging a networked security architecture would strengthen Chinese fear of encirclement, which is likely to lead to Beijing undertaking strategic or economic countermoves toward US allies and partners participating in the architecture, as evidenced by Chinese economic coercion during the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) deployment dispute in South Korea in 2016. However, Washington's response against Chinese coercion has not reassured allies and partners enough during the dispute. What is worse, the much narrower unilateralism of the Trump administration has spread perceptions of further US decline and attenuated an otherwise favorable balance of power.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, under the Moon Jae-in administration, South Korea prioritizes foreign policy goals aimed at improving inter-Korean relationship as a means of denuclearizing North Korea. As North Korea remains the core driver of South Korea's foreign policy, Seoul attempts to maintain a good relationship with China, which is the biggest trade partner and main benefactor of North Korea,

enabling sustainment of the momentum of inter-Korean dialogue. To this end, South Korea strives to achieve foreign policy autonomy amid the great-power rivalry in the region.

Against this backdrop, this article argues that South Korea's priority of maintaining foreign policy autonomy during great-power rivalry and paving the way to build a non-nuclear peace regime on the Korean peninsula has been less compatible with the US grander strategic intent of building a networked security architecture under the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy. That said, this article addresses South Korea's perspective on the current US-China competition and changing regional security landscape in the Indo-Pacific. Next, it discusses how the strategy of multilateralizing bilateral alliance, as exemplified by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue Plus (Quad Plus), generates strategic dilemmas for South Korea. In particular, such dilemmas will be discussed in the context of South Korea's pursuit of its own foreign policy priorities and how South Korea's alternative regional initiative—the New Southern Policy—can be synergized with the FOIP.

### **South Korea's Perspective on US-China Competition**

As Beijing started to reassert China's influence regionally and globally, the United States is increasingly being challenged in the security, economic, technology, and even governance domains. Such confrontation posed by China raises questions about America's status as the preeminent power. Since the end of the Cold War, Washington was able to enjoy the unipolar moment with its own unparalleled strength, and the fact that the most of countries next to it in overall geopolitical strength were its closest allies bolstered US primacy.<sup>9</sup> The United States has used that primacy to shape the international system in a fashion highly conducive to American interests and ideals—employing its power-projection capabilities, forwarded presence, and expeditionary intervention to uphold stability in key regions, to promote the spread of democracy, to anchor a liberal economic system, and to roll back or contain the influence of adversaries that might disrupt the US-led liberal order.<sup>10</sup> However, distribution of global military and economic power has shifted significantly since the mid-1990s. While the decline of the United States and its allies is not universal, allied decline relative to the rise of adversaries has eroded the broader influence that US allies can bring to maintain the liberal order.

However, China, as a main competitor to the United States, can be better conceptualized as a selective revisionist.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, Chinese strategic behavior is better captured by the phrase *regional restructuring* than simply *revisionism*. Beijing would certainly prefer to alter the status quo of the current international order, but

China only aims to revise certain aspect of the regional order to better promote its own interests. As China primarily intends to shape international order to be more amenable to the exercise of Chinese power, regional restructuring mainly requires weakening the US alliance system as an obstacle to those goals, while leaving other elements of order intact.

This US hub-and-spoke bilateral alliance system poses a threefold threat to China.<sup>12</sup> First, the persistence of volatile sovereignty disputes between China and neighboring countries—such as Taiwan, Philippines, and Japan, which are mostly allied with the United States—carries the risk that a localized clash could escalate into a devastating full-scaled war between China and the United States. Second, from Beijing’s perspective, US provision of extended deterrence encourages and enables US allies to act more assertively. Third, a robust US alliance system grants Washington the option of assembling an anti-China coalition to contest leadership in East Asia should relations turn sour. Therefore, finding ways to weaken US alliances offers Chinese leaders the benefit of reducing the risk of all-out war with the America, while advancing the objectives that the US opposes the most, such as ending or reducing US access to allied bases, which would make military intervention in a regional conflict infeasible. Without the ability to project forces from forward bases in allied countries, conducting any intervention would be highly costly for the United States.

To this end, China has long upheld the realization of “national rejuvenation” since the 1980s; Pres. Xi Jinping refined this vision into the “China Dream,” the goal of which is to build “a community of common destiny” where China leads neighboring countries in managing their own security affairs.<sup>13</sup> In Xi’s words, “it is for the people of Asia to uphold the security of Asia,”<sup>14</sup> which would inevitably reduce the US presence in the region. To promote this vision, Beijing has promoted new initiatives that aim at building a parallel security order featuring dialogue and multilateral cooperation to address shared security threats without any role for alliances. Such structures include the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Furthermore, China has conducted multilateral and bilateral exercises to develop its capacity to conduct multinational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, engage regional US allies, and ease anxieties among China’s neighbors concerning the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) growing capabilities and expanding missions; for instance, recent joint exercises between China and regional countries including Cobra Gold, the ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercises, Khaan Quest, Kowari exercise, Tropic Twilight, and Falcon Strike. These exercises have intended to support Xi’s foreign policy by seeking to

ease regional concerns while attempting to shape the international system and improve the security environment along China's periphery.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned engagement measures toward the regional countries, the growing influence of China provides both positive and negative measures through a combination of coercion and alliance splitting.<sup>16</sup> Regarding coercion, Beijing uses both coercion and coercive diplomacy to shape the behavior of countries on its periphery. For instance, Beijing has employed punitive economic sanctions against Japan and the Philippines following confrontations in 2010 between the Japanese Coast Guard and a Chinese fishing vessel in the East China Sea and in 2012 between the Philippine Coast Guard and Chinese maritime law enforcement ships at Scarborough Reef in the South China Sea, both over illegal Chinese fishing activities. China temporarily banned the export of rare-earth elements to Japan and unofficially imposed import restrictions on Philippine bananas.<sup>17</sup>

In alliance splitting, some notable examples include the case of South Korea's THAAD deployment dispute, which found Seoul in a strategic dilemma between its economic engagement with China and its security relationship with the United States. Furthermore, Beijing seeks to exploit seams in relationships and has attempted to drive wedges between Japan and South Korea, whose alignment is critical to the US security strategy in Northeast Asia.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, US foreign policy under the Trump administration has been a combination of retrenchment and realignment as Washington focuses on engaging great-power competition rather than restoring liberal order. Retrenchment has been pursued to concentrate the limited assets of the United States to the great-power competition in the Indo-Pacific theater, while the realignment indicates that Washington is willing to cooperate with any actors in addition to traditional allies and partners to sustain its primacy, which raised concerns.<sup>19</sup> In this context, US calls for a networked security architecture have been initially regarded less credible, as numerous commitments to the multilateral institutions have been abandoned during the Trump administration, such as US withdrawal from Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

While the idea of great-power competition between the United States and China has been lingering among US foreign policy makers, the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed US resolve to disengage from China beyond great-power competition. This pandemic has clearly revealed US economic interdependence with its geopolitical rival, ranging from lifesaving medical equipment to supply chains of technology in national security-related infrastructure. Many believe such dependence renders the United States more vulnerable to China's coercive economic statecraft.<sup>20</sup>

It should be noted that peacetime nationalist urges of both great powers are also driving this decoupling, which leads to the question of how far the decoupling will be escalated.<sup>21</sup> At the moment, the Trump administration is framing the US–China interdependence as “economic surrender,” threatening that to “cut off the whole relationship.”<sup>22</sup>

Joe Biden, the 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, shares this conviction for US disengagement from China. Although he has been labeled as a foreign policy centrist, Biden has been pressured to move left by Democratic voters, especially by supporters of Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT). As clearly stated in the 2020 Democratic Party Platform, Democrats also share the hostility against Chinese economic practice in the global market, especially for manipulating currencies and stealing intellectual property.<sup>23</sup> Hence, this bipartisan urge for decoupling is likely to outlast the current Trump administration, whoever wins the 2020 US presidential election.

It is certain that this decoupling from China will not only incur an unbearable cost to the US economy for sure but also collateral economic impacts on allies and partners. Furthermore, disengaging from China would make the US post-COVID recovery even more difficult and the opportunity to hold accountable China in domains of human rights, environment, development cooperation, and global health issues will be lost.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, it is undeniable that China is the second-largest economy, with the world’s largest population, and a permanent member of UN Security Council, which could undermine US interests across the board. Global issues such as climate change, Iran, or North Korea cannot be effectively managed without a working relationship with China. However, for now, Washington is determined to ensure that the economic activities of US firms do not serve the interests of an authoritarian competitor.<sup>25</sup> Regional countries in the Indo-Pacific, however, do not universally share the same level of threats and interests out of Chinese selective revisionism, which leads them take different types of alignment vis-à-vis US efforts to build a networked security architecture.

### **Multilateralizing and Institutionalizing a Networked Security Architecture**

The idea of multilateralizing the bilateral hub-and-spoke system is nothing new. In fact, the hub-and-spoke alliance network in East Asia has already been transformed into a “less hierarchical and more pliable basis” for security cooperation.<sup>26</sup> Originally, the hub-and-spoke system was anchored in East Asia to allow the United States to exert control over potentially unruly leaders such as Taiwan’s Chiang Kai-Shek.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, US allies had very little ties between

one another. However, China's growing assertiveness and the deficiency of US strategic commitments in East Asia since the George W. Bush administration necessitated a number of regional alignments. This has led to the forging of minilateral and multilateral arrangements—a more fluid regional security architecture that reflects the diversity of emerging regional architects.<sup>28</sup> Particularly military and diplomatic ties among China's rival claimants in the South China Sea are proliferating, with countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines building bilateral partnerships. The Quad countries, India, Australia, and Japan, are deepening security cooperation, as demonstrated by the Quad itself, and actively participating in other multilateral such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), ARF, and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM+). Regional countries that are not treaty-based allies of the United States, such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia, also participated in building partnerships to preserve normative and material base of the rule-based order in the region. In other words, while the hub-and-spoke system remains, the region as a whole starts to become far more interconnected in the face of the changing security landscape. Such a web of political and military ties that pool capacities enables states to resist China's selective revisionism.

However, institutionalizing a sustainable networked security architecture would require the United States to consider whether this architecture can find the equilibrium between two potentially countervailing perspectives in mobilizing regional democracies: “balance of threat” and “balance of interests.” Realist theories suggest that common threats drive states to form a military alliance as an institution for hard balancing.<sup>29</sup> China, as a selective revisionist, however, is far from being a common enemy that poses the same level of threats across regional countries. For instance, South Korea feels less threatened by China than does Japan. Indeed some have argued that South Korea accommodates rather than balances against China's rise.<sup>30</sup> Even regional countries in the Indo-Pacific intentionally accommodate China to develop a vested interest in the stability of the existing order, as evidenced by the China-South Korea-Japan Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, EAS, ARF, and ADMM+.

Uneven distribution of threat perception on China's rise may hinder US efforts to institutionalize a networked security architecture in a sustainable manner. In other words, balance of threat among democratic allies and partners may not be universally perceived. In this context, portraying the US-China rivalry as a “geopolitical competition between free and repressive vision of the world order,”<sup>31</sup> which is more value-oriented, can mobilize more regional democracies by legitimizing the necessity of current competition with their existential threats.

Meanwhile, different levels of economic interdependence with China might create different incentive structures for regional countries to calculate whether to join US-led economic multilaterals in the region, as evidenced by the Economic Prosperity Network. A wedging strategy conducted by China,<sup>32</sup> which uses the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to dissuade regional countries from engaging in anti-China institution building in the Indo-Pacific, is noteworthy. Furthermore, such strategy might offset threat perceptions among regional states. For instance, the failure of Quad 1.0 is a clear example in which a “democratic diamond” confronted sudden demise after Australia’s withdrawal.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, given that national security agendas of US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific have already become diverse and often contradictory, forging a networked security architecture would require a measure to overcome the issue of compartmentalization among multilaterals. Compartmentalization has been a major issue in the relationship between the West and Russia. While Western leaders emphasize shared common interests with Russia in the areas of the war on terrorism, the Iranian nuclear program, and stabilization operations in Afghanistan, Russia sought to exploit Western efforts to compartmentalize as a way to undermine Western interests, as represented in the cases of hybrid war in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Syrian Civil War.<sup>34</sup> These examples demonstrate that expanding areas of cooperation among countries do not necessarily make their interests converge with one another. Their interests in specific domains may collide with others in different domains, which will destabilize the overall security architecture the United States intends to forge.

Altogether, institutionalizing the multilateral security architecture is still uncertain, forging a networked security architecture indeed rests on regional democracies’ willingness and capabilities that reflect their interests and threat perception vis-à-vis China’s selective revisionism and the US intent to decouple from the relationship with China. Regional countries will not easily make a choice of bandwagoning with one of those great powers but may instead opt to diversify the scope of alignment with great powers and with regional countries, as they collectively hedge the risk of great-power rivalry.

### **Quad Plus and South Korea’s Dilemma**

Some argue that South Korea holds the key to the success of the US FOIP strategy.<sup>35</sup> As two great powers compete with each other, both need regional architecture through which they can project their geopolitical strategies and garner

support from regional countries. However, the Quad, which serves FOIP strategy to balance China's BRI, does not have participants that can enhance their own strategic leverage vis-à-vis China. Japan is a predictable actor as a treaty-based ally of the United States; India is now more willing to balance against China after the recent Sino-India border dispute in the Galwan Valley; Australia suffers from trade wars with China for years. Therefore, inviting South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam—each of which still hedges against US-China great-power rivalry—to the Quad Plus demonstrates the Quad's effort to expand its own influence.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, South Korea under the Moon Jae-in administration prioritizes maintaining foreign policy autonomy amid great-power competition, which makes Seoul reluctant to embrace the FOIP. As much as endorsing the idea of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" is regarded as an attempt to contain China, Quad Plus is considered as another driver that globally supports Washington's anti-China narrative.<sup>37</sup>

This relatively accommodating attitude toward China has been observed for decades. As South Korea's foreign policy is mainly preoccupied with North Korea, Seoul attempts to forge multilateral initiatives connected with Pyongyang. For instance, South Korea strived to link its Eurasian Initiative during the Park Geun-hye administration with China's One Belt, One Road initiative to facilitate infrastructure building that could reconnect South Korea and North Korea and even to the European continent in the long run. Moon Jae-in's New Northern Policy also has the same strategic purpose. Additionally, South Korea's middle-power diplomacy, which envisions Seoul's bridging role that builds inclusive like-minded groups, seeks positional advantage in the global hierarchy as well as geographical location—between the global North and South, great powers and small powers, the West and East, and continental powers and maritime powers.<sup>38</sup> As a result, South Korea has taken a more accommodating attitude toward China and more inclusive approach toward other regional countries as a whole.

Meanwhile, as seen in table 1, South Korea's endeavor to join a networked security architecture remains fairly nascent so far. Most of Seoul's efforts are bilateral, and even minilateral and multilateral cooperations have been limited to engage neighboring countries in Northeast Asia. This is mainly due to the ROK's foreign policy focus on North Korea and subsequent accommodating attitude toward China, which do not necessarily support US efforts to build a networked security architecture to resist China's revisionism.

**Table 1. South Korea’s major experiences in networked security architecture**

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Types	Initiative	Year Since	Partners
Bilateral	Joint Vision for the Alliance	2009	United States
	Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogues (KIDD)	2011	United States
	General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)	2015	Japan
	Defense Cooperation	2015	Singapore
	Defense Cooperation	2017	Indonesia
	Memorandum of Understanding	2015	Vietnam
	Intelligence Sharing	2015	Australia
	Defense and Security Cooperation Blueprint	2015	Australia
	Protection of Military Cooperation	2018	Philippines
Minilateral	Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG)	1998–2003	United States, Japan
	China-Korea-Japan Trilateral Summits and Secretariat	2011	Japan, China
Multilateral	Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)	2003	Global
	Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative	2003	Japan, China, Russia, North Korea, US
	Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI)	2013	Japan, China, Russia, North Korea, Mongolia, United States
	Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility (NAPCOR)	2018	Japan, China, Russia, North Korea, Mongolia, United States, India, ASEAN
	Seoul Defense Dialogue	2015	Global

Source: Matteo Dian, “Japan, South Korea and the Rise of a Networked Security Architecture in East Asia,” *International Politics* 57, no. 2 (2020): 185–207.

However, South Korea would rather attempt to hedge great-power rivalry by forging an alternative network among middle powers such as Australia, ASEAN, and India, which are economically and strategically trapped in the US–China competition. This is contrasted with Japan’s attempt to compensate for the declining US commitment in supporting the regional order in the Indo-Pacific. More specifically, South Korea attempts to share the concern over collapse of the international order out of great-power decoupling with those middle powers by forging a buffer through which two great-power’s rivalry can be attenuated.

In fact, early in 2019, South Korea clarified its position over the escalating great-power rivalry. When President Trump visited the Demilitarized Zone

(DMZ) on 30 June 2019 to hold a meeting with Kim Jung-un of North Korea, he also discussed the US–South Korea bilateral relationship with Pres. Moon. During this meeting, both countries agreed that they would put forth a harmonious cooperation between South Korea's New Southern Policy and the US FOIP strategy. Indeed, South Korea maintained its participation in the broader US regional effort in domains such as energy, infrastructure, digital economy, and good governance.<sup>39</sup> The New Southern Policy was introduced as an attempt to better posture South Korea to strengthen economic ties with Southeast Asia and to expand the diplomatic horizon beyond Northeast Asia amid great-power competition. At the same time, while South Korea would attempt to synergize its New Southern Policy and the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, the former should be understood as a hedge to reduce economic reliance on China.<sup>40</sup> Seoul's bitter experience suffering from China's economic sanctions in response to South Korea's deployment of the US THAAD system in 2016 is reflected in this endeavor.

Meanwhile, the Quad, which was initially inaugurated in 2007 on the basis of the US, Japan, India, and Australia's success in HA/DR cooperation in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami disaster, has been less vitalized after the withdrawal of Australia and India until the arrival of the Trump administration in 2017 and the rejuvenation of the initiative. While many doubted the feasibility of the Quad's strategic cooperation in the region, the spread of COVID-19 provides ample opportunity for the Quad countries to engage major middle powers in the region, including Vietnam, New Zealand, and South Korea, through the auspices of the Quad Plus. Vietnam, which is the current chair of ASEAN; New Zealand, which is one of the Five Eyes partners; and South Korea, which is one of the treaty-based bilateral allies of the United States, are all capable contributors in not only fighting the COVID-19 pandemic but also strengthening the soft power of the Quad by further addressing the issues of HA/DR in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>41</sup> Also, these countries are expected to serve as trusted partners for the Economic Prosperity Network.

Joining Quad Plus could provide South Korea a number of strategic and economic advantages, although the initiative is still in its early stages of development. Quad countries already have been conducting spoke-to-spoke strategic cooperations. To name a few, India and Australia's Mutual Logistics Support Agreement in June 2020, India and Japan's Acquisition and Cross-serving Agreement in September 2020, and the US and India's Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in September 2018, all represent deepening strategic cooperation among Quad countries.

However, Quad Plus also presents a geopolitical challenge to South Korea, as it signals a unified resolve among Indo-Pacific countries in countering China.

Likewise, none of the “Plus” countries are sign on to the Quad Plus easily. New Zealand, for instance, maintains deep economic ties with China, and Vietnam, with its “three nos” principle of defense policy—no military alliance, no foreign troops stationed on its soil, and no partnering with a foreign power to combat another—is seemingly constrained from taking part in Quad Plus and countering China.<sup>42</sup>

South Korea prefers an interpretation of the FOIP that does not exclude any country in the region. Thus, South Korea does not want the Quad Plus to serve as an instrument for the development of regional blocs or for great-power competition that might further accelerate the pace of decoupling. South Korea, within the US–ROK alliance framework, is willing to cooperate on a number of issues, building on previous bilateral efforts. South Korea would also cooperate on a working level with members of the Quad Plus both in economic and security domains, but the umbrella of Quad Plus might send a wrong signal to other countries that South Korea takes a side in the great-power rivalry.

### **Way Toward an Inclusive International Order**

For South Korea, the Quad Plus is a geopolitical minilateral that serves a networked security architecture. South Korea recently confronted a number of occasions in which it has to choose, including Quad Plus, D-10, Five Eyes Plus, G-11, and so forth. South Korea welcomes any discussions on economic cooperation for empowerment, investment for infrastructure in developing countries, or nontraditional security issues from which it can elevate its position as a middle power in the Indo-Pacific as well as foster a better strategic environment to build an inclusive international order. Likewise South Korea’s support for the FOIP is channeled through its implementation of the New Southern Policy in the Indo-Pacific region as taking a more conflict-avoidance approach in regard to China, by mostly participating in economic, social, nontraditional security issue projects. Instead, South Korea further focuses on expanding the areas of cooperation with the United States so that US–ROK alliance cooperation can be deepened to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the Korean Peninsula and regional stability. In the long term, South Korea might be more aligned with the FOIP, if Chinese assertiveness trespasses upon Seoul’s foreign policy autonomy. But for now, South Korea prefers to foster a more inclusive international order that accommodates every country in the region in its attempt to resist great-power decoupling. 🌐

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