

Outcome Report

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Korea Office
in cooperation with the
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung India Office

(15 February 2022 – Zoom/Seoul)



“Virtual Dialogue on the Indo-Pacific”



I. PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

On 15 February 2022, the KAS Office Korea and the KAS Office India jointly hosted a virtual dialogue on the Indo-Pacific, which gathered five Indian and four South Korean subject matter experts.

The two-hours long virtual meeting invited for an analytic comparison of the respective regional policy approaches, perceptions and strategies vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific and related developments, as well as a look at the current state and potential of bilateral relations between the Republic of India and the Republic of Korea and their joint contributions to a rules-based international order as well as a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The virtual dialogue was divided into two sessions.

- The **first session** sought to shed light on the country-specific policies, stances and perceptions of India and South Korea in relation to the region and the concomitant environmental and security concerns.
- Whereas the **second session** was specifically aimed at discussing issues relating to the prospects, strengths and challenges of bilateral economic cooperation between India and Korea, as well as the nature and scope of cooperation under the three pillars of people, peace and prosperity within the Indo-Pacific.

The meeting took place according to Chatham House rules; therefore, the outcome report will not mention any names of the experts, but rather focus solely on the insights and issues that were addressed during the Virtual Dialogue.

II. THE CONTEXT

“With the rise of Asia, the political and economic balance is increasingly shifting towards the Indo-Pacific. The region is becoming the key to shaping the international order in the 21st century. [...] More and more governments, organisations and institutions worldwide are making the Indo-Pacific their conceptual frame of reference and thus the basis of their policies, for example Japan, the US, India, Australia, France and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). All Indo-Pacific concepts allude to the rules-based international order. They differ, however, in terms of their objectives, emphasis on different policy fields, the importance they ascribe to multilateral approaches and, above all, with respect to the question of China’s involvement as a regional and emerging world power that, to some extent, calls the rules of the international order into question.”

This quote, which is taken from the first paragraphs of the German Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific, exemplifies how foreign policy makers in Berlin - and their counterparts in other European capitals - have become slowly but increasingly aware of the significant challenges to the international order, which are deriving from, responding to or coming along with the changing role of the People’s Republic of China and the changes in China’s relations with neighbours, other countries around the globe and the United States of America in

particular. It has become an eminent task for every country to reconsider its strategic approaches to the world and especially the Indo-Pacific as the major playing field and frame of reference for the probably most decisive phenomena in the International Relations of our times.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has been contributing with wide-ranging impulses to this process both within German debate and in the framework of our cooperation with international partners. KAS offices were directly involved in the promotion of the German Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific and publication and dialogue formats on the matter by and among academia, civil society experts and analysts as well as up to the ministerial level. Another example are the ongoing KAS activities around the visit of the German frigate Bayern in the Indo-Pacific, marking the first mission of this kind for a German navy vessel for decades. On the special occasion of the Frigates' arrival in Mumbai, the KAS India Office organised in January 2022 a virtual symposium on the potential of Indo-German/European cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, thus once again emphasising the pivotal significance of collaboration between like-minded democratic nations in asserting a rules-based order within the region.

The KAS Korea Office in particular initiated project lines particularly focusing on the before mentioned developments on the occasion of then German Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer's virtual dialogue series with her counterparts in selected Asian partner countries in 2020. KAS subsequently provided support for the translation of the German Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific into Korean language and its release by the German Foreign Office in January 2021. Our interest, however, goes far beyond our own debate and its results. The KAS Korea Office has therefore invited a group of five distinguished South Korea experts on countries and international affairs in the region from academia, think tanks and government affiliated institutes to form the KAS Indo-Pacific Advisory Group Korea.

The ongoing pandemic and the conditions it created also with regard to international meetings certainly affected the scope of related activities. Nevertheless, throughout the year 2021 the advisory group has held regular meetings on aspects of strategic importance to the foreign and security policies of Korea as well as ASEAN countries and other states such as for instance Australia, India, Japan, the PR China, Taiwan and the United States of America. Reacting on evolving situation, their discussions further gave specific attention to the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific or AUKUS. In May 2021 the group had a first meeting of that kind facilitated in cooperation with KAS colleagues in Canberra, Australia.

III. AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

The major aims of the format are the following:

- **Firstly**, deepening the members' common understanding of relevant developments from both domestic perspectives and those of partners by mutually providing and discussing their insights and expertise on particular pieces of the puzzle.
- **Secondly**, the advisory group has conveyed their thoughts and experiences to political decision makers of the legislative and executive branches in Seoul, Berlin and Brussels.
- **Thirdly**, the project is designed as part of a cross-national platform and with ambition to create additional opportunities for gatherings among like-minded peers through the extensive network of KAS offices in the Indo-Pacific.

IV. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- South Korea should not subscribe outright to any particular regional or extra-regional vision or strategy for the Indo-Pacific region, yet at the same time Seoul should not discourage economic, strategic or people-to-people cooperation with any specific country in the region.
- Changes within the current rules-based order that reflect the shifting balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region are essential to accommodate the voice and interests of small and medium powers in the region as well as to strengthen the rules-based order throughout the region.
- South Korea will most likely continue to engage positively with both China and the US in economic, security and geostrategic terms. This stance currently safeguards the country's national interests and will most probably continue to persist in the foreseeable future.
- Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, India has developed a clear vision for its Indo-Pacific strategy, which focuses on keeping the region open, inclusive and equitable for all states, and thus does not solely address India's own national interests.
- In essence, preparedness, partnerships and the promotion of an interconnected region are now building the cornerstones of India's Indo-Pacific vision.
- In recent years, one could observe the emergence of criss-crossing networks in the region, leading to several processes of institutionalisation in the sense of a series of mini-laterals. India, which is a major driver of this ongoing phenomenon, is pursuing the goal of an organic institutionalisation, where thematic coalitions are organically formed around issues of joint interest and concern.
- There are several opportunities for increased cooperation between India and South Korea, as both countries are partners of the United States and together can help ensure a lasting US presence in the region, in addition to which there is also much potential

for the development of issue-based coalitions of mutual interest between the two like-minded democracies.

- As the issue of an increasingly belligerent China has given rise to various new forms of cooperation between stakeholders in the region, the decisive yardstick now rests on the ability of finding a common ground on how these relations can be effectively sustained beyond the China question.
- South Korea and India, as ambitious middle powers, can offer to many countries in the region an attractive choice and alternative against authoritarian powers.
- South Korea faces a great dilemma with respect to the Sino-American power competition. On the one hand, Seoul is being pressured by the US to take a more proactive stance against China, for example on the Taiwan issue. On the other hand, China is putting pressure on South Korea by threatening Seoul's leadership with dire military and economic repercussions if it were to cooperate with the US on matters such as Taiwan's sovereignty.
- Free international shipping lanes within the Indo-Pacific region are vital for the trade and energy security of the entire world, and therefore a rules-based order is essential for the development and growth of the world at large.
- South Korea does not seem to intend to become a formal and official member of QUAD at the moment, however, this does not imply that the South Korean government rules out partial cooperation with QUAD members in the areas of development of cross cutting technologies and strengthening of regional supply chains.
- Indo-Korean security, defence and economic relations have been strengthened by the substantive convergences between India's "Act East Policy" and South Korea's "New Southern Policy" and provide a good starting point for increased cooperation between the two nations.
- A major point of criticism concerning South Korea's "New Southern Policy" is that the peace pillar is insufficiently buttressed. In this context, Korea's strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region could be significantly improved through an enhanced and intensified strategic relationship with India.
- The future of Indo-Korean relations will mainly rest on three key developments: the scale of the Sino-American rivalry, the North Korea question and the outcome of the South Korean presidential election in March of this year.
- The cutting-edge technology sector will represent the most decisive and unusual shift in geopolitics in the decades ahead and already today constitutes the focal point of the strategy of individual nations and multilateral groupings within the Indo-Pacific region.
- The QUAD's primary objective appears to be not so much to ensure that its member states dominate critical technologies, but rather to prevent China from doing so.
- South Korea is crucial for many cutting-edge technologies and is far ahead of India as a technology power, but will face manpower woes due to its extremely modest population growth.
- As countries such as the US, Japan and India increasingly erect barriers and impose bans on Chinese technologies entering their respective markets, South Korean companies may in the near future encounter the same barriers simply because some

Korean companies are regarded to be working too closely with the Chinese government.

- Both China and the US are at the moment crucial to South Korea's national interests, with the Korean-American alliance forming the cornerstone that maintains a stable security situation on the Korean peninsula and China being South Korea's most important trading partner.
- South Korea's participation alongside India in soft power alliances such as an extended network around the QUAD or a potential Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is looking very much feasible and promising.
- Over the last two to three years, the security and defence elements in the Indo-Pacific strategy of various nations and soft power approaches have gradually begun to merge together.
- Structurally, India and South Korea complement each other very well in the economic sphere, whereas the core competencies of both countries are very different, thus offering great potential for mutual gain through economic cooperation.

V. WELCOME REMARKS

The welcoming remarks set the tone of the virtual dialogue by highlighting the multitude of recent processes and developments that have occurred within Indo-Korean relations. The speaker highlighted how several convergence points within India's "Act East Policy" and South Korea's "New Southern Policy" have significantly intensified economic and strategic ties between the two democracies. It was further pointed out that the current range of joint Indo-Korean interests, ranging from nuclear disarmament; maritime security; regional economic cooperation; counter-terrorism to energy cooperation, have led to a strengthening of bilateral ties. With regard to the Indo-Pacific region, it has been noted that such enhanced cooperation has been made possible primarily by various shared objectives of India and South Korea, both of which are heavily dependent on maritime trade for their economic prosperity and therefore also share a common desire to ensure that every nation in the region enjoys the right to freedom of navigation and unhindered trade. Moreover, the orator expressed that the political elites of both countries share a common desire to maintain order in the Indo-Pacific region as open, rules-based and free from the undue influence of any single country.

Despite these positive developments, the speaker noted that challenges remain within Indo-Korean relations, particularly with regard to the sharply divergent political and strategic approaches that the two countries have adopted to meet the challenges of the rules-based order in the region. While South Korea has held on to its strategic ambiguity and neutrality, India has opted for a much blunter and, as seen in the recent past, at times even openly hostile approach to countering Chinese provocations and territorial incursions. It was also stated, that confidence in mutual partnership has not yet been fully established. One point of concern for South Korea's political leadership are India's relations with North Korea, the speaker stated.

According to the Indian political leadership, South Korea's close economic ties with China and its political elites, as well as Seoul's rather hesitant attitude to openly address China's violation of the rules-based order, hinder an even closer alliance between the two nations, especially in the field of security. Furthermore, the welcome remarks expressed the perception that in view of the increasingly blurred boundaries between economic and security issues - considering, for example, the Sino-American competition for power - doubts about the success of a strengthened Indo-Korean relationship that focuses only on the two pillars of prosperity and people and disregards the peace pillar seem quite justified.

“Building good relations between states is ultimately about two things. First, finding out what we have in common. Second, to respect the differences.”

However, it was also emphasised that despite such differing perceptions, both India and South Korea can greatly benefit from a deepening of their mutual relations. South Korea, for example, appears to be keen to reduce its economic vulnerabilities vis-à-vis China, whose weaponisation Seoul experienced first-hand in 2017 when the CCP launched a campaign of economic coercion in retaliation for Seoul's decision to allow the deployment of a US missile defence system on South Korean territory. Given that one of Seoul's main goals is to diversify its economic and strategic partnerships in the region, it seems naturally drawn to India because of its huge national market and shared interest in an open and free Indo-Pacific.

The opening address also noted that in recent years India has expressed a desire to work on an Indo-Pacific strategy based on inclusion, with South Korea's “New Southern Policy” providing an important avenue that does not limit India's involvement in a geopolitical arrangement and instead focuses on issues that are central to India's progress, such as scientific and technological research under the fourth industrial revolution, improving India's defence industry, as well as cultural and trade policies.

The speaker concluded his welcome address by asserting that building good relations between states is ultimately about two things. “First, finding out what we have in common. Second, to respect the differences.” He said that if Indo-Korean, Indo-German and German-Korean relations evolve in this direction, future generations will undoubtedly see a free, prosperous and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

VI. Session 1: Strategies of South Korea and India Towards the Indo-Pacific

The first session showcased the insights and opinions of four panellists, among them two South Korean and two Indian subject matter experts. The topics of discussion ranged from the perspectives of South Korea and India with regard to their national and broader Indo-Pacific strategy to the emerging challenges faced across the region and ongoing trends and processes of cooperation, greater convergence and multilateralism across the Indo-Pacific.

VI. A. FIRST SPEAKERS' INTERVENTION

The first Korean speaker began his presentation by pointing out that South Korea is neither a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) nor AUKUS or for that matter any other strategic grouping, and is thus not institutionally integrated into an Indo-Pacific strategic framework. He attributed this fact back to a South Korean leadership that is apparently convinced that it can maximise its own country's strategic autonomy by eschewing any institutional ties in the region. However, he pointed out that in terms of issue-based groupings that do not have associated strategic connotations, such as the QUAD Working Groups, South Korea is indeed actively engaged for instance in cooperative efforts in combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, it was underlined that South Korea does, however, maintain bilateral partnerships, particularly with its military ally, the United States, in terms of cooperation based on Indo-Pacific security issues. In this regard, South Korea appears to be increasing its engagement in bilateral military exercises with the US in the region, as evidenced, for example, by its first-time participation in the US-Australia-led "Talisman Sabre" exercise in 2021. The orator expressed his belief that such forms of bilateral military cooperation will continue to grow in the years to come.

“South Korea does not have the intention to bandwagon any particular countries vision or strategy within the Indo-Pacific but at the same time should also not exclude cooperating with any particular country from the region.”

Speaking about South Korea's "New Southern Policy", he argued that it is very much aligned with both the US and Australia's Indo-Pacific strategy. In this regard, the 2019 agreement between the political leadership of South Korea and the US government to further converge their respective Indo-Pacific strategies can be seen as the cornerstone of such enhanced cooperation, with both countries selecting seven areas of joint collaboration, including, for instance, the areas of defense and cybersecurity. According to the orator, the primary significance of such strategic convergence lies in the fact that both governments have hereby given their primary focus to the key region of Southeast Asia. On the other hand, Australian-Korean cooperation essentially covers the same areas as South Korea-US cooperation, with the minor distinction that it started more recently, in 2021. Looking at the bigger picture, he stressed that South Korea does not intend and should not bandwagon on the vision or strategy of any single country in the region, but at the same time should also not rule out cooperating with any specific regional nation

With regard to challenges posed to the rules-based order, the speaker argued that South Korea represents one of the greatest beneficiaries of the rules-based order in Asia, as it has made extraordinary economic progress since the end of World War II thanks to it. Therefore, he appealed for South Korea's duty to preserve, maintain and strengthen the existing rules-based order. Nonetheless, he emphasised that the current rules-based order in the region was

established a long time ago in the context of the post-World War II era. As the geopolitical and geostrategic situation has changed significantly as of today, he called for more attention to the existing changes and the shifting balance of power in the region. He argued that these far-reaching changes make modifications to the existing rules-based order indispensable in order to properly mirror the voice and interests of the small and medium powers in the region.

Lastly, in view of the power struggle between the US and China, he reasoned, that Seoul would have to continue to maintain a positive relationship with both powers in economic, security and geostrategic terms, as collaboration with both constitutes "the best option for South Korea". He predicted that this stance taken by the South Korean government would not be changing in the foreseeable future.

VI. B. SECOND SPEAKERS' INTERVENTION

The second speaker of the session, an Indian expert, began her remarks by outlining India's vision and strategy for the Indo-Pacific region. She argued that under the leadership of Indian Prime Minister Modi, a clear vision of India for the Indo-Pacific has been laid out, envisaging an open, inclusive and equitable region. She mentioned that such a vision constitutes a strategy aimed at developing the region as a whole while simultaneously attaining India's national strategic goals. Moreover, such a vision is arguably underlined by India's aspiration to play a leadership role in the region while simultaneously creating the prerequisites for achieving it. The Indian vision for the Indo-Pacific region thus represents a natural progression of India's "Act East Policy", which affirms the centrality of ASEAN member states to the realisation of a free, rules-based and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, while at the same time devoting special attention to the needs of India's immediate neighbourhood.

Commenting on the role of China's increasing assertiveness in India's process of developing such an Indo-Pacific vision, she remarked that such overall negative developments indeed had played an integral part, pointing out that 2020 marked a turning point in Indo-Chinese relations, which significantly influenced India's strategic choices. On the role of China's increasing assertiveness in India's process of developing such an Indo-Pacific vision, she said it has played an important role, pointing out that 2020 marks a major turning point in India-China relations, which significantly influences India's strategic choices. Such recent events, she opined, result in India's vision of the Indo-Pacific today being essentially defined by three cornerstones, being: Preparedness, partnerships and the promotion of a network region.

“The idea that rising authoritarianism has brought everyone to the table, but how can we sustain these relationships beyond the China question?”

In this context, the Chinese threats on India's land borders and in the Indian Ocean region seem to have led Delhi not only to strengthen its internal defence capacities and

preparedness, but above all to increase its own foreign policy engagement. In the process, India had also taken calculated choices, such as deepening cooperation with the partners of the QUAD and relations with countries like France, Britain, Singapore and South Korea.

In terms of trends in Indian security and defence cooperation in the region, she noted that New Delhi is increasingly initiating joint military exercises, strategic dialogues and capacity-building efforts aimed at further institutionalising cooperative networks. In addition, she remarked, a growing number of high-level plurilateral diplomatic consultations having helped shape India's Indo-Pacific strategy. In light of this trend, she stated that India has begun to leverage its bilateral relations to strengthen Delhi-led multilateral platforms such as the "International Solar Alliance." Under the framework of such multilateral platforms, India has started working with like-minded nations in the Indo-Pacific region to ensure that economic and security cooperation benefits the largest possible number of partners in the region.

Another trend she wanted to draw the attention of the Virtual Dialogue participants towards was the recent increase in criss-crossing networks within the region, leading to a process of institutionalisation in the form of a series of mini-laterals. In her words, India is thereby pursuing the goal of organic forms of institutionalisation, where issue-based coalitions are formed organically around joint issues of mutual interest. As an example, she cited the "Supply Chain Resilience Initiative" (SCRI), launched by Japan, India and Australia, which aims to revitalise global supply chains. India, she said, has therefore come to realise that its Indo-Pacific strategy will only succeed if all like-minded partner countries in the region build on each other's strengths. Yet problems of cooperation remain, as she herself aptly stated: "The idea that rising authoritarianism has brought everyone to the table, but how can we sustain these relationships beyond the China question?"

Speaking about the possibilities of enhanced cooperation between India and South Korea in the wider region, she asserted that thematic coalitions in the areas of free trade, trade; supply chain diversification; infrastructure and defence development; and digital technology, in particular, were all areas of national interest for both countries and well worth pursuing with greater vigour. Thereby, she mentioned first accomplishments achieved, among others, by the joint commitment of Delhi and Seoul to strengthen cooperation in the area of defence and industrial technology, being a sector that has gained a lot of momentum in the last few years.

Finally, she discussed the QUAD, whose member states, according to the orator, have recognised that there are many important stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region and no one wishes to act in isolation. Thus, the desire to work with other partners in fluid formats is quite clearly expressed by the political leadership of all four member states. Therefore, she argued, it is not necessary for the QUAD to actively seek an expansion of its members, as there are various other formats in which regional partners could work together. She added that military exercises that South Korea conducts with the US could also be conducted in a similar form with India, for example, as part of the Malabar exercise, which have the potential to deepen Korean and Indian security cooperation.

VI. C. THIRD SPEAKERS' INTERVENTION

The third speaker's intervention focused on the Indo-Pacific Strategy report published in February 2022 by the White House and South Korea's strategic dilemma vis-à-vis China and the US. He began by referring to the White House Indo-Pacific Report and summarised that the report strongly recommends strengthening relations between partner countries with the aim of balancing China's influence in the region. Central to this goal and highlighted in the report is the need to improve relations between South Korea and Japan, as the present state of affairs poses a major obstacle to the efforts of democratic nations in the region towards establishing a common position vis-à-vis China and thus in keeping the "Red Dragon" in check.

“South Korea faces a great dilemma. On the one hand, Seoul is being pressured by the US to take a more pro-active stance against China, for example on the Taiwan issue. On the other hand, China is putting pressure on South Korea by threatening Seoul's leadership with dire military and economic repercussions if it were to cooperate with the US on matters such as Taiwan's sovereignty.”

The South Korean expert also mentioned that the Biden administration unveiled five strategic goals and ten action plans through the report, among them the expansion of cooperation between South Korea, the US and Japan and the launch of a new “Indo-Pacific Economic Framework” (IPEF) partnership. Regarding the South China Sea and East China Sea, the report emphasised a rules-based approach and also reaffirmed security assistance to Taiwan to prevent military contingencies occurring in the Taiwan Strait. Interestingly, the Indo-Pacific Strategy paper placed Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand into five regional alliances with which the US seeks to cooperate and resolve pressing issues in the Indo-Pacific region.

Concludingly, he addressed what he termed South Korea's "great dilemma" concerning the Sino-American power struggle. The dilemma is posed since, on the one hand, Seoul is being pressured by the US to take a more pro-active stance against China, for example on the Taiwan issue. On the other hand, China is putting pressure on South Korea by threatening Seoul's leadership with dire military and economic repercussions if it were to cooperate with the US on matters such as Taiwan's sovereignty. In his opinion, intervening in the Taiwan issue is not a wise decision from South Korea's point of view, as South Korea's political leadership would remain trapped between the question of involvement in a potential war in Taiwan and the eventuality of a military assault by North Korea.

VI. D. FOURTH SPEAKERS' INTERVENTION

The fourth speaker of the first session chose to direct his remarks towards the Indian Ocean region and India's strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific region from a maritime angle. He began by underlining the importance of free international shipping lanes in the Indo-Pacific, which are crucial for the trade and energy security of the world at large, while relying decisively on the maintenance of a rules-based order in the region.

The Indian expert also reiterated that India is pursuing its maritime Indo-Pacific strategy not as a club of limited members or a grouping that seeks to dominate, but as one that promotes collective action for peace and security in the region. To buttress his case, he referred to various maritime policy frameworks and strategies initiated by India in the region, the most important of which being the "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR) policy. He argued that "SAGAR" represents India's vision for the Indian Ocean region, which comprises a four-part framework focusing on defence of India's maritime territory, deepening economic and security cooperation with maritime neighbours and island states, promoting collective action for peace and security, and strengthening cooperation for future sustainable development.

“India does not pursue its Indo-Pacific strategy as a club of limited members or as a grouping seeking supremacy”

Listing several other multilateral, minilateral and trilateral bodies in which India actively participates within the maritime space, he argued that these bodies are open to the participation of like-minded democratic countries such as South Korea. In this context, he expressed optimism about the potential of a future multilateral initiative in the maritime space between India, Japan, the US and South Korea.

Finally, he mentioned India's role as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean region, with the Indian Navy serving as the key vessel for guaranteeing the same. In this context, he informed the participants about the Indian Navy's deployment along all major trade lanes in the Indian Ocean region and its activities, which include inter alia capacity building as well as humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

VI. E. FIRST SESSION Q&A

The first panel concluded with a roundtable discussion in which the moderator posed two questions to the panellists. In the following, the two questions shall be substantiated and the answers of the panellists briefly summarised.

- ***First Question: There was a point in time when it was said that ASEAN lies in the heart of Asia-Pacific Multilateralism. Do you think that ASEAN is going through a heart-attack right now?***

In their response to the question, the panellists argued that ASEAN member states are particularly concerned about the power struggle between the US and China, which constitutes a rather worrying development for Southeast Asian nations.

Furthermore, the case was made that the centrality of ASEAN-led multilateral institutions has been greatly weakened in recent years. A panellist opined that in the late 2000s and early 2010s, when the United States and China did not yet have their own strategic framework for the region, both nations invested heavily in ASEAN-led institutions. Since China created its own strategic framework with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the US also developed its own strategic framework for the region, these investments have declined dramatically.

“The Biden government's latest strategic report on the Indo-Pacific region repeatedly stresses the central role of ASEAN, but these are just words, China says the same, but these too are just words which are followed by no action at all.”

Moreover, the view was expressed that despite the White House's most recent “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report” emphasising ASEAN's central role in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as various comparable statements coming from Beijing, these remain mere words that are not followed by any concrete deeds. In such an overall climate, the biggest concern of South-East Asian states is that the multilateral organisations led by ASEAN member states continue to grow ever more feeble.

In conclusion, it was stated that if South Korea wants to effectively build a closer partnership with Southeast Asian countries through its "New Southern Policy", it would be crucial for its leadership to take concrete measures to strengthen ASEAN-led multilateral organisations.

- ***Second Question: To what extent is Seoul willing to incorporate mechanisms that are QUAD-led, and in what areas do you see potential for cooperation?***

Hereby, the panellist expressed that South Korea has no intention of becoming an official member of QUAD and it is unlikely that things will change in the near future. However, it was also clarified that this does not mean that the South Korean government rules out issue-based collaborations with QUAD member states, for example in the field of disruptive technologies and with regard to strengthening regional supply chains - being all areas in which Seoul exhibits great enthusiasm for cooperation.

“Regardless of being a QUAD member or not, South Korea will be doing its part to strengthen a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.”

Moreover, it was said that whether or not Seoul is a QUAD member, it can still play its due role in strengthening the rules-based order in the region within the Indo-Pacific framework and is in fact keenly receptive thereto, as Seoul's active cooperation with Washington and Canberra in recent years attests.

VII. Session 2: Mutual Perceptions of Policy and Strategy Towards Relations With Each Other and the Indo-Pacific

The second session of the event focused on analysing potential synergies between India and South Korea to gain a clearer and in-depth assessment regarding the trajectory of Indo-Korean relations. The session contained a plethora of striking topics, ranging from the impact of high-end technologies in the region, to the role of South Korea vis-à-vis the Sino-American power struggle, to the challenges faced by the rules-based order in the region. It once again involved the contributions of two South Korean and two Indian domain experts.

VII. A. FIRST SPEAKERS' INTERVENTION

The first Korean expert centred her speech upon the analysis of the bilateral relations between South Korea and India and addressed three important factors which, in her opinion, are bound to determine the future development of the relationship.

She initially pointed out the various advances, policy convergences and strides made in Indo-Korean relations in recent years. Thereby, she alluded to the India-led issue-based initiatives that have enabled South Korea to choose from a wider range of strategic options within the region. According to her, the security, defence and economic relations between the two nations have also been significantly strengthened by the issue-based convergences of India's "Act East Policy" and South Korea's "New Southern Policy". She remarked that these policies provide an excellent starting point for further cooperative measures. Speaking about the existing cooperative agreements, the speaker mentioned that Seoul and New Delhi are already cooperating through the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which was stipulated back in 2009. In this context, she also mentioned that bilateral relations were upgraded to the status of "special strategic partnership" in 2015, with annual high-level political meetings between the two countries having become the norm.

Despite all of this progress, however, she noted that given the high potential and expectations that both parties have placed in their cooperation, the aforementioned achievements are "not satisfactory". In this context, she reiterated that South Korea's overall strategic engagement

with India and the Indo-Pacific region remains inadequate, thus weakening South Korea's own "New Southern Policy" peace pillar aspirations.

Commenting on the future of India-Korea relations, she identified three key factors that she expects to shape Indo-Korea bilateral relations in the years to come. These factors are as follows: the growing rivalry between China and the USA; the military question of North Korea and the presidential elections in South Korea, which will be held in March 2022.

“Considering the great potential and high expectations that both South Korea and India place in their mutual cooperative efforts, current and so far achieved results are not yet satisfactory.”

With regard to the Sino-American power struggle, she argued that an intensification of the rivalry would significantly complicate the security environment in the region for both India and South Korea. The more aggressive the rivalry became, she said, the more difficult it would be for South Korea to pursue its own "New Southern Policy". She added, however, that an intensification of the power struggle between the two superpowers could also act as a catalyst for the middle powers in the region to seek more active cooperation in the areas of digital trade or through the creation of new supply chain networks. In this context, she made the case that the agendas of South Korea and India are very much aligned, and therefore promising avenues for enhanced cooperation between the two countries could be emerging.

On the second key factor, she elaborated that South Korea's political and strategic outreach in the Indo-Pacific region is affected by the perennial concern of North Korea and its armament ventures. She added that given India's good relations with North Korea, India could act as a mediator in the peace initiatives between South and North Korea and play a valuable role in persuading North Korea to give up its nuclearisation programmes.

Regarding the third factor, the speaker argued that the upcoming South Korean presidential election will be fateful for the direction of the "New Southern Policy", as the two most promising candidates hold strictly opposing views on security and national defence matters. While the ruling democratic parties candidate is likely to continue the security policy of the current South Korean President Moon Jae-in of engaging Pyongyang, courting China and staying close to Washington, the conservative party candidate takes the position of being tough on both Beijing and Pyongyang and staunchly pro-Washington.

VII. B. SECOND SPEAKERS' INTERVENTION

In his address, the Indian expert discussed cutting-edge technology related issues and the role they play in shaping the strategies of individual nations and groupings across the Indo-Pacific region. He pointed out at the very outset that the field of critical technologies will produce the most decisive geopolitical shifts across the world in the coming years. Moreover, he argued that such cutting-edge technology issues are now embedded in India's Indo-Pacific policy and

strategy, but more importantly, they also play a decisive role in the region's multilateral groupings such as the QUAD.

He went on to say that the future of 21st century power lies in the domination of certain key critical technologies, which represents a strategy that is quite visibly being pursued by Beijing. He added that QUAD members' reaction to such proceedings lay not so much in trying to dominate these critical technologies, but rather in ensuring that China fails to do so. Furthermore, the speaker argued that QUAD is primarily about technological cooperation activities, because if one looks at the joint statements of its working groups, they are nearly all technology-related and only marginally address other subjects. Such critical technologies include, for example, artificial intelligence, green technologies and quantum computing.

He posited that one of the main reasons QUAD is not a military alliance is that its member states have recognised that making headway in the development of cross-cutting technologies requires building coalitions with other non-Quad members, some of whom do not seek to antagonise China by formally joining the QUAD. The speaker then identified South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and Singapore as crucial partners for the success of developing such vital technology capacities within the QUAD. He argued that these countries needed to be “brought on board” and would be very reluctant to join if the QUAD presented itself as a military organisation.

“But because these Korean companies happen to work with or sell to the Chinese, they will be told, “We're sorry, but the ban applies to you too.”

The speaker also emphasised that various multilateral international groupings have emerged in recent years, all of which have put critical technologies at the core of their respective agendas. In this context, he gave the example of AUKUS, which is mainly portrayed as a submarine agreement in the broader media. However, he mentioned that when Indian officials talk about AUKUS, they take into account the fact that it is about cyber security, artificial intelligence and quantum computing and thus a whole range of critical technologies, of which the submarine agreement is basically only one small component. Moreover, he added that India has launched what has been coined as the “Western QUAD”, being an economic forum in which Israel, the US and the UAE are represented, and that too deals primarily with critical technologies.

With regard to South Korea, he stated that the country plays a key role in the advancement of many of these cutting-edge technologies, as it is far ahead of India in terms of being a technological hub. In this context, he went on to say that South Korea will, however, soon face some labour shortages due to its very low population growth.

Lastly, he spoke about the recent trends of increasing protectionism in countries like India, the US and Japan when it comes to the diffusion of Chinese technology products in their respective national markets. The speaker said that India, for example, has deliberately sidelined all Chinese components and contracts in building its domestic 5G networks, whereas Chinese technology components were very widely used in its domestic 4G network building efforts just a few years ago. He added that even in the digital domain, India's ban imposed on

around 150 Chinese apps should be seen as a move to halt any form of support for China's increasing technological footprint.

On the consequences of such trends for South Korea, he argued that South Korean companies will eventually face problems as they will encounter such barriers designed to prevent Chinese technologies from entering the Indian, Japanese and US markets, given that these companies often work very closely with Chinese companies and/or the Chinese government. Hence, he warned that such a reality should not be disregarded in the strategic calculations of the South Korean leadership.

VII. C. THIRD SPEAKERS' INTERVENTION

The Korean expert mainly discussed South Korea's strategic options in the region and the possibilities of cooperation with India as well as with multilateral groupings such as the QUAD.

He began his intervention by stating that South Korea should maintain its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the US and China, as South Korea strongly depends on both countries in order to achieve its own national interests. He said that this is the case since the alliance between Korea and the US on the one hand represents the cornerstone for maintaining security stability on the Korean peninsula, and on the other hand Beijing constitutes Seoul's most significant trading partner.

“South Korea must maintain its strategic autonomy from both the USA and China, as it sorely needs both countries to achieve its own national interests.”

He advised South Korea to refrain from participating in any form of military exercises led by QUAD member countries, as these would anger China and have a negative impact on South Korea's national interests. Instead, he saw the potential for cooperation with democratic actors in the region through joint non-military stability and peace operations, which according to him could also positively influence South Korea's regional clout.

He added that South Korea is certainly willing to cooperate with QUAD member states and other regional players in the field of economic cooperation as well, so that further involvement of South Korea in the QUAD Working Groups or the emerging Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is highly feasible. He mentioned that South Korea could make valuable contributions to the QUAD Working Groups, especially in the areas of green economy, infrastructure and cutting-edge technologies. With regard to the IPEF, he argued that South Korea could make a significant contribution to topics such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, digital trade and 5G technologies within its framework. In all these areas, he also identified huge untapped cooperation potential in bilateral efforts with India.

VII. D. FOURTH SPEAKERS' INTERVENTION

The last speaker of the session analysed recent strategic developments in the region and commented on the current state of Indo-Korean relations.

He explained that there are two ways to approach Indo-Pacific strategies. The first, he noted, is through the lenses of the QUAD, which essentially concentrates on security and defence elements in its strategic framework. The second approach is one that is characterised by its focus on soft power and is reflected, for example, in India's "Act East Policy" through which New Delhi has sought to place developmental issues at the centre of its strategic approach. He remarked that these two approaches have been gradually converging over the last two years. To support his argument, he cited the example of the QUAD Summit in September 2021, which highlighted soft power issues such as climate change, disaster management and health, thus moving the conversation away from its erstwhile purely security and military focus. This process, he argued, has meant that the differences between the QUAD and the QUAD+ are far more limited than they were just a few years ago.

“Seoul and New Delhi should diversify their relations and focus on potential areas of cooperation rather than on diverging strategic outlooks.”

Turning to Indo-Korean relations, he suggested that South Korea and India should focus on potential areas of cooperation and diversify their relations rather than dwelling on their different strategic perspectives in the Indo-Pacific region. The speaker argued that India and South Korea are structurally quite complementary to each other in the economic sphere, with the core competencies of the two countries differing greatly, thereby holding great potential for mutual gain based on cooperation. He also pointed out that there already exists a lively exchange between Indian and Korean scholars in the field of interpersonal ties, which, according to him, ought to be further intensified.

Nevertheless, he added that the special strategic partnership between India and South Korea still lacks sufficient mutual trust as, for example, talks to revive CEPA had begun back in 2015 during Prime Minister Modi's visit to South Korea, but have not been revived to date. Finally, he suggested that both India and South Korea should bring new issues to the table to improve their respective cooperation in the region instead of focusing only on the Sino-American power struggle.

VII. E. SECOND SESSIONS Q&A

The second panel ended in the same way as the first, with a discussion round, albeit with the difference that the moderator did not ask any specific questions, but invited the participants of the virtual dialogue to make additional comments on the subjects discussed so far. A brief summary of the panellists' contributions can be found in the following.

One of the discussants started the conversation by reiterating that South Korea values a rules-based international order and is strongly committed to stability and peace in the region, although this does not mean that South Korea welcomes measures that have the sole objective of containing China, as this would conflict with South Korea's national interests. In this context, it was added that Seoul and New Delhi should focus their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region on elements of competition and cooperation rather than confrontation.

“If you ask me, are you concerned about China's state of affairs in terms of democratic values and human rights? Yes, I am. And if you ask me, do you have a problem with measures of Chinese economic coercion? Yes, I do. And if you ask me, do you want to live under a Chinese order? No, I do not want to live under such an order. But what we need to do is not only to isolate China, but to set, tighten and consolidate a rules-based order in the region, that is the real solution.”

It was also said that South Korea should indeed be concerned about China's policies from the point of view of democratic values, human rights and economic coercion. However, it was argued that the aim should not be to simply isolate China, but rather to set, strengthen and consolidate the rules-based order in the region, which would be representing a genuine solution to the challenges of the rules-based order in the region.

Furthermore, it was added that South Korea of course maintains good relations with China, especially in terms of solving the “North Korea problem” as well as addressing other maritime and land-based issues. Such issues were said could not be resolved through confrontation but only through negotiation between Seoul and Beijing.

Lastly, it was voiced that many misunderstand the relations between Korea and China in terms of technological cooperation. It is true that South Korea invests heavily in China, but its economic interests are more conventional and when it comes to critical technologies, South Korea is actually in competition with China and not dependent on Beijing.