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The New Biden Administration and the Possibility of QUAD as a Military Alliance

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English Abstract

In 2020, the Trump administration has endeavored to develop the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, into a military alliance like the NATO in the Indo-Pacific area. Such was possible as the relationship between Australia and China soured due to the dispute over the origin of COVID-19 and as the relationship between India and China sharply cooled off since the India-China clash in the northwestern border area (Ladakh).

Although the meeting held in Tokyo, Japan, on October 6, 2020, among four foreign ministers of the four countries ended without a joint statement, the four countries of QUAD set a goal to create “a free and open Indo-Pacific” based on the rule of law, agreed to engage in economic recovery, jointly respond to various challenges upon eradicating the COVID-19, and decided to regularize QUAD.

In particular, the U.S., its allies and other partner countries briskly continued joint military exercises. The Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC, August 17-31), Pacific Vanguard (September 11-13) among the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Australia, and the unprecedented Malabar exercises among QUAD in the Bay of Bengal (November 3-6) and in the Arabian Sea (November 17-20) were conducted. Joint military exercises among the QUAD show that the QUAD turned into a lax form of a military alliance. Simply, the declaration of the alliance is on its way.

Except for the ways of implementation, the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy and the upcoming Biden administration's Asia-Pacific policy (Asia Pivot 2.0) are likely to be very similar. The two administrations similarly aim to maintain democracy, strengthen alliances, and hold China in check.

In conclusion, Japan, Australia, and India, which consider China's military buildup and the Belt and Road Initiative as threats, will support the Biden administration's anti-China policy, and actively participate in the QUAD. If the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, continue to look unfavorably upon China and join forces, the birth of QUAD PLUS may be possible. The QUAD (PLUS) alliance may develop sooner if China further takes the offensive. South Korea is not currently viewing China as Japan, India, and Australia are. However, it must consider participating in the QUAD PLUS at least in a form of strengthening already existing security cooperations such as joint military exercises. ❖

※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.

※ This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.