

Divergent Paths: The Quad's Challenges and South Korea's Strategic Engagement

By Dr. Stephen Nagy

Dr. Stephen Nagy raised important questions about the Quad, probing into its significance for different nations and the divergent perspectives held in Tokyo, Canberra, Washington, and Delhi. He highlighted the evolving nature of the Quad, suggesting that these nations are not entirely harmonized, particularly on security matters and public good provision. The absence of clear and sustained concrete outcomes from the Quad prompted Dr. Nagy to question its reliability as a strategic alliance. He emphasized the challenge of determining where South Korea fits in and called for a closer examination of the Quad's track record in delivering tangible results.

Moving on, Dr. Nagy acknowledged the Quad's shift towards public good provision over the past years, influenced by ASEAN concerns about the Quad becoming a security-oriented initiative



and India's stance. Still, the speaker underscored China's prominent role in shaping the Quad's future: if Beijing presses its interest across the Taiwan Straits, if China becomes more belligerent towards the Philippines, it might lead to an expansion of the Quad. India's reluctance to extend its security aims into regions prioritized by Japan, specifically the South China Sea, introduces a layer of uncertainty regarding the Quad's trajectory.

Dr. Nagy suggested a functional plug-in cooperation model for South Korea within the Quad, focusing on spe-

cific areas such as maritime security, supply chains, environmental sustainability, and the digital economy to concentrate on complementary activities in its domain of expertise. A regional approach would allow South Korea to add value to the Quad maritime domain in areas such as the Sea of Japan, the Pacific Islands, and the South China Sea, South Korea. While the Japanese enthusiasm for South Korean involvement in the Indian Ocean seems uncertain, there appears to be a potential willingness from Japan to embrace increased col-

laboration with South Korea when it comes to addressing North Korean concerns.

Notable divergences within Quad members would be a crucial concern regarding the sustainability of South Korea's involvement. The transition from the Moon to Yoon administration in South Korea didn't affect the nation's global engagement and mature approach to handling diplomatic challenges, particularly with Japan. However, uncertainties arise regarding the sustainability of the current Yoon administration and Modi ad-

ministration in India, with reservations about its alignment with the liberal values endorsed by other Quad members. Moreover, South Korea's economic vulnerability makes it susceptible to challenges in achieving economic cohesion. The ad hoc cooperation within the Quad may expose South Korea to heightened economic risks. On the other hand, India, less developed and less integrated with the Chinese economy, faces a different starting point, making it less susceptible to economic cohesion.

Considering broader participation in global public good initiatives, there's a need to determine the geographical focus of cooperation—whether to distribute efforts widely or concentrate where value can be added. South Korea can contribute significantly to maritime domain awareness activities and consolidating sea lines of communication in the eastern Indo-Pacific. Other Quad members might be better suited for collaboration with the EU, addressing issues in the Western Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.