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SOUTH KOREA'S ROLE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC  
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES UNDER THE YOON ADMINISTRATION

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MADAN: Good morning to those of you in the United States and good evening to those of you in, who are joining us from the Indo-Pacific. I'm Tanvi Madan, senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program and director of the India Project at Brookings. We're hosting this webinar ahead of President Biden's visit to South Korea and Japan. In both countries, he'll be hosting bilateral meetings, and in Tokyo, you will also meet with his counterparts from Australia, India, and Japan for the Quad Leaders' Summit. With the trip, the White House will hope to convey as it sought to do with the recent US-ASEAN Summit that the Indo-Pacific is still a priority for the administration despite the focus on responding to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

On the forthcoming trip, there'll be particular interest in the President's meeting with the new South Korean President Yoon. The new South Korean leader has promised to take a more active role in the Indo-Pacific cooperating not just with the U.S, but also with other partner countries. Indeed, amongst his first calls after he was elected are conversations with the leaders of Australia, India, and Japan, the other Quad countries.

To discuss the trip and expectations from it, but more broadly to consider South Korea's likely approach under President Yoon to the Indo-Pacific, we have a stellar panel today, which will be moderated by my colleague, Andrew Yeo, Senior Fellow in the SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies at the Brookings Center for East Asia Policy Study.

Panelists will discuss what President Yoon's approach to the Indo-Pacific, various partners, and mechanisms like the Quad, all organizations like ASEAN might look like, and how it might be different from that of his predecessor. They will also discuss how those partners might perceive this approach as well as their hopes and expectations of the new South Korean administration, and how will Beijing respond to President UN's Indo-Pacific policies.

To lead the conversation on these questions and more, I will hand over the

virtual mic to Andrew. But before I do that, just to note that the Brookings Center on East Asia Policy Studies is grateful for the support we received from a range of individuals, foundations, and corporate supporters. This event is part of a research project on South Korea's role in the Indo-Pacific, which is made possible in part through the generous support of the Korea Foundation. We'd like to thank the foundation for their support, and to reiterate Brookings' commitment to independence in all our work. I will also underscore that the views expressed today are solely those of the speakers. And with that, over to you, Andrew.

MR. YEO: Thank you, Tanvi for that introduction. And I also want to thank our audience tuning in from around the world for joining us. I'm delighted to introduce our panelists on this webinar or what I like to call a virtual roundtable. But before I do, let me just reiterate the importance of President Biden's visit to Seoul and the significance of South Korea's anticipated active engagement with other Indo-Pacific countries, including members of the Quad. South Korea has been the missing link in the Indo-Pacific framework and its presence may serve as a force multiplier, especially if it can mend fences with its neighbor, Japan.

Let me now introduce our panelists. And I'll just begin in the order that we'll go in the program. So first is Kuyoun Chung. She's an assistant professor of political science at Kangwon National University. We have Zack Cooper, who's sitting in Washington D.C. He's the senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and co-director of the Alliance for Securing Democracy Project. Kei Koga, who's based in Singapore, is assistant professor at the Public Policy and Global Affairs Program at the School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University. And we also have Sarah Teo, also joining us from Singapore, who is an assistant professor and coordinator of the Regional Security Architecture Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at the Nanyang Technological University.

All right, so we have a full agenda, but I wanted to just begin by having each of the panelists to say a few remarks about their perspective on South Korea's role in the

Indo-Pacific. And I mean, let me just begin with Kuyoun, because you're sitting in Seoul, it's just we're just a couple of days out before President Biden is going to visit South Korea. And we know that President Yoon Seok-youl has pledged to play a more active role in the Indo-Pacific region. What concrete steps do you think he's going to take to engage Indo-Pacific actors, and are there any immediate domestic or international challenges that might prevent President Yoon from making good on his promise?

MS. CHUNG: Well, thank you, Andrew, for introductions and also thank you Brookings for this timely event, and I also appreciate Jennifer Andrews' efforts throughout this process. So, let me start with the Yoon's new administration's foreign policy visions and corresponding roles and foreign policy that has been opened so far.

So, as you have already known, Yoon administration's foreign policy vision is called global pivotal states that contribute freedom, peace, and prosperity in the region and the world. So, you can see that as Andrew mentioned, South Korea wants to become a more active player in the regions and increase force coordination with United States and other regional partners more than in the past five years. And as Andrew mentioned, South Korea has been described as a missing link in the Indo-Pacific or sometimes as a missing link as well.

So, Yoon Seok-youl administration's foreign policy vision has been based on the understanding that South Korea has been benefited from global and regional order for the last 70 years since the creation of South Korea. And it is our interest to contribute maintaining such orders, which has been declining these days. So, and plus Yoon Seok-youl's administration is that it will play a leading role in safeguarding the rule-based order, as well as a piece of prosperity and try to secure a framework with which create a cooperation with other countries.

So, this is the kind of main departure actually from the previous Moon's administration which failed to establish a clear position whenever an issue of conflict between U.S. and China arises which creates actually suspicions that Seoul is moving away

from United States and leaning toward China. Yoon administration's, his position is that South Korea does not have to be feel pressured to choose between China and the United States, but it should not compromise when it comes to our core security interests. So that's the kind of differences from Moon administration. And this attitude actually set the baseline for South Korea in the Pacific approach, and as well as North Korea policy as well, and also the scope of U.S.-South Korea and U.S.-Japan and our regional partners' cooperation as well.

And in that sense, let me briefly talk about the Japan issue. So South Korea as Yoon administration sends teams and delegates to Japan before the inaugurations, it sends a signal that it will reconcile the relationship with Japan as well. And South Korea already acknowledged the importance of Japan in its bilateral as well as trilateral cooperation in the region as well. So, in that sense, Japan has been rewarded pretty importantly in this Yoon's social administration.

So based on this understanding South Korea's Yoon Seok-youl's administration already mentioned this interest in Quad Plus working group, either vaccine initiative as well as economic cooperation and also confirmed its participation in IPF and more regional and trilateral cooperation will be joined by Yoon Seok-youl's administration. And I will talk more about Ukraine as we have more time.

And I will briefly talk about challenges since I have a few more minutes. So, Yoon Seok-youl's administration, of course, it is pretty internationalist and pretty globalist governments are compared to the previous administration, but it has double challenges from domestic and international front. Domestically, as you all know, President Yoon has been elected by the margin of only 0.7 percent as in the United States. So, opposition party will remain until 2024, and until then opposition party will, you know, can pass any law at any time it wants, and it already happened in the last few weeks.

So, South Korea's new president might use a veto, but it will consolidate more political cleavage and polarization in the domestic political landscape. So, it will create

a dilemma and also President Yoon has more domestic policy issue that might override foreign policy initiative as I mentioned, the global pivotal states, such as education issue, also job market issue, as well as judicial reform. Many issues have been more highlighted during the campaign trail, so, Yoon's nation has more pressure to resolve this issue more than just foreign policy issue.

And internationally, South Korea has been challenged by its issue of North Korea. Even though South Korea mentions that you will take a more principled approach to China and sustain a suspended hedging strategy between U.S. and China but as North Korea increase its missile and nuclear capability, you will face more urgency to address this issue, which will emphasize the role of China in that process.

And also, how to reconcile with Japan has been uncharted. Of course, it shows a good gesture toward China to Japan to have more a better relationship. But South Korea's domestic public opinion is not that positive yet. So, it will take a more cautious and it will take a longer time to address this relation issue as well. So, I'll stop here. We'll talk about it later.

MR. YEO: Right, thanks, Kuyoun. So, it looks like there's a positive agenda moving forward for President Yoon, but he has these challenges domestically with the National Assembly and the opposition controlling the legislature. But then also internationally, as you mentioned North Korea, which by the way, highlights the issues tensions with China, but then also Japan. And so that's a perfect segue to our next speaker, Kei Koga, who can give us the perspective on Japan and South Korea's role in the Indo-Pacific. So, Kei, over to you.

MR. KOGA: All right, thank you very much. Thank you for inviting me this panel and then, yeah, I'm pretty much looking forward to the discussion. I think Yoon's inaugural to the presidency, is a great opportunity for Japan to re-engage with the South Korea, and then they discuss the potential areas of cooperation in East Asia and beyond. Japan will definitely take Yoon's diplomatic stands seriously and see cooperation where

possible. And this is why the Prime Minister Kishida met the delegation sent by Yoon in April prior to his inauguration.

And also, if we take a look at the current Northeast Asian strategic environment, North Korea has been provocative by developing its missile and nuclear missile capabilities, while China is also becoming the more and more assertive in expanding its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. So as both the Japan and South Korea have been concerned about the development, there are a lot of shared interests between them. So, Yoon's initial diplomatic posture is welcoming and then encouraging. That said, Kishida will definitely take a very, very serious crucial step, and it would take a bit of time for Japan to consider South Korea as a true idea in the Pacific partner.

And there are two fundamental reasons for this. The first one was Japan has yet to free their trust of South Korea's diplomacy because Japan thinks that the South Korea often moves the gold post and sometimes breaks the existing bilateral agreements. The wartime legacy still remains such as the issue of the comfort women and the wartime drafted or forced labor. And despite the 1965 normalization treaty, the Japanese government does not totally dismiss the other issues and try to find a way to solve them. But I think the 2015 bilateral agreement on the comfort women has become very symbolic and different point for Japan to illustrate its Korean fatigue. And what this agreement did was that Japan, the Obama administration, and the South Korea, under the Park administration, completed the final and irreversible agreement on the comfort women issue, so that they could construct more future oriented bilateral relations. And Japan provided one beyond the yen to the other foundation called the reconciliation and healing foundation, and also Japan expressed the apologies to those victims.

However, after the new administration came in, it declared a new political opposition in 2018 stating that the agreement did not solve the issue because it did not reflect the wishes of the victims. So, for Japan, there is a fear that South Korea will break this promise every time a new leader comes in. And there are deep-seated trust issues

between Japan and South Korea. So, Japan wonders if South Korea can be, to be their true partner.

And secondly, South Korea's commitment to rules-based order, international order is the not necessarily clear to Japan. Everyone understand that the South Korea is located in the strategically very complicated area and its strategic priority is placed on the North Korea, the stability on Korean Peninsula, and China. But these issues sometimes become too influential in shaping the South Korean foreign policy and they often marginalizes the regional and global policies including the promotion of their universal values and then protection of the international law.

So, for example, South Korea's response to China's assertiveness in South China Sea has been ambiguous. And in many international conferences, such as ASEAN-Korea dialogues, where there are opportunities to discuss issues, South Korea tends to be reticent. So again, this is strategically understandable considering that the South Korea relations with China has become vital for its trade and economic prosperity. But if South Korea always prioritize its national interest over the maintenance and enhancement of the rules-based order, then Japan considers are very important in realizing they are free and open in the Pacific, it would be difficult to regard South Korea as a true Indo-Pacific partner.

So given this, Japan has not really regarded South Korea as a supportive player in Japan in the past 50 years and then have less expectations, unfortunately, in the working future. This probably remains the same in the next couple of months. And Japan's initial cooperation with South Korea will likely be confined to the North Korea or the Korean peninsula.

But Japan will be open to discuss what both can do together in the Indo-Pacific bilaterally and multilaterally in the future.

I believe that both Japan and Korea can work together in terms of the specific functional areas such as COVID-19, the economic security, including the supply chain diversification, water diversification, critical and emerging technology, other things.



So, strengthening functional cooperation could be the first step for the improvement of the bilateral relations, and then working together. Thank you.

MR. YEO: Thanks so much, Kei, for giving us your candid perspectives on cooperation with South Korea in the Indo-Pacific, especially between Korea and Japan. Let me now move over to Zack Cooper who can give us the U.S. perspective, and we know that President Biden will depart for Seoul very soon. What should we expect to come out of Biden's first meeting with President Yoon? And drawing on your research on the Quad, do you see other Quad members beyond the United States welcoming South Korea's active engagement with the Quad framework, particularly in joining the working groups that Kei and Kuyoun mentioned.

MR. COOPER: Well, first, Andrew, let me just thank you and the Brookings Institution for hosting this discussion. I think it's really, really important and fantastic to be alongside so many fantastic panelists.

So, I would say I think our expectations should be pretty low for President Biden's visit to Seoul. It's not to say that I don't think it'll be a positive visit. I think it'll be a relatively easy visit in many ways and Korea's interests and American interests are very closely aligned, and the Yoon administration, and I'll speak about this in a second, is doing a lot of things that I think the United States will look on positively. B

But in my view, this is really an opportunity for President Yoon and President Biden to meet each other for the first time to get to know each other a little bit. It's really just a little over 24 hours in Korea that Biden has. So, I think we're going to see, you know, a fair number of photo ops, a little bit of substantive discussion, but I wouldn't be expecting a lot of deliverables to come out of this visit. And by the way, I think that'll largely be true about President Biden's visit to Japan as well and the Quad meeting.

I do think we'll hear a lot about the Indo-Pacific economic framework. But

aside from that, I'm not expecting a lot of major deliverables, maybe a little bit, frankly, like the US-ASEAN Special Summit that we just had last week, where there were a lot of photo ops, but actually not a lot of major new initiatives. But I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. And let me just give the way I'm thinking about how the U.S. and South Korea might cooperate over the next few years.

I think in many ways, South Korea's focus and America's focus are increasingly aligned. You know, the Biden team won't talk about this much. But they really want to focus less on the Korean Peninsula, less on North Korea, in particular, and more on the broader region. And that is exactly what you've heard from President Yoon, right? So, he has made the statement that South Korea should no longer be confined to the Korean Peninsula but rise to be a global pivotal state as he calls it. And I think you're going to hear that message reverberate in Washington. And there's going to be a great welcoming desire for Korea to play that larger role, not just on the peninsula, but more broadly in the region.

So, I think our focuses are aligned. The area that I think is much more difficult is exactly what we've already been discussing this morning, is what is the format? And that is less clear to me. So, if you think about the institutional groupings that the United States relies on, for rulemaking, you know, on the security side increasingly, I think the Quad is that group. Korea is not part of the Quad, although it obviously engages with some of the Quad working groups. And for all the reasons that Kei just mentioned, Korea's probably not going to be part of the Quad, certainly not anytime soon.

You've got then on economic issues, really the G7 leading the way. Of course, again, the only Asian country in the G7 is Japan. There was a British effort to basically expand the G7 to be the 10D by including South Korea, Australia, and India. I think that was a wise effort, but it really hasn't produced much. And so, when you look at these institutional groupings, you know, even on something like intelligence sharing, where United States mainly uses the Five Eyes grouping, right, the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, again, South Korea is not in that group.

So, I think the challenge here for the United States and South Korea is that increasingly, our focuses are aligned but the format of our engagement is not, right? The US-South Korea alliance is really bilateral, maybe more bilateral than sort of any American alliance, right? Our NATO alliance is obviously multilateral, our alliances with Japan and Australia include both Japan and Australia being part of these other groupings. But the U.S.-Korea alliance is incredibly bilateral, and it's very deep, right? You've got lots of U.S. Forces in Korea, you've got combined commands, these things that don't exist elsewhere. But I think the challenge for us is going to be changing the format of our engagement and trying to figure out how we work together on these broader agenda items.

And let me just say two quick last thoughts. I think there's a lot of room for Korea to do good work in building new areas of cooperation that don't already have strong institutional framework. So, one in my mind is technology cooperation, where we sort of lack those institutional frameworks. Korea is obviously a technology leader. I think Korea can do a huge amount in that area.

And then the other one, I think, where we can do a bit of thinking at least, is on economic coercion. This is something that Korea has faced directly, you know, five years ago, it has a lot of experience with this. And if Korea takes a tougher line on China in some areas, it needs to be prepared for this kind of coercion, and the United States needs to be prepared to back South Korea up. So, I think those are two areas that are really right for cooperation, but there are a lot of challenges ahead, even though I think most Americans are pretty excited about the prospects of what the Yoon administration wants to do. Thanks.

MR. YEO: Thanks so much Zack, a lot of excellent points. I was seriously trying to take notes as I'm moderating here. And I absolutely agree with you. The focus has so much been on bilateral relationship. That's how South Korea really engages with the U.S., but it hasn't really

developed these other trilateral or multilateral relationships and even when you look at

Southeast Asia with the new southern policy, towards the latter Moon years, there is an attempt to try to link the NSP with the Indo-Pacific framework, but it was done mainly through the bilateral alliance framework, and not multilaterally.

And so, I want to turn the floor over to Sarah Teo, RSIS. She's in Singapore and, you know, just before I let you speak, I just wanted to ask under the Moon government, we know that South Korea adopted a strategy that was similar to what we see with many Southeast Asian countries where they balance or hedge between Beijing and Washington. But as our earlier panelists have all stated in some, some shape or form, President Yoon is going to act less cautiously when it comes to navigating relations with Beijing. He's going to prefer sticking to Washington and joining other Indo-Pacific partners.

So, what is ASEAN'S view of South Korea's greater tilt towards the United States, and its anticipated engagement with the Quad and other allies and partners? We know that, again, if South Korea is trying to look for some kind of framework to engage the Indo-Pacific, there's also ASEAN as well, too. But I haven't heard South Korea talking a lot about following the ASEAN but using ASEAN as a framework to engage other regional actors. So, if you could just share some of your perspectives from Southeast Asia, looking at South Korea.

MS. TEO: Sure, thanks, Andrew. So let me start off by expressing my appreciation to you and the Brookings team for bringing me on board this project. So, as you pointed out, I think under the Moon government, South Korea's policy towards China-US relations or rivalry, mirrored the approaches of many Southeast Asian countries in terms of trying to remain neutral, and basically trying to avoid taking sides or having to take sides.

So, this shift or this potential shift that President Yoon's government has indicated towards the major power, you know, things like working with the Quad, or even the deployment of additional start batteries, I think, we do expect it to elicit a strong response from China. So, it is a departure from the approach under the previous administration.

So, in terms of ASEAN view towards this change, obviously, I would say that ASEAN is, I know, we always talk about ASEAN as a unitary entity, but it really is not. It has ten different countries with ten different foreign policy approaches and foreign relations. And as we know that diversity has often resulted in what has been criticized right as the lowest common denominator outcomes that appear not to really say much substantively.

So, in this context, I will say that it is pretty difficult to pin down a single ASEAN view of South Korea's tilt towards the US. But I think we can point to some broad assumptions that will shape ASEAN'S response towards this new approach by the administration. And the first is that ASEAN does understand that the U.S. has been an important contributor to South Korea security, and it is a fact that South Korea is a former tribunal of the U.S.

So, I think despite the fluctuations in ROK-US relations over the years across different administrations, that understanding by ASEAN of close South Korea-US cooperation is pretty consistent. So for ASEAN as a whole, I think among the bigger questions would be, firstly, whether this tilt towards the US and its other partners would be something sustainable in the longer term, especially as the other panelists noted, given China's expected response, I mean, the fact that China remains, I think, one of the biggest if not the biggest trading partner of South Korea, as well as the domestic sentiments towards Japan.

So given all these, to what extent the Yoon administration would actually be able to achieve its objectives in strengthening the U.S. relationship, enhancing cooperation with Japan, and more broadly right, in engaging with the Quad, even in the face of strong resistance. So, I think that would remain a question mark from the perspective of ASEAN.

The second concern for ASEAN, I think, would quite logically be whether that this shift would lead to more tensions in the region, because on the one hand, Seoul's interest to work functionally with the U.S. and its other allies and partners on issues like technology or climate change, you know, even on COVID-19, I think they could be beneficial

to the region and to regional capacity building at large.

But on the other hand, I think there is also a slight concern that if, if U.S.-Korea cooperation is framed, or it becomes part of this broader ideological narrative, in the sense of establishing kind of binary oppositions between regional countries, then tensions and divisions in the region, are likely to deepen. So that is certainly a concern for the Southeast Asian countries.

And one last point I will make is that, you know, for ASEAN, ASEAN has tended to regard its diversity and inclusiveness is something to take pride in, right. So, the implication for a more ideological cooperation framework in the region, I think, is quite apparent. So, if the regional divide becomes very much driven by ideology or political values, then what happens to the ASEAN model of inclusive engagement that seeks to embrace both likeminded as well as non-likeminded partners? So, I think those would generally encompass ASEAN'S broad concerns about South Korea's too. And I think I will stop there.

MR. YEO: Thank you, Sarah, for those remarks and also giving us the perspective of, from Southeast Asia. As you mentioned, too, ASEAN itself is heterogeneous, they're different members, and so they may have different views. But I think some of those sentiments are shared by Southeast Asian countries about Korea's hotel, and there is the possibility that could lead to more tension, not more stability.

So, we've given each of the panelists an opportunity to speak and offer regional perspectives on South Korea's role in the Indo-Pacific, and for this second half of our webinar, I thought I'd have more of a moderated discussion. I might begin just picking up on what Sarah had mentioned about, you know, potential tensions that lie as we see South Korea and other countries rallying around this, the Indo-Pacific around the United States, especially as we see tensions with China and now China-Russia, alignment between China and Russia strengthening. And so in the wake of that, how might China respond to the Yoon government's more active foreign policy, and if I were to give just, I guess, a

tangible example or some kind of hypothetical.

Let's say that Korea faces another round of an economic boycott, economic coercion, from Beijing. Would we see the United States or Japan or ASEAN supporting South Korea if they would have to face this kind of economic coercion. So again, the real question though, is that what is China, what might China's reaction be Yoon government's more active foreign policy?

MS. CHUNG: Well, let me get a start I guess. So actually China already mentions its opposition to South Korea's joining IPF. You know, it says that it's not helping regional landscape, which as Sarah mentions it will create more cleavages in the Pacific and Northeast Asia and more specific. And also, we are expecting that there might be some kind of economic coercion as we have already experienced during that deployment dispute in 2016. Also, we are expecting some kind of graze on kind of operations in the west to see as well. But even so South Korea's new governments are kind of moving toward the other directions that it is better for South Korea to build the economic resilience by participating IPF and other regional countries' economic cooperation framework so that you can we can have more solidarity as well as more resilience against this conclusion.

MR. COOPER: Yeah, can I just build on that point briefly which is, I think if you look back at how the United States and South Korea responded to the THAAD economic coercion case, I think it's instructive that there's a lot we need to be doing now to prepare for potential future economic coercion from China. And I think we should expect some type of coercive activities because I think it's natural for Beijing to be frustrated if Seoul aligns a bit more with the United States as Yoon appears to want to and I think there will be lots of opportunities for friction. And, you know, with China using economic tools more actively not just in Asia but around the world I think Korea has to be ready for this. But it's not just Korea, you know, I think one of the takeaways for me from the THAAD situation was it would have been much better for the

U.S.-Korea alliance if Washington had ways to stand with Korea at the time, and I just don't think we did.

So, I think we should be expecting some real tensions between Korea and China, and I think the United States has to be working right now to think about what it would do in these cases, right? And I'll just say I think we have a lot of work to do, you know. Australia is under a pretty substantial economic coercive campaign and has been for several years and U.S. doesn't really seem to have any way to really support Australia economically. Now what have we done, we've done the August deal, right? But this is really a security deal that's responding to an economic problem, so I think we need to be developing economic ways of cooperating and pushing back against Chinese economic coercion now so that we have them ready in case this does happen in the future and as a deterrent to China actually using those kinds of economic tools.

MR. YEO: Yeah, I think you're absolutely right, Zack. I felt that Seoul may have seen that they weren't really getting as much support from Washington or other allies, but I do think that it'll be different this time around because there's so much more attention and cognizance to economic vulnerabilities and this is why we're seeing the Biden administration focusing so much on things like supply chain resilience and even trying to get allies to coordinate on these issues. And that's part of what I think IPF is supposed to address. When they talk about digital standards or, you know, trying to coordinate digital economy in some ways, this is also an attempt to strengthen allies and their economic policies to prevent some kind of outside coercion from China.

But while we're on this track, let me talk about an even more controversial issue. So, we have the potential for a Chinese economic coercion again confronting South Korea and other allies but another question that often comes up when you talk about South Korea's increasing role or engagement in the Indo-Pacific is the Taiwan question. And I know that we've definitely seen Japan coming out with bolder statements in support of



Taiwan and taking a stand on issues such as the South China Sea disputes. And, you know, South Korea for understandable reasons has remained pretty ambiguous on its approach to Taiwan, but do any of you anticipate seeing South Korea moving in a direction that will make the Yoon government more vocal on issues related to Taiwan or on issues like the South China Sea? Maybe I can turn first to Kuyoun if you have any thoughts on the Taiwan question?

MS. CHUNG: Well, I think we have to go back to the latest US-ROK Summit during the Moon administration, and they actually mentioned the South Korea support stability and prosperity of Thailand Strait which was the first time they actually mentioned about this issue in the US-ROK Summit. And that actually shows the kind of departure from the previous kind of attitude that shows ambiguity and Yoon administration is more willing to show and more vocal actually to measures about its emphasis and commitment to value diplomacy.

Actually, Yoon administration has been pretty emphasizing, every time it has opportunity, the value of democracy and rules-based orders and Taiwan issue has been, of course, it is pretty sensitive not only because we have North Korea but also it will kind of invite more coercions and oppositions from China. But South Korea's new government seems to be more supportive of Taiwan issue than in the past.

MR. YEO: Any others, like, Zack.

MR. COOPER: Andrew, maybe I'll just jump in quickly and say I think this is a really tough area for Korea. There's no doubt that the United States would love to see other countries whether in Asia or elsewhere express support for Taiwan. We're seeing this worked into joint statements, you know, from country after country, you know, even the Europeans and the G7 are talking a lot about Taiwan.

But I have to say I think this is a tough one where there's some really tricky alliance issues, right? If we think about U.S. forces in Korea operating more in a Taiwan consistency, that raises some really tricky alliance issues to say nothing about the possibility

of Korea actually aiding in those types of operations. And this absolutely would really create some very tough discussions with Beijing or for Seoul, but you know maybe also for Washington.

So, I'm fully supportive of South Korea, you know rhetorically supporting Taiwan fellow democracy et cetera, but my guess is that we're going to see Seoul look for other areas to align with the U.S. before it looks to Taiwan. I just think Taiwan is a really, really tricky alliance issue and it's going to take us time to work up to that, you know. I think when you expand cooperation you want to expand in the areas where you know you can get a good return on your initial investment, and it strikes me that that Taiwan is something down the line that could be a real area of cooperation, but I think it's going to take us a fair amount of time to get comfortable doing that. I mean after all you know the us and Japan talk a lot about Taiwan but we're still just at the early stages of thinking through what real cooperation means on Taiwan contingencies. I think Korea is several steps behind.

MR. YEO: Great thanks.

MS. TEO: Andrew, can I come in?

MR. YEO: Yes, Sarah, go ahead.

MS. TEO: Yes, well I think in terms of the South China Sea we're given what President Yoon has said so far about freedoms and value. I think logically it does suggest that Seoul may take a stronger line in the South China Sea issue but I do think that most of what, I mean, in terms of statements, I think Seoul would still kind of frame it in the context of a rules-based order. It may contribute more to the maritime capacity building of some of the littoral states. But whether it would actually take stronger substantive measures, for example, you know joining spinous for instance. I think that is really a big question, but I don't think so at this point because I think, similar to the case of Taiwan, there are a lot of complex dynamics at play there. But I think that, you know, in the context of say an ASEAN-South Korea Summit you know having a paragraph in

there on the need to maintain stability and peace in the south China Sea, that would not be something that is feasible.

MR. YEO: Thank you Sarah. So when, you know, we talk about principles or principles and values based approach to foreign policy that might actually be one tangible way of addressing this and you talk about upholding you know rules-based order, freedom of navigation, so at least rhetorically if you were to see South Korea talk about those more openly that would actually be at least some shift in the direction towards you know engaging or being more active with other like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific but as Zack mentioned there's certainly sensitivities of you know fully cooperating with the U.S. on Taiwan Strait's issues certainly anything that revolves around military cooperation may be very difficult at this time.

But if we were to look at more practical ways of exercising increased engagement or South Korea's increased role within this region you know, what are some other specific issues that that South Korea may be able to work on with other countries or develop together with other countries and I'm thinking more on the economic front things like development finance or addressing supply chain issues which we talked about to some extent. And maybe I can turn the floor over to Kei to talk a little bit about potential for cooperation even in in southeast Asia on things like infrastructure and development behind us. Kei?

MR. KOGA: Thank you. So, I think, yeah as I said there are there are several areas of the functional cooperation that the South Korea could work together with its partners and including, I think Japan as well. And as Andrew said earlier you said the development of finance and also the economic cooperation are one and then what I kind of thought about this year.

Yes, I mean it would be actually a little bit provocative to China but the South Korea's participation in the Pacific economic framework, IPS, is actually one way to get stronger cooperation with the United States and Japan. I guess the IPS has several idea

economic audio agendas including the diversification of the supply chain and also the critical infrastructure too. I think also the IPS is the kind of framework that facilitates their rules making. And in that sense, I guess the Yoon administration could contribute to the rules making in the Pacific and then that would actually be really helpful for Japan too because they share the similar kind of principle democratic and then also the democratic values and then the principles.

So, that's the kind of one area that the Pacific could actually work on. And the other thing is probably, I don't know about this, but the other Greater Mekong Subregion of the corporation, yeah, Sarah actually organized around the special issue in Asia policy with regard to how the region states see American sub-regional cooperation and how they actually cooperate and in the context of the U.S.-China rivalry. But I think South Korea is more active in developing the development in the Mekong Region. And I guess Japan also are doing but the one big problem is that they don't actually coordinate much so each country, the United States and Japan and South Korea are actually working individually to some extent. So, if they actually coordinate the policies together and they actually facilitate the division of labor clarifying division of labor which part of development they actually want to do and also, they are preventing those kinds of regional states in the Mekong Subregion from being the victim of the financial debt or so. Then that would be one big contribution for the average order. So, I think I did that kind of practical cooperation that the South Korea can contribute.

MR. YEO: Thanks. Sarah, did you want to add anything about the Mekong region and cooperation. There, okay, you read my mind because I was actually thinking about that project that Sarah had done, and I know that there's involvement of South Korean involvement in the Mekong Region as well as support from Japan and United States but as you mentioned there it doesn't really seem to be much of a coordinated effort. They're all

kind of doing their own things and I don't know how realistic it is where there actually be some kind of consortium to do work together. And if that would be an example of you know getting allies and even thinking about the Quad and looking at infrastructure, finance, and development of getting allied countries to try to cooperate more on projects within the region. My understanding is that the needs of infrastructure are so great in southeast Asia and beyond that you don't have to coordinate that much that there's plenty to do and you can do it on your own but if there are ways certainly to work together that could at least show some form of solidarity.

But Sarah, do you have any thoughts and while I have you on the floor, is there anything else that you think from this perspective of southeast Asia that you think South Korea could be doing to engage the region further? I know we had the new southern policy, and it doesn't look like the Yoon government is going to continue that specific policy per se but that doesn't mean that he's not going to give increasing attention to the region. It might just come under some other name, or it might be folded under a broader Indo-Pacific framework. Sarah?

MS. TEO: Yeah, sure. So, on the Mekong, I think, well, South Korea think it has been a relatively compared to other partners like Japan and China. It held its first Korean Mekong summit in 2019 I believe or 2018, so just a couple of years ago. But what I think what we found from that project which Kei and of course we had other distinguished participants as well, was that I think in the Mekong, South Korea does have a niche which is its development experience, and it is able to use that experience to kind of help and assist the Mekong country's own development and infrastructure building.

And Andrew you also mentioned that you know we are probably not going to see the new southern policy in form again. I think that's very right, but President Yoon has actually, I think he briefly outlined a strategy which he called the ABCD strategy for southeast Asia so basically this involves advancing human capital, building health security, connecting cultures, and digitizing Asian infrastructure. So in terms of the specific issue

areas they actually don't differ very much from what was covered under the new southern policy, and I think these are traditionally areas where South Korea can play to its strengths and likewise these are areas that are also very relevant for ASEAN's own agenda in terms of development, narrowing the development gap, strengthening of people to people exchanges, and looking at how to digitize economies.

So the one other thing I would say I think in terms of Korea ASEAN relations is really that I mean, realistically speaking, I don't think each side could ever take the place of a major security or economic partner for the other, but you know in light of the shifts and the fluctuations in in geopolitics at large, I think that ASEAN-Korea relationship is all the more valued for firstly, its consistency and secondly, like Kei mentioned, functional cooperation, right?

So, in light of major power rivalry I think from ASEAN's view, cooperation with South Korea on very functional areas like development assistance, technology, smart cities, and public health. I think those would be areas which ASEAN does prioritize, and which South Korea could play an important role in for the region.

MR. YEO: Wonderful thanks so much for those insights and as you're mentioning the ABCD for southeast Asia I was thinking wow, which sounds very much like the NSP, but I think we often see that happening with new governments. They don't like to use the framing or the project or initiate name of the previous government but that doesn't mean that they get rid of those policy's wholesale, they just try to adopt or insert some of the good ideas from the previous government into their own policy and make it their own. So, I hope that the Yoon government does remain engaged with its ASEAN and Southeast Asia.

We still have a few minutes. I'm going to open up questions to our virtual audience and some have already commented in advance so I will address those in a moment but while I have all this expertise in our virtual room I wanted to think ahead a little bit about Indo-Pacific engagement and enroll South Korea beyond even this region and I know that a lot of experts and policy makers are thinking about connections between the

transatlantic alliance and NATO and Indo-Pacific and there's, especially following the Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Within the Indo-Pacific region there's been much more interest and engagement across these regions. Before, we've seen Europe gradually becoming more interested in Indo-Pacific affairs because of the rise of China but now we're seeing this from the Indo-Pacific side and increasing interest and supporting alliances like NATO. And of course, we have the NATO Summit that's coming up at the end of June in Madrid, and Japan and South Korea have been invited to attend. But are there any thoughts about this upcoming meeting and whether NATO Summit or greater engagement with European allies or more involvement on the Ukraine front will come up at either of these meetings in a Seoul or Tokyo.

MR. COOPER: Andrew, I'm happy to jump in first. So, I do think that increasingly the United States is looking to connect its European and its Asian allies and I think in some ways this is natural right? You've got leading democracies in Europe leading democracies especially in northeast Asia that are sort of natural partners, right, and there's a lot of work we can do I think on economic issues, on technology issues.

As I said before, and increasingly you know Korea even Japan you know, and others are standing up more on what I would think of as sort of values issues right? But I do think there is increasingly a break down between the way that we are thinking about some of these challenges in Washington which is, I hate this term, but I think it's illustrative the east-west divide right the divide between let's say China and Russia on the one hand and many of the world's advanced industrial democracies on the other. And in that sense, you know, it's very natural for the U.S. and Korea to be leading parts of the west, even though Korea is in the east, and that that's a natural role.

I think the other tension though that we haven't really gotten our heads around is really a north-south divide right and I think this is more how my Chinese friends tend to think about the breakdown over Ukraine and Russia is that there's I think there's a bit

more hesitance in other parts of Asia. You know our friends in Singapore right now are in the middle of this where you know Singapore has taken a pretty active position on Ukraine, but the rest of ASEAN has been very quiet. And even the statement coming out of the special summit was very carefully written.

And so, I think part of the challenge here for the United States and for Korea is how do we join together these leading you know advanced industrial democracies without leaving behind a lot of the rest of the world that doesn't really see itself so closely as part of those groupings in northeast Asia or Europe, you know. Where does southeast Asia fit into these debates? Where do African or Latin American countries fit into these debates. I think this is a really tough challenge and you know you brought NSP before. This is exactly the kind of challenge that is applicable there, right? How does Korea appeal in in southeast Asia? My final thought on this is, I don't think we can only talk about democracy, and you know democracy tying these countries together because of course in southeast Asia that's a lot less appealing. So, I think we're going to have to think very carefully about what we can do to support Ukraine that isn't focused simply on the logic of democracy but is going to gain support really in the global south.

MR. YEO: Right, those are some excellent insights Zack, and I'm just thinking here as well from Washington's perch, it sounds great that allies want to become more engaged with NATO and with Europe, but as you mentioned, if there is a north-south divide, I mean how would Philippines or Thailand which are trade alliance partners, how would they feel about this.

And so, on one hand you know again if your focus is just on treaty alliances and advanced industrial democracies, this looks like a terrific opportunity but other regional actors and again I'm thinking about ASEAN may, they'd be quite alarmed with, and they might see this again, as Sarah mentioned earlier, the divisions that are creeping whether those divisions are ideological but also in terms of you know where countries are at in development of the north south divide.



Are there any others that want to weigh in on this and I'm actually interested to hear Kei's perspective or the Japanese perspective because Brookings had hosted a Japanese delegation and former Foreign Minister Taro also came and he spoke publicly, and he was very keen in supporting the regional architecture and connecting alliances and he even had thrown out a term NAPTO, the North Atlantic Pacific Treaty Organization, and you know I know some folks in the region have talked about a Quad Plus Quad. So, I know that there's certainly an interest in building up framework, institutional framework for connecting Europe and Asia and Japan seems like one of the most keen countries in doing that.

So maybe Kei you can give us some thoughts and then I want to go back to Sarah who can maybe give us the perspective from ASEAN, and I'll turn the floor over to the virtual audience. Kei?

MR. KOGS: Yeah, okay, thank you very much. So, just quickly I think Japan is more kind of leaning toward the United States and European, their partners and allies in terms of supporting democratic values and so I guess that's the kind of the tendency I see. But, yeah, I guess Japan also has a certain kind of comfortable advantage in among the other advanced industrialized democratic state that Japan can to some extent bridge between the western allies and also their ASEAN partners. Because the reason is Japan also, that Japan supports those democratic values and then so-called universal values but at the same time their approaches are not exactly the same as the United States or European allies. And then, yeah, in that sense Japan actually used the kind of means to portray already a nudge the Asian allies to actually facilitate the democratization or protection of the human right, facilitating ASEAN security.

So, I guess the other approach are different and then this actual approach is going to be pretty important to connect those gaps that like you just mentioned, east as the exact and then as we mentioned at the east west and then the north and south. So, my kind of feeling that the Japan has a unique position to play in the past week so that the Japan

should actually do that even though I mean the basic kind of principle is pretty much the same as the United States and European countries, but I think the approach are different. So, they should actually make the most.

MR. YEO: Sarah?

MS. TEO: Thanks, Andrew. So from the ASEAN perspective I mean at this point I think I do want to bring up the ASEAN Charter, which does mean I mean and in terms of you know ASEAN'S previous documents they do mention principles of democracy and good governance and so there are I think countries in ASEAN that are really strongly supportive of such principles but in terms of I think the actual implementation or the actual interpretation it, of course differs from member state to member state so as a whole I think ASEAN has had to move slowly on such issues.

So, in the context of I think what Andrew mentioned earlier about a NATO or a Quad Plus that you know is kind of based on democracies I think I mean ASEAN would naturally be wary, I think, for two reasons.

One, ASEAN has always been wary of kind of multilateral military packs, right? And second is that I think ASEAN has always like I mentioned in my opening comments, ASEAN has always prided itself on its inclusive model engagement. So, you know regardless of your domestic political system if you are a key player in the region ASEAN will engage that country whether it's like-minded or non-likeminded. So, if the region kind of fragments into such, I guess, institutions that are driven by ideology or by such political values then I think that would be something that would end up being a challenge to ASEAN's own model and how ASEAN sees that region

MR. YEO: Great, thanks so much, Sarah, for giving us that perspective and hopefully you know as South Korea weighs in on you know how engaged they want to be with partners in in Europe you know it will be certainly give them pause as they think about the ramifications for the relationship with ASEAN and other countries that are in the developing world.

While we're on this thread you know there are a couple questions that had come in from our virtual audience. So, I'll bring up two just because they relate to the thread that we're on now with Europe and Ukraine and Russia. So, the first comes from Gary Landsman, and he asks how is South Korean leadership responding to Putin's nuclear saber rattling and then another question from William Hayderman, adjunct professor at the Mexico CSIS Joint IR Programme, will the crisis in Ukraine lead to better reconciliation between South Korea and Japan? So, maybe I can turn it over to Kuyoun to address the first question about South Korea's leadership and how they've responded to Putin's nuclear saber rattling and just more generally just Putin's invasion of the Ukraine and Kei maybe you can weigh in on whether you think the Ukraine crisis provides for any opportunity for cooperation between Japan and South Korea. Kuyoun?

MS. CHUNG: Okay, thanks, Andrew. When it comes to Ukraine crisis Yoon administration of course in the first place to join the economic sanctions campaign by international community and looking at the issue of economic security and in that sense it tries to secure more economic framework and the framework of cooperation with other countries and at the same time South Koreans are looking at this issue from the North Korean perspective on North Korean angle and how North Korea might learn the lesson from Putin's rhetoric and nuclear adventurism and how North Korea's commitment to you know retain its nuclear capability as well. So, in that sense South Korea is of course as all the panelists have mentioned South Korea has been reluctant about Ukraine crisis and take a step but it as it is protracted it's taken more significance in foreign policy.

MR. YEO: Right, and Kei on the Korea Japan cooperation aspect post Ukraine.

MR. KOGA: Yeah, so in terms of the reconciliation I think there are two things, the reconciliation, and the cooperation. I think in terms of reconciliation it will be difficult I mean even though Ukraine kind of crisis drives the Japan and South Korea to the same kind of their strategic direction, but I guess the reconciliation part is more kind of

bilaterally specific so that they would not be able to probably get over their historical legacy or these kinds of things.

But I guess again like as I said operation-wise they are I think it's possible. And then they are given, everybody talks about Yoon's diplomatic emphasis on the universal value also and then also they are kind of placed emphasis on the principles, I think they are those are the really important factors for the Japan's free and open in the pacific division as well. So, I guess the Ukraine issue creates the moment for Japan-South Korea to cooperate together and then they are trying to do something toward the idea to mitigate the risk of Ukraine crisis also. So, I think that's. the how do I say, that's the kind of important part of the European crisis. It could actually create the momentum for the cooperation. But again, like as I said it doesn't actually prepare them to reconcile with each other in terms of their biological disputes.

MR. COOPER: Yeah, so it sounds like we shouldn't expect too much out of the Ukraine crisis but at the same time as you mentioned I do think that as both you know seek to provide humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and try to cut off Russia by imposing export controls that they can see that they're moving in the same direction, that they do support particular values, that they are opposed to Russian aggression. So certainly, rhetorically, at least you can make something out of that.

I wanted to turn this, to ask this question from Gabriel Baldubam, a researcher at the university of Sao Paulo in Brazil so we have a listener all the way from Brazil tuning in, but this question is about the Quad plus. So, do you think that South Korea may join the Quad plus in the future? And Zack, I know you had mentioned in your opening remarks that you don't see South Korea joining the Quad itself anytime soon but what about the Quad Plus, so maybe I can turn it to Zack, and then Kuyoun, talk about the Quad Plus and then anyone else as well too if you wanted to weigh in on this question. Zack?

MR. COOPER: It's a great question, thanks Andrew. And look others may have a slightly different view on this. I think it's very natural for Korea to cooperate with the Quad in certain areas you know as I said I think supply chain cooperation is a natural one. You know, Korea is such a leader on semiconductors and other parts of the supply chain that it would be foolish for the Quad to go ahead without Korea as part of those discussions and the supply chain working group.

But I have to say I think trying to include Korea more broadly in the Quad we could spend a huge number of efforts trying to get Korea into the Quad and I'm not sure how substantial the returns would be. And, you know Kei has mentioned all of the challenges between the US and Japan and Korea and trilateral cooperation and bilateral cooperation between Japan and Korea themselves is obviously a challenge. I hope we can overcome some of those hurdles, but I think the other reality is you know everyone sees the quantity differently.

My personal view is that the one thing that makes the Quad special is that it is the four countries in Asia that are willing to push back in the military domain against China right. There are other countries here and there that are willing to do certain things but India Japan the us and Australia, those are the four countries that are really willing to balance in the military domain against China and frankly that's the only thing that all those four countries really clearly share right. We have different views on democracy. We have very different economic approaches right. India is quite perfectionist. I think if you go to Seoul right now and say do you want to be part of this grouping that is really in some ways it's naturally focused on military balancing against Beijing that will make a lot of people quite nervous. So, my personal view is that it makes a lot of sense for Korea to cooperate with the Quad, but I don't think Quad membership should be the focus of South Korea's efforts over the next few years.

MR. YEO: Thanks, Zack, I also agree too. I think the Quad membership is I mean maybe they can decide that down the road but right now it seems like the working

groups is probably the best avenue or a bet for South Korea to become engaged with the Quad countries. And I always say that we also have to ask how other Quad members outside the United States would feel about South Korea membership. Would they even, would they be, it doesn't, I don't think that they would all jump up and down excited to have South Korea formally join the Quad. I mean you would have to figure out another name Quad won't work anymore.

But I do want to just mention that with this Quad plus formulation, I think a year ago there was a lot of discussion about, you know, Quad plus being a possibility, actually don't hear as much about the Quad plus these days, so I don't know if the working groups, you know, creating the working groups have phased out, you know, maybe this idea of having something of a Quad plus. And of course, it was never formalized, it's just what people called, referred to the Quad meeting and having three additional countries. I think it was New Zealand, Korea, and Vietnam – correct me if I'm wrong – joining in on discussions.

And the other point, Zack, they want to make and maybe push you back a little bit on is that the Quad, yes, I think what makes it special is that all the members are willing to push back on China militarily. But we've also seen Biden move away from that military aspect as well too and some have even criticized the Quad these days that now it just focuses on these functional issues like climate change you know vaccine resilience you know emerging technologies that may be less antagonistic to China and make other countries more comfortable and trying to engage with the Quad so there's also that bit as well too it's maybe perhaps the Quad countries are more willing to push back on China militarily but they don't seem to be emphasizing that point or waving their arms saying that you know at the end of the day it's really the military aspect of the Quad that really brings us together. Kuyoun, so any thoughts about Quad plus in South Korea

MS. CHUNG: Well during the campaign trail president Yoon actually emphasized its willingness to join Quad plus actually gradually moving into Quad membership. That's the kind of campaign trail he mentions but after he become president at

the inaugurations actually, he tries to say that it will try to in kind of scaling up its presences and cooperation in the pacific. So, I think it becomes more realistic in the sense that he tried to you know increase and finding more identity and interest and domains it can contribute in the pacific in the first place. As we have all know we have a Japan issue without increasing reconciliation with Japan it is not possible to you know set up another trilateral's workplace membership as well. So, in that sense it has now set up more phased approach rather than just jumping into Quad members or Quad plus membership is trying to find a more reasonable areas of domains of cooperation in the first place.

MR. YEO: Thanks, Kuyoun. I've become really engaged in the Q&A, I didn't realize that I slightly lost track of time. And due to the interest of time and being respectful to everyone else's busy schedule, you know, I want to just say that we covered a lot of ground here and there's high expectations about South Korea's role in the Indo-Pacific but there's also additional challenges which come with playing a greater regional role and we've I think unpacked a lot of those challenges today.

So, I want to thank our panelists again for sharing their insights and regional expertise on the Indo-Pacific and South Korean foreign policy. I'd also like to put a plug in for an upcoming event on South Korea and the new geo-economics of Asia on May 25<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. Eastern time. If you are interested in the issues of supply chain economic coordination economic coercion, you can tune in then.

And finally, I want to thank our associate director, Jennifer Mason, and Senior Research Associate Laura McGee, and the Brookings Tech and Communications team for helping organize and making this webinar possible. And once again we thank the Korean Foundation for their generous support to our ongoing program. So again, thank you all panelists for sharing your insights. Have wonderful morning afternoon or good night wherever you are. Thanks again.

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