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## QUAD PLUS FORM VERSUS SUBSTANCE

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## INTRODUCTION

### 3 Quad Plus

#### **Form versus Substance**

Jagannath Panda

## BEIJING, QUAD, AND THE QUAD PLUS

### 14 “Sea Foam in the Ocean” or an “Asian NATO”?

#### **Chinese Views of the Quad**

Jeffrey Becker

### 28 US–China Strategic Competition and Washington’s Conception of Quad Plus

Akriti Vasudeva

### 44 India and the Quad Plus

#### **Between Pointed-Alignment and Conjectural Alliance**

Jagannath P. Panda

### 73 Japan and the Quad Plus

#### **A Japanese View for the Development and Expansion of the Quad in the Age of War on the Novel Coronavirus**

Hideshi Tokuchi

### 87 A Quad Plus?

#### **The Prospects for Australia and New Zealand**

Miguel A. Hajar-Chiapa

## THE PLUS PERSPECTIVES

### 106 Whose Centrality?

#### **ASEAN and the Quad in the Indo-Pacific**

Evan A. Laksmana

### 118 Britain and the Quadrilateral

John Hemmings and James Rogers

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

Kuyoun Chung

## **146 Israel and Quad Plus**

**A Pivot to Asia and through the Indian Ocean**  
Giuseppe Dentice

## **165 France's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Quad Plus**

Celine Pajon

## **179 Quad-Plus?**

**Carving out Canada's Middle Power Role**  
Stephen R. Nagy

## **196 Brazil in the Quad Plus**

**Incongruous or Extended Drawbridge of the Indo-Pacific?**  
Dattesh Parulekar

## **A VIEW FROM THE OTHERS**

## **210 Russia and Quad Plus**

**Is There a Way Forward?**  
Anna Kireeva and Alexei Kupriyanov

## **229 Indian Ocean Island States and the Quad Plus**

Nilanthi Samaranayake

## **240 Connectivity and the Quad Powers:**

**Revisiting History and Thought**  
Lavanya Vemsani

## **257 Realistic Expectations**

**The China Factor in the Australia-US Perspective on the Indo-Pacific**  
Amit Gupta

## **269 The Middle East and the Quad Plus**

Brendon Cannon

## **285 Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran Triangularity and the Quad Plus**

**Countering China's Growing Influence**  
Kenta Aoki

# Quad Plus

## Form versus Substance

DR. JAGANNATH PANDA  
GUEST EDITOR

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (hereon, Quad 2.0) has become increasingly institutionalized and a normalized part of diplomacy for the four member countries—Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. After a 10-year gap from when the mechanism was first introduced in 2007, Quad 2.0 resumed in 2017 with biannual meetings between the four major Indo-Pacific democratic powers. At present, the Quad process has secured official traction among these states and is considered a vital part of their Indo-Pacific strategies.

By comparison, the concept of “Quad Plus” is currently an abstract one, seen as an extended version of the Quad framework—whether it will materialize into a more concrete grouping remains unknown. The idea of Quad Plus refers to a minilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific that expands the core Quad 2.0 to include other crucial emerging economies. At the same time, the framework offers a multipolar lens through which observers can view, analyze, and assess the strategic multilateral growth of the nations involved.

### The Arrival of Quad Plus

The Quad Plus idea is rather new: it originated from a unique Quad 2.0 meeting initiated by outgoing US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun on 20 March 2020 at the foreign secretary level. The consultation—instituted as a weekly meeting—was meant to enable an exchange of assessments of members’ COVID-19 pandemic situations and synergize participant nations’ responses to contain the virus’ spread.<sup>1</sup> The forum continued with discussions surrounding issues like vaccine development studies; strategies for alleviating the pandemic’s devastating impact on the global, national and domestic economies; navigating the challenge of citizens stranded in foreign nations; and coordinating assistance packages to smaller states in the region. It significantly extended the Quad 2.0 forum to South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand, raising critical questions about whether such a broadened platform could be sustained and whether it could feasibly translate into a mechanism for security cooperation. Yet, despite the many questions surrounding the viability, and indeed the existence, of a Quad Plus framework, a foreign ministers–level meeting in May 2020 with the addition of South Korea, Brazil and Israel imbibed it with a global characteristic.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, on a nongovernmental or think-tank level involving the strategic communities, the Heritage Foundation in the United States has been organizing Track 1.5 roundtable consultations under a Quad Plus label since 2013, which have involved Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan, France, and Sri Lanka on a rotating basis.<sup>3</sup> Hence, a thematic idea of a Quad Plus structure has been around for a long time, which is now being witnessed in its practical implementation, usage, and value on an international platform.

Although merely a virtual assembly of agreeable nations that engage and meet to address or counter a shared challenge at present, the Quad Plus format holds much promise amid all the current uncertainty. It represents, potentially, the amalgamation of the Eastern and Western “like-minded” countries. Even in its current status, it includes a wide array of states—developing and developed economies and middle and major powers. This indicates that the grouping could possibly be regarded as an amalgamation of countries committed to maintaining a rules-based, liberal institutional order. Whether the Quad Plus will be based simply on democratic values or international rules and norms remains to be seen. However, rather than being a reflection of a broader democratic coalition, which is very much abstract at present, a Quad Plus framework is likely to be based more on a shared commitment to the existing international order rather than “democratic values” that are harder to define and more exclusive in nature. Instead, what states must envision is a broad, all-embracing, and comprehensive framework that can stand as a pillar for regional security and stability, multilateralism, and defense of global institutionalism and the status quo.

In this context, perhaps the most salient feature of a Quad Plus mechanism is its plural, inclusive nature. While the conceptual Quad Plus is led and organized by the United States, the distribution of power within its framework allows participating countries to also deepen engagement with counterparts under the strategic ambit of the Quad 2.0 grouping.<sup>4</sup> By building on their own national interests, while being active participants to the fulfillment of national interest goals of other nations, the Quad Plus dialogue is poised to take up greater salience as a potential extension of the Quad 2.0 mechanism. The Quad Plus emerged with the aim to discuss an international response to the coronavirus pandemic by coordinating an efficient crisis response and humanitarian aid.<sup>5</sup> However, in a post-COVID period, the scope for cooperation and convergence among the Quad Plus nations has the potential to, and must, emerge as a geopolitical reality.

Indeed, even in the absence of a shared, urgent challenge that the pandemic presents, the increasingly multipolar vis-à-vis multiplex regional order implies that there are plenty of foreign policy choices and challenges for rising powers, including the Quad 2.0 and Plus nations. The arrival of new institutions; emergence

and re-institutionalization of trilateral, minilateral, and multilateral groupings; as well as growing bilateral synergy among like-minded nations are key contours of this regional order.<sup>6</sup> These contours are increasingly shaping and conditioning the strategic choices and challenges of Indo-Pacific nations. China, as a regional and a global power, figures greatly in the multipolar choices that actors like India, Japan, South Korea, and others are making in Asia and beyond.

### **Furthering the Quad Plus Process**

It is important to note the larger implications that the emergence of a Quad Plus dialogue can have for regional security in the post-pandemic period that, by all signs, will be marked by notable differences. For instance, the Quad Plus could potentially play a central role in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The economies of the IOR are demonstrating growth at a remarkable pace as the region, along with the Indo-Pacific as a whole, is becoming one of the most crucial geopolitical and economic areas of the world. Concurrently, a rise in security concerns related to vital sea routes and lines of communication, aggressive maritime militarization, and the scramble for natural resources have threatened the transformation of the IOR.<sup>7</sup> In this context, the “Blue Economy” has emerged as an arena for nations to reframe their approach in managing the oceans for a sustainable maritime environment. Here, Blue Economy refers to the sustainable use of precious ocean resources for “economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health.”<sup>8</sup> While the economic aspects of the Blue Economy are widely accepted, the political and security importance it holds as a geopolitical instrument have received less international focus. To this effect, the Quad 2.0 nations could create a viable and comprehensive strategy to reach the geopolitical, security, and economic potential of the Blue Economy. In fact, the Quad Plus mechanism would offer an ideal platform to further this paramount factor, with countries like Australia, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and India attributing increasing focus to their maritime economy.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, in light of the realistic national security threats prevalent in contemporary times, the Quad Plus would allow participating nations to create a strategic alignment that has otherwise proved difficult to materialize. The potential grouping could, therefore, reinforce the liberal international order in the Indo-Pacific and, by extension, the world. Due to its composition of like-minded states, the Quad Plus could indicate a growing, or at least temporary, embrace of a US-led order in the Indo-Pacific region while still not becoming part of a set “alliance framework.” An expansion of its scope, or a shift in its priorities from pandemic-induced disaster relief to China, remains an unlikely scenario for many of the potential partners in the forum.



Therefore, the emergence of the Quad Plus dialogue as China-centric is not a goal that most of the participating nations would like to openly espouse, with almost all participating nations having elaborate economic ties with Beijing even if they are wary of China's coercive, unilateral, and destabilizing actions.<sup>10</sup> Even though economic and trade ties with China are witnessing reduction in a post-COVID order, with nations aiming to create newer, more sustainable, and broader supply chains, the embedded nature of China in the world economy is unlikely to be upended, with globalization here to stay.<sup>11</sup> Under such circumstances, the Quad Plus will, at least for the foreseeable future, shy away from being a China-focused grouping owing to fraught tensions that are likely to hinder a convergence of national outlooks toward the major power. Nevertheless, a Quad Plus framework could be a multilateral pillar for securing international norms and laws and ensuring a secure and prosperous region. Today, despite a misalignment of approaches of individual states, their regional outlooks and metanarratives are becoming increasingly securitized. While a militarization of the Quad 2.0, let alone the Quad Plus, remains highly improbable, the fact that the Quad Plus dialogue will focus on securing and underpinning a rules-based order is highly probable.

In this context, it should be noted that the Indo-Pacific has emerged as the next global theater of power politics and competition. The rise of the region has multiple facets attached to it: it is geographically hard to define which results in greater disagreements among the countries; such politicization of its geography only further attests to its importance.<sup>12</sup> The region is crucial to the United States and China, with the US Department of Defense characterizing it as "the single most consequential region for America's future."<sup>13</sup> Despite a large number of potential flashpoints, it remains one of the most important economic and energy trade hubs of the present world order.<sup>14</sup> The Indo-Pacific incorporates the world's most populated state (China) and the most populated vote-based political system (India). Seven of the ten biggest standing armed forces on the planet can be found in the Indo-Pacific,<sup>15</sup> and around one-third of worldwide trade goes through the South China Sea alone.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, the Chinese leadership and strategic circles have persistently argued that the singular motivation behind US focus in the Indo-Pacific and Washington's Free and Open Indo-Pacific<sup>17</sup> strategy is to contain China's ascent to power.<sup>18</sup> To a limited (but certain) degree, the Indo-Pacific has become a point of convergence of the US-China competition in present times and will continue to be a theater for their contestation in the coming decade. The US-China rivalry is set to reshape key geopolitical, geo-economic, and geostrategic elements in the regional and global order. In many ways, this rivalry is set to unfold a new era

“cold war” dimension that will pressure smaller states in the region and beyond—such as the Quad 2.0 and Quad Plus nations—to choose between the security assurance offered by the United States and their economic dependence on China. Many Indo-Pacific states are already altering their foreign policy strategies to account for such emerging geopolitical uncertainties. Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific policy, India’s Act East Policy, South Korea’s New Southern Policy, and Australia’s Pacific Step-up policy have been ideated to encourage deeper and dedicated bilateral synergy among nations in an attempt to ensure security vis-à-vis an increasingly belligerent China and the United States. This bilateral synergy could eventually be carried forward within a Quad Plus framework that is more multilateral than US-centric.

In fact, bilateral synergy between the Quad 2.0 nations has been growing exponentially, leading to deeper quadrilateral synergy and the creation of the Quad Plus. Cited until now as the weakest bilateral link<sup>19</sup> in the Quad 2.0 framework, India–Australia ties have recently been upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, with both nations signing a mutual logistics support arrangement.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the fourth foundational pact between India and the United States—the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)—has been signed.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)<sup>22</sup> between India and Japan has been signed amid rising tensions with China for both nations and domestic changes in Japan, signaling a boost in strategic defense ties between New Delhi and Tokyo at a time of turmoil.<sup>23</sup> These agreements will set the stage for the future of security cooperation between India and the Quad; Japan already shares ACSAs with the United States and Australia, further strengthening the scope of cooperation.

### **Factoring the New Undercurrents**

In a major boost to trilateralism, India, Japan, and Australia have proposed to establish a Supply Chain Resilience Network (SCRI),<sup>24</sup> which can gain notable success by engaging economically with the Quad Plus nations of South Korea, New Zealand, Brazil, Israel, and Vietnam. The emergence of alternative global supply chains is a reality of the post-COVID-19 era. In the coming times, the global economies will perhaps be divided into two separate value chains: one that is China-centric, and one for the rest of the world. As this shift occurs, South and Southeast Asia, alongside other developing economies, will seek to benefit by integrating themselves in the new nexus. States like India and Vietnam will also seek to establish themselves as technological competitors or search for new technologies to offer a viable alternative for value-added advanced technology manufacturing. Here, the Quad Plus can prove to be a vital tool for the states to further

their economic and technological goals by providing an additional avenue for building bridges and opportunities for growth and development. The US–Japan–Australia-led Blue Dot Network,<sup>25</sup> aimed at improving infrastructure-related activities in the Indo-Pacific, has also emerged as an initiative with much potential. Meanwhile, the India–France–Australia trilateral ideated in 2019 aims at creating an inclusive Indo-Pacific by rebalancing China’s assertiveness in the region and is a further testament to growing focus being attributed to the Indo-Pacific by nations beyond the region.<sup>26</sup> The Australia–Japan–India trilateral, established in 2015, advances Westphalian ideals of democracy, sovereignty, and the rule of law while billing itself as an anti-China, yet not China-containment, model.

To consider the potential outcomes that a post-pandemic-era Quad Plus platform might take, it is also important to consider whether any such coalition could feasibly stand the test against China’s ire and potential retaliation. In recent times, Beijing has proved to be a coercive trade partner, willing to pressurize states to bend to China’s will by applying its considerable economic prowess. As one of the world’s largest economies, still growing steadily despite a brief downturn during the pandemic, China is a veritable global economic heavyweight. For many of the states in the region and beyond, Beijing is still their largest trading partner, meaning that these states are considerably dependent on China for their own economic growth. However, instead of being a responsible trade partner, Beijing has openly and frequently used its might to extend China’s influence and achieve its diplomatic goals through economic coercion over states and businesses.

In other words, Beijing has expanded its foreign policy tools to include realist notions of hard and soft power.<sup>27</sup> It has harshly punished countries that undermine its national interests and foreign policy goals through high tariffs, import bans, popular boycotts, and limiting tourism. For example, in response to South Korea agreeing to host the US’ Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) antimissile systems on its territory, Beijing unleashed an economic retaliation campaign that left the middle-power economy severely damaged. China not only targeted major companies like Hyundai and Lotte with boycotts but also stopped Chinese tourism to the country, banned K-pop and other cultural products, and held up licenses of Korean agencies in China. Although the cumulative impact of China’s retribution is difficult to calculate, South Korean companies are still feeling its impact.<sup>28</sup> More recently, in response to Australia’s calls for an independent investigation into the origins of COVID-19 and subsequent perceived anti-China statements, Beijing levied sanctions on imports from Australia—the world’s most China-reliant economy.<sup>29</sup> Yet, China is so deeply integrated into the global economy that, despite the push for alternative

supply chains, a complete decoupling is a highly unlikely scenario for most states.<sup>30</sup> Such circumstances will be critical in determining the outcome and the scope of a Quad Plus framework—and will very likely be the major reason that the potential mechanism is limited in its China approach.

As such, there are multiple outcomes that the COVID-era Quad Plus dialogue can reach. By performing exceedingly well, the group may just establish a place for itself as a continued exercise between the nations that have been invited until now or a rolling observer membership order with the Quad 2.0 nations leading the charge. In other words, it can transcend from a mere expansion of the Quad 2.0 forum to become a systematized form of a coalition. Alternatively, the Quad Plus mechanism can overtake the Quad 2.0 altogether, reverting its focus to disaster management, coupled with national and strategic security discussion focus areas of Quad 2.0, that led to the creation of the “core” group of four in 2004, then known as the Regional Core Group, serving a joint response to the Indian Ocean tsunami.<sup>31</sup> This, however, is an unlikely scenario: despite its overtly broad agenda, the rebirthed Quad 2.0 dialogue is largely focused on unifying efforts to counter China’s aggressive rise, and any expansion into humanitarian aid will divert attention from this primary focus. On the other hand, the Quad Plus format is likely to focus more explicitly on areas like crisis response that are generally easier to coordinate and receive more robust support within a broadened forum of liberal, like-minded states. Additionally, the possibility of both the Quad 2.0 and the Quad Plus mechanism coexisting in the post-COVID order is also likely. The symbiotic existence of both dialogues, with a rotational membership beyond the Quad 2.0, can lead to the establishment of a new-era framework that seeks to provide aid to Indo-Pacific and Asian nations while strengthening bilateral and multilateral modes of interaction.

### **Critical Questions**

At present, the Quad 2.0 and Quad Plus mechanisms are US-led in practice, even though Japan has shown strong support for such mechanisms. A stronger view from other participating nations, decisive leadership, and focus on regional interests that promote national priorities must be envisaged. The Quad 2.0 has immense potential to shape the future of the Indo-Pacific, especially in the post-COVID order, and the Quad Plus mechanism might just prove to be the boost it needs to reach set goals.<sup>32</sup> The rebirth of the Quad and its steady institutionalization have proven that further expansion in the future can be a possibility; the Quad Plus is one such gateway to bolster a combined response to China’s assertive rise. As Chinese president Xi Jinping’s envisioned China goes under more prominent international critique<sup>33</sup> in the post-COVID-19 period—the Belt and Road Initia-

tive specifically has pulled much focus as a result of “debt-trap” set-ups—the United States, Japan, India, and Australia must use this chance to reinforce the Quad 2.0 grouping. By expanding solicitation efforts vis-à-vis the new Quad Plus nations into newer economic and security structures such as SCRI and more, the post-COVID-19 order is being shaped rapidly. The Quad Plus is an expansion of the Quad 2.0, permitting the creation of a “continental connect”<sup>34</sup> and “corridor of communication.”

Therefore, taking into account these changing realities in the post-pandemic world, there are crucial questions that must be addressed to better understand the future trajectory of international relations in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. *First*, what is the significance of the Quad Plus dialogue, and what are its implications for the post-COVID-19 Indo-Pacific and Asian order? *Second*, who are the major stakeholders in the Quad Plus mechanism, including and beyond the Quad 2.0 nations? *Last* and more importantly, how can the Quad Plus mechanism grow beyond its current abstract existence to find synergy with national and multilateral Indo-Pacific initiatives? In reference to these questions, this special issue seeks to assess the prospects of the Quad Plus proposition and to test its feasibility as well as its future.

To do so, this special issue brings together different national and scholarly perspectives to analyze the potential of the Quad Plus from varied national and regional connotations. The volume considers whether the Quad Plus framework can emerge as a central focus of the emerging Indo-Pacific synergies or approaches of various regions and nation states. Accordingly, the special issue is divided into *three* parts. The *first*, “Beijing, Quad, and the Quad Plus,” discusses the grouping from the viewpoints of the core Quad 2.0 states—the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, beginning with a special article on the Chinese perspective on the Quad process. The *second* part, titled “The ‘Plus’ Perspectives,” seeks to consider the prospects that the grouping holds for middle powers and previously included parties such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, United Kingdom, South Korea, Israel, France, Canada, and Brazil. The *third* and last section expands the scope to discuss perspectives of countries like Russia, the Indian Ocean island states, the Middle East, Pakistan–Afghanistan–Iran, and of course, with a focus on history and politics that the region delves upon pertaining to connectivity and infrastructure. Together, these articles aim to discuss not only the present approaches of the nations/regions in question toward the Quad Plus but also assess how their policies may evolve in the future amid a more hotly contested Indo-Pacific region and an intensifying US–China rivalry. ★

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**Notes**

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# “Sea Foam in the Ocean” or an “Asian NATO”?

## Chinese Views of the Quad

DR. JEFFREY BECKER

### Abstract

Since the early 2000s, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States (aka the Quad) has been a subject of signift, incorporating participation from New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam. These changes have led to an exchange of ideas on how to advance shared interests, including ways to address the rise of China as an economic and security presence in the Indo-Pacific.

How does China perceive this cooperation among “Quad” countries, and what effects do Chinese scholars and policy makers anticipate it having on China’s interests in the Indo-Pacific? This article examines how the Quad is being viewed from Beijing, how Chinese academics and government-affiliated analysts understand its potential impacts on Chinese interests, and what they view as possible policy responses.

### Introduction

In 2018, when asked whether the “Indo-Pacific strategy pursued by the US, Japan, India and Australia” (better known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or “the Quad”) was an attempt to “contain China,” People’s Republic of China (PRC) foreign minister Wang Yi was dismissive.<sup>1</sup> Likening the strategy to “sea foam in the Indian or Pacific Ocean,” Wang argued that the Quad was a “headline grabbing idea” that “would soon dissipate.”<sup>2</sup> Others, such as Luo Zhaohui, China’s deputy foreign minister for Asian affairs, have been less sanguine. Speaking at a Foreign Ministry seminar in September 2020, Luo described the Quad as an “anti-China front line.” He also referred to the Quad as “the ‘mini-NATO,’” thus connecting the rise of the Quad to one of Beijing’s older, longstanding concerns.<sup>3</sup>

Since its reemergence in 2017, the Quad has been a subject of both debate and speculation. How does China perceive cooperation among Quad countries, or even among the Quad and an additional grouping some have labeled as a “Quad-Plus” arrangement? How does it foresee the Quad evolving, and what effects do Chinese scholars and policymakers anticipate it having on Chinese interests in

the Indo-Pacific? This article examines how the Quad is being viewed from China, and how Chinese academics and government- and military-affiliated analysts view its potential impacts on Chinese interests in the region.

The Quad has its origins in the response to the December 2004 Sumatra–Andaman earthquake and subsequent tsunami, which devastated Indonesia’s Aceh province and much of South and Southeast Asia. Following the disaster, the United States, Australia, Japan, and India moved to form the Tsunami Core Group, allowing the four countries to coordinate their relief activities.<sup>4</sup>

Following 2004, Quad members continued to explore opportunities for cooperation. In 2006, the United States, Australia, and Japan upgraded their trilateral security dialogue to the foreign and defense ministerial level.<sup>5</sup> While visiting Japan at the end of 2006, Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh signed a joint statement noting “the usefulness of having dialogue among India, Japan and other like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region on themes of mutual interest,” while US vice president Dick Cheney reportedly endorsed Japanese prime minister Shinzō Abe’s idea of expanding the trilateral security arrangement to include India.<sup>6</sup> In May 2007, Quad country representatives met on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila for the first time,<sup>7</sup> while that September, the second phase of the Malabar naval exercise took place roughly 350 km southwest of the Andaman Islands and involved naval forces from the United States, Australia, Japan, India, and Singapore.<sup>8</sup>

This increased cooperation did not go unnoticed in Beijing. Following the Manila meetings, China issued formal diplomatic protests to each of the Quad countries.<sup>9</sup> When asked about the 2007 five-nation Malabar exercise, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu noted that China calls upon “all countries to establish a new security concept and carry out dialogue and cooperation on the basis of mutual trust and mutual benefit.”<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, Beijing sought to convince Canberra and New Delhi that an assertive Quad arrangement could jeopardize their economic relations with the PRC.

While Beijing was successful in slowing Quad cooperation, in 2007–2008, China’s reevaluation of the balance of power in Asia following the 2008 financial crisis helped bring the Quad back into play.<sup>11</sup> Following the crisis, Chinese leaders saw an opportunity to modify Deng Xiaoping’s traditional axiom of “keeping a low profile and biding one’s time” and instead pursue the country’s overseas interests more aggressively.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the decade since, one can see this assertive posture in a range of activities, including the establishment of an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea, island building in the South China Sea, and continued border disputes with India.

Economically, Chinese domestic growth slowed during this time, as GDP growth declined from more than 14 percent in 2007 to less than 7 percent in 2017, while demands for imported energy grew as the economy matured.<sup>13</sup> This demand for new sources of growth in part helped spur China's outward economic expansion in the form of overseas investment projects, culminating in China's massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Pres. Xi Jinping's flagship policy designed to leverage Chinese lending, investment, and technical expertise to more closely integrate China to the rest of the world, primarily through infrastructure development.<sup>14</sup> As China's reliance on overseas energy imports and overseas investments continued to grow, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), particularly the PLA Navy (PLAN), was given responsibility for protecting these interests. This subsequently expanded the PLAN's presence in the Indian Ocean beyond its traditional counterpiracy operations, including submarine patrols and the establishment of the PLA's first overseas base in Djibouti.<sup>15</sup>

This reassessment of the international situation post-financial crisis, and corresponding shift toward a more assertive PRC foreign policy, served to rekindle interest in the Quad. This reemerging interest was made evident in the Trump administration's *2017 National Security Strategy*, which noted the administration's desire to "seek to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India."<sup>16</sup> While not naming the Quad specifically, Australia's *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* notes that "Australia is open to working with our Indo-Pacific partners in other plurilateral arrangements" and that "Australia pledges to "build on the growing strategic collaboration between Australia, India and Japan."<sup>17</sup>

While decades of collaboration had already drawn the United States, Japan, and Australia closely together; 2010–2017 saw cooperation between the three allies and India expand as well. In 2015, the Indian and Australian navies began conducting the biannual naval exercise AUSINDEX. By spring 2017, the two countries had announced a whole series of exercises involving both the armies and special forces of the two countries as well. By the end of 2017, India and Australia had also established a 2+2 bilateral dialogue between foreign and defense secretaries, giving India three 2+2 dialogues—one with each of three Quad countries.<sup>18</sup>

Rumors about the reemergence of the Quad culminated in November, as senior officials from all four countries met again in Manila ahead of that year's ASEAN summit.<sup>19</sup> Between 2017 and 2019, Quad member representatives met in Singapore in June and November 2018, and New York and Bangkok in September and November 2019. In March, the four countries met in an expanded "Quad-plus" virtual session at the vice-ministerial level, involving South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam.<sup>20</sup> By summer 2020, it was rumored that Australia would once again join the Malabar naval exercise after a 13-year hiatus.<sup>21</sup>

Publicly, official PRC government statements were not as strident following the Quad’s “revival” in 2017 as they were in 2007 (China did not, for example, demarche all four countries as they did in 2007). However, Beijing certainly took notice, often seeking to link India and other Quad members’ activities directly to US policies. When asked about the Quad meetings in Manila, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang stated that “these visions and proposals [in the Indo-Pacific] should be open and inclusive and conducive to enhancing win-win cooperation. Politicized and exclusionary ones [i.e., the Quad] should be avoided.”<sup>22</sup> When asked about Malabar 2017, Geng provided similar comments, noting, “We hope such relations and cooperation are not targeted at a third party and are conducive to regional peace and stability.”<sup>23</sup> When asked about the Quad at the March press conference for the first session of the 2018 National People’s Congress, Wang Yi noted,

It seems there is never a shortage of headline-grabbing ideas. They are like the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean: they may get some attention, but soon will dissipate. Contrary to the claim made by some academics and media outlets that the “Indo-Pacific strategy” aims to contain China, the four countries’ official position is that it targets no one. I hope they mean what they say and their action will match their rhetoric.<sup>24</sup>

Chinese media coverage, however, was more strident. Writing in the *Global Times* immediately following the 2017 Manila meetings, Ling Shengli of the China Foreign Affairs University argued that “interference [in the South China Sea] by the US, Japan, Australia and other nations . . . cannot be left unnoticed” and was adding tensions to an otherwise peaceful environment in the South China Sea.<sup>25</sup> The overseas edition of the *People’s Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee, raised the question “Should the United States, Australia, Japan and India Join Forces to Counter China?”<sup>26</sup> When discussing the possibility of Australia participating in Malabar 2020, PRC news outlets such as the *Global Times* again argued that the exercise was “directed at China,” connecting India’s acquiescence to Australia’s participation in the exercise to recent escalations in tensions between China and India.<sup>27</sup>

Stepping back from immediate coverage of events, **how do Chinese scholars and analysts view the Quad’s evolution and resurgence?** First, it should be noted that some of the writings examined here **see the resurgence of the Quad of secondary concern and not yet a critical foreign policy issue akin to Taiwan or the South China Sea.** Ye Hailin at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), for example, points out that, to date, **Quad activities have been focused within the Indian Ocean, which constitutes China’s “secondary strategic direc-**

tion” (*Zhongguo de Eryao Zhanlue Fangxiang*; 中国的次要战略方向) compared to more critical issues such as Taiwan or the Korean Peninsula.<sup>28</sup> That being said, many Chinese analysts writing about the Quad often discuss it within the context of an evolving regional and international structure that continues to move from the unipolar world of the post-Cold War world toward the bipolarity of a post-9/11 environment. According to this analysis, the Quad is often viewed as part of the United States’ attempts to prevent this shift and reverse its decline in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>29</sup>

This viewpoint is evident in statements by PRC officials as well. As noted by President Xi at the June 2018 Foreign Affairs Work Conference, “it is necessary to grasp the general trend of accelerating multi-polarization of the world and to attach importance to the in-depth adjustment of relations between major powers.”<sup>30</sup> When speaking at the September 2020 ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, Wang Yi argued that differences in US–China relations are fundamentally about the United States’ refusal to embrace the historical trend toward multipolarity.<sup>31</sup>

It is within this context that Chinese analysts often see the Quad as a mechanism by which Washington can prevent this power shift and undermine China’s growing influence in the region. When discussing the reemergence of the Quad, Zhang Li at Sichuan University argues explicitly that China, particularly China’s expanding maritime activities and overseas investment activities in the form of the BRI, are the Quad countries’ main target.<sup>32</sup> Zhang Jie at CASS points to Japanese foreign minister Tarō Kōno’s October 2017 interview, during which Kōno expressed a desire to work with the Quad countries to counteract China’s expansion under BRI, as evidence that the Quad is explicitly designed to “compete with China’s Belt and Road Initiative and [also] its [China’s] strategy to become a maritime power.”<sup>33</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that many Chinese analysts see the Quad as an extension of the US *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, which, although vague, under the Trump administration has helped to generate increased focus on the region, a process that began under the second Obama administration.<sup>34</sup> As part of this strategy, the United States has moved away from its traditional view of two distinct regions (the East Asian and Indian Ocean Regions), and adopted the view, which had come to prominence in the region years earlier, of an interconnected Indo-Pacific extending from the Horn of Africa to the Western Pacific.<sup>35</sup> With this view, the current administration has described, at least on paper, an approach characterized by free trade, the rule of law, and an upholding of the existing regional order by US allies, partners, and regional institutions.<sup>36</sup>

Examining the Quad’s resurgence in the context of the US *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, many Chinese authors argue that the Quad is merely an extension of that strategy,

designed to maintain the US position in the region and curb China’s rising power. Xia Liping at the Shanghai Institute for International Strategic Studies (SIISS) for example, argues that **the United States sees the Quad as a means of bolstering America’s network of alliances in Asia**, which has eroded in recent years to the point where it was insufficient to contain China’s rise. Xia specifically ties the Quad’s resurgence to the White House’s *2017 National Security Strategy*, which calls for increasing security ties with Quad countries.<sup>37</sup> Editorials in the PRC’s official English newspaper, *China Daily*, connect the Quad and the Indo-Pacific strategy explicitly, stating, “China-haters in Washington have been celebrating the administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy, *especially the so-called Quad alliance*” (emphasis added).<sup>38</sup>

A subset of authors, however, **do see Australia and Japan as having a larger hand in the Quad’s resurgence**,<sup>39</sup> viewing this as a consequence of the US retreat from the region, rather than its recommitment, which has motivated Australia and Japan to try and keep Washington engaged “and bring India in to jointly cope with the rise of China.”<sup>40</sup> According to Zhang Jie at CASS, “as the first step, Japan and Australia have attempted to work together to fill the ‘power vacuum’ left by the US and curb the rapid expansion of China’s influence.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Zhang believes that **because the Quad is being promoted by Japan and Australia, it is quite separate from the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, and, as a result, may also develop faster in both the economic and security fields.**

Regardless of whether the Quad is a US construct or a product of the power vacuum created by the US absence, most scholars examined here **view the Quad as a means to contain China’s rise.** This concern has no doubt been intensified by a series of policy speeches by Trump cabinet members during the summer of 2020, which outlined China’s hostile behavior and presented policy options designed to counter that behavior.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, concerns that US policy in the region is designed to contain China are nothing new, and the Quad is certainly seen as an extension of that objective. Reporting on a July 2018 speech by US secretary of state Mike Pompeo, during which he discussed the US *Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy*, the *China Daily* noted that “Pompeo and other State Department officials have tried to depict the Indo-Pacific strategy as inclusive and not meant to contain China, but such words are not credible.”<sup>43</sup> A June 2020 *Global Times* article argues just as explicitly that **“to contain China, the U.S. proposed to build a ‘Quad Alliance’ of the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia.”**<sup>44</sup> Analysis by Chinese academicians is more nuanced but draws similar conclusions. Xia Liping argues that the Trump administration views the current security architecture in the region to be inadequate, implying that the Quad is designed to resolve those shortcomings.<sup>45</sup> Others are

more direct, stating, “For the United States, the Quad provides a way to restrict China in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>46</sup>

It is not lost on the Chinese research community that the Quad has economic dimensions as well. Many see the Quad as a mechanism through which the four countries can respond to China’s BRI. Scholars such as Zhang Jie go as far as to argue the potential threat of economic cooperation between the four Quad countries poses an even greater threat to China than does the security cooperation.<sup>47</sup>

To be sure, economic cooperation between the four Quad nations has grown; the United States for example recently surpassed China as India’s largest trading partner, and Japan and United States have been within the top five-largest sources of foreign direct investment to India since 2017.<sup>48</sup> The four countries are also reportedly discussing a “supply chain resilience initiative” to lessen reliance on Chinese factories, as well as a mechanism for improving the quality and transparency of infrastructure investment, known as the Blue Dot Network.<sup>49</sup>

However, in their current forms, none of these initiatives appear ready to rival the breadth and scope of China’s BRI. Currently, the Blue Dot Network lacks the types of dedicated financing similar to that provided by Chinese policy banks such as the China Development Bank or the Export-Import Bank of China.

### China’s Response to the Quad

Some Chinese authors see the Quad as a work in progress and caution against conducting what they refer to as “undermining work” (*fenhua waijiiegongzuo*; 分化瓦解工作).<sup>50</sup> Others, however, point to economic diplomacy as perhaps the PRC’s most useful tool, arguing that economic pressure successfully undermined the Quad in the past. Zhang Li notes that as a result of Chinese economic pressure in 2007, Australia refocused on economic and trade relations with China at the Quad’s expense.<sup>51</sup>

Such economic pressure can be directed at either Quad members or against others in the region. Chinese analysts initially focused on India, for example, as a possible target for its economic diplomacy to hinder Quad development.<sup>52</sup> In 2018, Xia Liping and Zhong Qi suggested that India could be severed from the Quad through Chinese diplomatic overtures.<sup>53</sup> As recent as 2019, Ye Hailin posited that “China should focus on India when formulating a strategy to respond to the US-Japan-India-Australia security mechanism.”<sup>54</sup> Mu Xiaoming at China’s National Defense University believed that India’s desire to maintain its “strategic autonomy” (*zhanlue zizhuxing*; 战略自主性) will hinder the development of US-India relations.<sup>55</sup>

Yet this view appears to be changing. Over the past five years, a host of tensions in the Sino-Indian relationship have only served to make India a less attractive

target for Chinese economic outreach. These include China’s sale of submarines to India’s archrival Pakistan and China’s growing presence in the port of Gwadar, which Chinese analysts often consider as a possible location for a future Chinese military facility.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, in June 2020, the worst fighting between the two sides in 40 years broke out in the disputed Galwan River Valley region, resulting in the death of at least 20 Indian soldiers and helping to spur nation-wide anti-China protests.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly enough, some Chinese analysts have argued that if Indian prime minister Narendra Modi faces strong anti-China, nationalist sentiments at home, this would certainly limit China’s ability to use economic outreach to India to undermine the Quad.<sup>58</sup> To date, this appears quite prescient, as growing anti-China sentiment within India makes neither China–India rapprochement nor India backing away from the Quad appear likely to occur in the near term.

Others contend that should the four Quad countries continue to align their regional policies, this new, united group would undermine “ASEAN Centrality,” the idea that, as the region’s most important multilateral institution, ASEAN has a key role to play in the region’s diplomatic architecture. Ge Hongliang and Wang Nana of Guanxi University argue that “the Quad will pressure ASEAN to pick a side while also undermining ASEAN centrality.”<sup>59</sup> Writing in the *Global Times*, Zhao Minghao argues that

Southeast Asian countries . . . worry that the quadrilateral cooperation mechanism of the US, Japan, India and Australia would pose challenges to ASEAN’s centrality in the regional architecture. Having realized that the Indo-Pacific strategy is likely to trigger confrontation between China and the US and drag Southeast Asia into a dilemma over which side to lean, ASEAN countries are working on a common position to deal with the strategy.<sup>60</sup>

ASEAN centrality remains core to the organization’s perceptions of itself. One need look no further than the 2019 *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*, which “envisages ASEAN Centrality as the underlying principle for . . . maintain[ing] its central role in the evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia and its surrounding regions.”<sup>61</sup> This focus on ASEAN Centrality is echoed in member states’ official government documents, such as Malaysia’s first-ever *Defense White Paper*, which notes that “a strong and unified ASEAN is at the core of Malaysia’s security and defense reliance.”<sup>62</sup> In May 2018, Singapore foreign minister Vivian Balakrishnan noted that the Quad concept did not adequately address whether ASEAN would remain central to the region’s architecture.<sup>63</sup>

Political elites in ASEAN member states are also not universally opposed to a larger role for the Quad, and although Singapore and Malaysia voice concern, others, such as Vietnam, appear supportive.<sup>64</sup> According to a survey of Southeast



Asian elite opinions, roughly 57 percent of those surveyed are generally in support of the Quad, while only 10 percent outright oppose. Moreover, 46 percent believe the Quad is complimentary to the role of ASEAN in the region.<sup>65</sup>

To address these concerns, officials from Quad member states have expanded their outreach to ASEAN member states. In a formal statement following the 26 September 2019 ministerial meetings, the group went on record to officially reaffirm their support for ASEAN Centrality in the Indo-Pacific, noting that “we [the Quad] want to compliment ASEAN’s critical role in the region.”<sup>66</sup> This position was reaffirmed in November of that year in Bangkok, as Quad officials again formally “reaffirmed their countries’ strong support for ASEAN centrality, ASEAN-led regional architecture, and ASEAN’s adoption of its Indo-Pacific outlook.”<sup>67</sup>

### A Quad-Plus Arrangement?

Some ASEAN member states, such as Vietnam, have begun to cooperate with the Quad in what has been referred to as a “Quad-Plus” arrangement. In March, Quad member states were joined by Vietnam, South Korea, and New Zealand in a “Quad-Plus video-conference” to discuss ways to coordinate their COVID-19 response.<sup>68</sup> Within China, while these initial steps toward broader Quad-Plus cooperation are welcome in their ability to better coordinate and manage the region’s pandemic response, to the extent they are related to larger Quad activities, they are viewed with suspicion. For example, when discussing the aforementioned March 2020 “Quad-Plus” videoconference, Liu Zongyi at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies argued that “although they [Quad Plus] claimed to be mainly aimed at dealing with COVID-19 issues, the efforts to institutionalize the Quad and the intention to expand it to Wellington, Seoul and Hanoi cannot be underestimated,” suggesting a high degree of mistrust of anything associated with the Quad.<sup>69</sup>

Overall, however, perceptions of any Quad-Plus expansion appear to be a mixture of concern and ambivalence. Some have sought to downplay concerns over the Quad’s expansion. Following Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc’s trip to Australia in 2018, a *Global Times* editorial with the headline *Is Vietnam Moving to Join the Quad*, went to great pains to downplay the chances of this occurring, arguing “we don’t need to read too much into Phúc’s visit and what came of it.”<sup>70</sup> Others however, see any Quad-Plus activities as further evidence of the Quad’s threat to ASEAN. Wang Jingchao, for example, argues that the Quad’s outreach efforts to Vietnam has the potential to split ASEAN and the latter’s “central position will fall, and its risk of marginalization will increase.”<sup>71</sup> One issue

to watch, therefore, will be the extent to which these Chinese writings on the Quad-Plus begin to coalesce around either of these viewpoints.

### **The Quad and China: A Contentious Future?**

Since its inception, the ability of the Quad to retain cohesion has to a large extent been driven by Beijing’s assessment of the balance of power in the region and China’s corresponding behavior. A key reason for the Quad’s lost momentum in the mid-2000s was China’s continued adoption of Deng’s low-profile diplomacy, undermining the impetus for Quad cooperation at the time. As Beijing reassessed the international situation and pursued overseas interests more aggressively, Quad members again found common cause. Given this interplay between Chinese foreign policy behavior and Quad cooperation, it is no surprise that the vast majority of the Chinese literature examined suggest that the Quad is something to be confronted rather than engaged.

When considering confrontation, early Chinese writings considered a multi-pronged approach, employing economic diplomacy directed at both India and ASEAN. Yet as a means to undermining the Quad, India appears unlikely to be a path to success in the near term. If anything, India’s commitment to the Quad seems to have grown, as indicated by its willingness to host Quad ministerial meetings in late 2020.<sup>72</sup> ASEAN, however, may be more fruitful ground. The organization appears split over the Quad, with some members, such as Singapore and Malaysia, concerned about ASEAN Centrality, and others, like Vietnam, engaging with the Quad in what may be the early stages of a Quad-Plus arrangement.

This would be far from the first issue to divide ASEAN member states. For years, the organization has been unable to develop a unified approach to the South China Sea, and while multiple factors have contributed to this stalemate, China’s growing relationship with Cambodia has certainly played a role. In this sense, ASEAN’s Quad policy may end up becoming another issue that divides the Quad, widening existing cracks in the unity of Southeast Asian foreign policy. ⚡

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## Notes

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# US–China Strategic Competition and Washington’s Conception of Quad Plus

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## Abstract\*

To demonstrate leadership in the Indo-Pacific and build on global concerns about dependence on Beijing in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, the United States has sought to engage in regular meetings with a grouping of “like-minded” countries to collectively fight COVID-19 and its aftereffects. Discussion has ranged from vaccine development to ensuring supply-chain resilience to upholding international norms. What does this coalition imply about the evolution of Sino–US great-power competition over the past two decades and what does it mean for the Indo-Pacific going forward? This article considers what factors motivated the development of the Quad Plus coalition and why it is consequential, how it fits into the US relationship with China and the Trump administration’s *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, and what its future may look like under the Biden administration.

## Introduction

Over the past 15 years, China has emerged as a serious contender to dethrone the United States as the preeminent global superpower. Its gross domestic product in purchasing power parity terms has tripled between 2005 and 2019, surpassing that of the United States,<sup>1</sup> and by the US Department of Defense’s own admission, China’s defense modernization over the past 20 years has put its military capabilities “ahead of the United States” in areas such as integrated air defense systems and land-based conventional and ballistic missiles.<sup>2</sup> China has also made tremendous investments in antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities aimed specifically at frustrating US efforts to defend allies and partners in Asia in the event of a conflict,<sup>3</sup> to say nothing of its innovation in emerging technologies such as cyber and artificial intelligence,<sup>4</sup> forcing the United States to play catch up.

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Nor is this competition only in terms of economic and military prowess. Beijing has also sought to compete with the United States for diplomatic, geopolitical, and strategic influence globally, by investing huge sums of money into countries in Asia and Africa to provide public goods such as infrastructure and connectivity.<sup>5</sup> However, due to the lack of much of a pushback from Washington, this Chinese jostling for influence has turned into aggression. For years, by unilaterally advancing its land and maritime claims through salami-slicing tactics against neighbors such as Japan, India, Philippines, Vietnam, and others; economically coercing countries, such as by forcing them into debt-for-equity swaps as in Sri Lanka<sup>6</sup> or through antidumping tariffs such as with Australia;<sup>7</sup> and refusing to adhere to international law such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,<sup>8</sup> China has been chipping away at the US-led liberal international order without a credible challenge from Washington.

Although the United States in the past recognized and acknowledged the challenge China posed to the rules-based order<sup>9</sup> and made some efforts to address it through the Pivot/Rebalance to Asia,<sup>10</sup> Washington has now begun to articulate a comprehensive response spanning the economic, military, diplomatic, and strategic domains through the *Indo-Pacific Strategy*.<sup>11</sup> The goals of this strategy are to ensure that the Indo-Pacific region, which imagines the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean as one strategic system,<sup>12</sup> remains free and open for navigation, overflight, and commerce for all countries; is anchored in respect for international law;<sup>13</sup> and is not dominated by a “revisionist power”: China.<sup>14</sup> And in this endeavor to defend the US-led global order, the Trump administration has sought to develop and strengthen coalitions with like-minded nations such as the Quadrilateral, or Quad, grouping with Japan, India, and Australia. However, more recently, in response to the outbreak of the coronavirus, which began in Wuhan, China, the United States has initiated a new framework for Indo-Pacific cooperation, dubbed “Quad Plus” by the media.<sup>15</sup>

This article considers what factors motivated the development of the Quad Plus coalition and why it is consequential, how it fits into the US relationship with China and the Trump administration’s *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, and what its future may look like under the Biden administration.

## **US–China Great-power Competition and Quad/Quad Plus**

The genesis of the Quad Plus lies in the United States’ strategic competition with China, particularly over the past 20 years. To understand the drivers of and motivations behind the development of this coalition, we need to examine the evolution of the US approach toward China since the 2000s.



The Trump administration's policy toward China can be described as adversarial, with the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* naming Beijing as a "strategic competitor" that aims to achieve "Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future."<sup>16</sup> Analysts have warned that "a new type of Cold War" is now afoot,<sup>17</sup> with Washington taking an increasingly confrontational stance toward Beijing on areas such as trade, technology, and human rights, particularly in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic that Pres. Donald Trump has repeatedly called "the Chinese virus."<sup>18</sup> However, 20 years ago too, Condoleezza Rice, then a foreign policy advisor to George W. Bush's campaign and eventually National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, had identified China as a "strategic competitor" that "would like to alter Asia's balance of power in its own favor," and had proposed that the United States "should never be afraid to confront Beijing when our interests collide."<sup>19</sup> Thus, it becomes pertinent to ask: (1) why did it take two decades for the United States to decisively address the challenge from China and what factors explain how US policy toward China has come full circle in this time?; and (2) in what ways has this evolution impacted the conception of the Quad, the *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, and the Quad Plus? These questions are considered below, analyzing each US administration in turn.

The George W. Bush administration came into office at a time when the world was starting to come to grips with the rise of China. This administration had a hard-nosed view of China militarily, ideologically, and geopolitically. During the campaign, candidate Bush asserted that the United States "must deal with China without ill-will—but without illusions."<sup>20</sup> He criticized the Clinton administration for being soft on Beijing, particularly with regard to threats China made to Taiwan,<sup>21</sup> and pledged to strengthen relations with allies in Asia, particularly Japan. The mid 2000s was also when Sino-US economic and trade issues became acute, due to concerns in Washington about Chinese currency manipulation to keep export rates low, Beijing offering state-owned enterprises land sops and other subsidies to compete with foreign firms, and American companies being asked to surrender technology to continue accessing Chinese markets.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Bush administration was aware of the risks that China posed, as articulated by Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick in a speech in September 2005 registering alarm about Chinese military modernization, lack of transparency, and intellectual property theft, among others concerns.<sup>23</sup>

However, the Bush government had little policy space to address some of these challenges, dealing as it was with more pressing threats such as terrorism, two wars, and a domestic financial crisis. In addition, the United States and China were already fairly economically intertwined by then, and China's more assertive

foreign policy stance, such as confrontation with US naval vessels<sup>24</sup> and threatening of freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific commons or coercion of neighbors through “salami-slicing” tactics,<sup>25</sup> was still a few years away. Thus, overall, the Bush administration believed it could constructively engage China on economic issues and that being a “responsible stakeholder” and playing by the international rules and norms was fundamentally in Beijing’s interest.<sup>26</sup>

However, the administration did take steps to hedge against China’s rise. It was under President Bush that the idea of the shared values of democracies as a balancing force against China came about. Former Bush administration officials Michael J. Green and Daniel Twining wrote shortly after leaving office that “a network of Asia-Pacific great and regional powers, united by a shared democratic identity and the desire to hedge against Chinese domination, could work to preserve a multi-polar regional order as American preponderance eventually wanes.”<sup>27</sup> This vision called for strengthening relations with countries such as Japan, India, and Australia and became the underlying rationale for the Quad, which was imagined as “the hub of a new alignment of like-minded democracies prepared to provide greater public goods to the region”<sup>28</sup> after it proved successful as an ad hoc grouping to coordinate responses to the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004.<sup>29</sup> In fact, although the Quad disbanded after a single meeting and a military exercise in 2007, in the 2008 campaign for the US presidential elections, candidates Barack Obama and John McCain both spoke of the idea of a concert or league of democracies to deal with global challenges.<sup>30</sup>

Although President Obama did have concerns about the US trade deficit with China and what he viewed as unfair practices on Beijing’s part,<sup>31</sup> his administration came into office with a desire to maintain stability in the Sino–US relationship so that they could elicit cooperation from Beijing on issues such as combating climate change and denuclearization of North Korea and Iran while “managing differences.”<sup>32</sup> However, while the Obama administration was focused on reviving the economy after the 2008 financial crisis and dealing with an uptick in violence in Afghanistan, China became emboldened by a distracted United States and began asserting itself regionally and globally,<sup>33</sup> illustrated by Beijing’s expansion of China’s maritime claims in the South China Sea.<sup>34</sup>

As the nature of the challenge from China became clearer, the Obama administration shifted focus and attention from the Middle East to Asia through its Pivot/Rebalance to Asia strategy, initiated in 2011.<sup>35</sup> This aimed to build a web of relationships and partnerships,<sup>36</sup> both bilaterally and multilaterally, to maintain a balance of power in the region vis-à-vis China. This included Washington ramping up engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), for example, by officially joining the East Asia Summit;<sup>37</sup> initiating a trilateral

dialogue with Japan and India;<sup>38</sup> and expanding US military presence in Australia and Singapore.<sup>39</sup> In fact, it was Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who first indicated that the United States was seriously considering the “Indo-Pacific” construct in a 2011 piece for *Foreign Policy*.<sup>40</sup>

However, when Beijing challenged the status quo and it came time for the United States to enforce some of the red lines it had set, the Obama administration did not have the resolve to act decisively and instead privileged maintaining cooperation and stability in its relationship with China. For instance, President Obama had warned China of a negative impact on Sino–US relations if Beijing reclaimed land in the Scarborough Shoal,<sup>41</sup> and said that China must abide by the ruling of the international tribunal against Chinese maritime rights in the South China Sea.<sup>42</sup> However, the consensus among analysts is that the Obama administration did not follow through on those warnings, and the Chinese maintained and, in fact, expanded their aggressive presence in the maritime seas of the region.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the Bush and Obama administrations were either not entirely certain about the nature and extent of the threat from China or did not have the resolve to act. However, by the time the Trump administration came into office, Beijing’s increasing dominance in all domains, whether military, economics, technology, or geopolitics, had begun to blunt American advantage, and the challenges it posed to US primacy and global leadership as well as the liberal international order were clear. For instance, Pres. Xi Jinping had begun implementing large-scale modernization reforms to turn the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into a modern military capable of taking on the most advanced of nations, chiefly the United States, and the PLA Air Force was already cutting into US technical advantage.<sup>44</sup> Beijing’s advancements with regard to A2/AD capabilities were posing increasing threats to US ability to operate freely in maritime Asia, and the Chinese military had made heavy investments in artificial intelligence, cyber, and space capabilities, which led the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Joe Dunford, to remark that “in the last 10 or 15 years, [US] competitive advantage has eroded, and it’s no longer as decisive as it was some years ago.”<sup>45</sup> China had begun to assert its economic influence from Asia to Europe by floating an alternative to US-led financial institutions, i.e., the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank,<sup>46</sup> as well as through the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>47</sup> China had expanded its power projection capabilities, with its navy becoming the largest in the world,<sup>48</sup> the development of its first overseas military base in Djibouti, and its buildup of strategic ports in the Indian Ocean region such as in Pakistan and Sri Lanka—moves that had the potential to constrain US choices in the region.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, Beijing had ramped abrasive tactics toward US allies and partners by milita-

rising islands in the South China Sea<sup>50</sup> as well as attempting to change the status quo by trying to construct a road in disputed territory claimed by Bhutan.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, around this time, bipartisan consensus was starting to emerge in the policy community in the United States that Washington’s decades-long policy of engaging China economically and efforts to make it part of the international system in hopes of shaping its political and military behavior was not working.<sup>52</sup> For instance, former Obama administration officials Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner wrote in March 2018 that “nearly half a century since Nixon’s first steps toward rapprochement, the record is increasingly clear that Washington once again put too much faith in its power to shape China’s trajectory.”<sup>53</sup> This was essentially the same position that the Trump administration put forth in its *National Security Strategy* in December 2017, which said: “These competitions require the United States to rethink the policies of the past two decades—policies based on the assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners. For the most part, this premise turned out to be false.”<sup>54</sup>

These developments forced a rethink on the US approach to and policy toward China. The Trump administration not only labeled China as a strategic competitor, recognizing the dangers Beijing posed to a rules-based order, but it also developed a strategy with both military and economic dimensions to “preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific where sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity are safeguarded.”<sup>55</sup> Among the key elements of this strategy is developing stronger security relationships with partners in the region that share US concerns about Chinese adventurism and have a mutual interest in ensuring a safe, secure, and transparent region that is open for all to conduct commerce and navigation. This has meant not only upgrading trilateral consultations such as among the United States, Japan, and India to the leader level<sup>56</sup> or expanding the scope of cooperation such as initiating an infrastructure investment partnership with Australia and Japan,<sup>57</sup> but also revitalizing the Quad and elevating it to the ministerial level.<sup>58</sup> The administration believes that linking these relationships in the region would develop a “networked security architecture” that can share the burden of responsibilities in the region, is “capable of deterring aggression,” and can support “regional peace and stability.”<sup>59</sup>

In this way, Chinese military and economic ascendance over the past two decades and US recognition (albeit delayed) of the threat it poses have resulted in a hardening of American views of Beijing in recent years as well as the nurturing of a coalition like the Quad as a coordinating and consultative mechanism to address China’s rise. And these two factors have played a key role in determining

the US response to the coronavirus pandemic, including the development of the Quad Plus grouping.

### **Origin of and Strategic Rationale for Quad Plus**

The tide had already begun turning in the United States against China in the first three years of the Trump administration, which were punctuated by a trade war between the two countries<sup>60</sup> as well as US and Chinese ships facing off in the South China Sea.<sup>61</sup> However, the coronavirus pandemic brought bilateral tensions to a low not seen in several decades. Although President Trump was initially complimentary of President Xi's efforts to contain the virus,<sup>62</sup> his administration soon reversed its stance, perhaps partially to deflect blame for their own handling of the pandemic, as reports emerged that China had initially not been transparent about the spread and lethality of the virus.<sup>63</sup> Tensions escalated when senior administration officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, traded barbs with Chinese officials over where the virus originated and both sides blamed the other.<sup>64</sup> This nosedive in Sino-US relations in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic and in the backdrop of an already escalating rivalry between the two countries over the past few years laid the foundation for the Quad Plus grouping.

On 20 March, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Beigun initiated a weekly coordination call with his counterparts in the Quad countries i.e., India, Japan, and Australia, as well as Vietnam, South Korea, and New Zealand to discuss best practices for and coordinating responses to the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>65</sup> In a similar call on May 11 but at a higher level and with a slightly different group, Secretary Pompeo spoke with the foreign ministers of the Quad member countries along with Brazil, Israel, and South Korea to deliberate "the importance of international cooperation, transparency, and accountability in combating the COVID-19 pandemic and in addressing its causes."<sup>66</sup> Multiple such calls have happened since then, which the United States has labeled "Indo-Pacific cooperation on COVID-19"<sup>67</sup> but the media has termed "Quad Plus," since it includes the members of the Quad plus a few rotating others.<sup>68</sup>

Although Washington's initiative to convene the Quad Plus calls may be seen as driven by global health security concerns, it is perhaps better explained as a strategic move intended to reemphasize US leadership of the Indo-Pacific region and is best viewed through the prism of US competition with China.<sup>69</sup> A key indication of this is the United States' utilization of the Quad mechanism as the basis for facilitating this conversation. The Quad is widely known to be a response to China's rise and is meant to be a balancing coalition of democracies aimed at deterring Beijing's bid to threaten the stability of the Indo-Pacific. Until recently, the Quad had done this primarily through increasing military interoperability among its

members and exchanging views on regional and global challenges. That the Quad, led by the United States, has now brought together other democratic partners to provide and share solutions to a problem Washington views as created by China, such as through developing a COVID-19 vaccine or making global supply chains resilient, indicates the strategic and geopolitical significance of this grouping.

To challenge the narrative about American decline and compete with China in the Indo-Pacific, the Trump administration had already begun to paint Beijing as a norm violator through various speeches and other public messaging long before the pandemic. For example, former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in October 2017 called China out for its predatory economics in the Indo-Pacific and positioned the United States as a country that would work to ensure that small states in the region retain their sovereignty.<sup>70</sup> This rhetoric only accelerated after the coronavirus pandemic, with US officials asserting that "Beijing's actions threaten our people and our prosperity" and calling for a "new grouping of like-minded nations, a new alliance of democracies" to deal with the challenge from China.<sup>71</sup> Quad Plus is likely a part of that vision,<sup>72</sup> considering the Trump administration has sought to utilize the grouping to marshal support for an investigation into the origins of the coronavirus, develop ways to support countries that may be vulnerable economically as a result of COVID-19, and fight disinformation,<sup>73</sup> all measures directed at China. Officials have described the Trump administration's preference for "mission-based coalitions" instead of cooperation in large international institutions, and the Quad Plus seems to fit the bill.<sup>74</sup>

What has aided the United States in putting this coalition together has been increasing though selective convergences between its views and those of its Quad partners on the risks that China poses in the Indo-Pacific region. This is particularly due to the hardening of the stances of Australia and India, the more reluctant of the Quad partners, toward China in the past few years. **While Australia has a high degree of economic dependence on China and was traditionally wary to rock the boat in the relationship, Beijing's increasing influence operations in the country and repeated economic coercion has pushed Canberra to stand up to China.**<sup>75</sup> Similarly, India, which has had a longstanding border dispute and a large military capability gap with China, has long preferred a hedging strategy to deal with China. However, the coronavirus pandemic and the 2020 border standoff in eastern Ladakh has forced a rethink in New Delhi, which is now more comfortable in indicating resolve to China through concrete balancing actions.<sup>76</sup> Apart from the Quad countries, **other partners involved in the Quad Plus grouping also underline its importance as a tool for the United States to expand its influence in countries**

where it has not been as present in the last few years. For instance, the inclusion of South Korea, whose relations with China were increasingly close in the early to middle years of this decade (at the expense of relations with Washington) but have since soured,<sup>77</sup> lends credence to this argument.

The motivation behind the Quad Plus grouping is arguably not just strategic but also economic in rationale. As discussed in the previous section, the US government and private industry have long been frustrated with the growing barriers and challenges that American firms face in doing business in China. For example, estimates suggest that since 2013, the United States has incurred over 1.2 trillion USD in economic damages due to intellectual property theft from Chinese companies.<sup>78</sup> With the addition of the recent trade tensions between the two countries and the economic fallout generated by the coronavirus pandemic, the Trump administration has pushed American companies to end their dependence on Chinese manufacturing and move production out of China.<sup>79</sup> While some of these jobs would move back to the United States, due to Trump's insistence on domestic manufacturing, American companies may be looking to move their supply chains to countries with inexpensive labor.<sup>80</sup> Such cooperation could be facilitated and prioritized by the Quad Plus at the highest levels, particularly since grouping members Vietnam and India could be such destinations for US firms.<sup>81</sup> The Quad Plus' focus on "reenergizing global growth and economic prosperity" in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic with special attention being paid to smaller countries<sup>82</sup> is also in line with US efforts as part of the Indo-Pacific strategy to shield vulnerable countries from "unsustainable debt" and China's potential to "[take] possession of sovereign assets as collateral."<sup>83</sup> This is also why the United States has invested in economic instruments such as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, the BUILD Act, and the Blue Dot Network to provide fair and sustainable financing options to countries facing Chinese economic coercion and looking for alternatives for their economic development.

Overall, the Trump administration has utilized the Quad Plus as a signal to Beijing that China is increasingly isolated in the world as a result of its own actions, whether with regard to the coronavirus pandemic or its territorial and economic coercion. However, whether this mechanism survives when the new US administration takes office in 2021 is still an open question, which will be discussed in the final section.

### **Biden–Harris and the Quad Plus Test**

Since the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as president and vice president of the United States, there has been significant debate in policy circles on how the administration should or would deal with China.<sup>84</sup> Will the Biden

administration's policies signal a return to Obama-era engagement of China to secure tactical cooperation while avoiding conflict, will they resemble Trump's more confrontational approach, or will they be somewhere in the middle? Biden has suggested that he would "build a united front of U.S. allies and partners to confront China's abusive behaviors and human rights violations, even as we seek to cooperate with Beijing on issues where our interests converge,"<sup>85</sup> which indicates a bifurcated strategy of competition and cooperation. However, it is too early to predict with accuracy and conviction which of those two elements will dominate. What appears at present is that Biden would like to restore American leadership in the world, return to a focus on strengthening allies and partners in Asia and Europe, and link foreign policy much more with domestic policy.<sup>86</sup>

What does this mean for his approach to the Indo-Pacific, the Quad, and the Quad Plus? There has been some apprehension over whether Biden would adopt the term *Indo-Pacific* or further the vision and strategy articulated by the Trump administration. Early indications suggest that the focus on the Indo-Pacific may stay intact, but the policy details remain to be seen. Biden has made reference to the importance of maintaining a "secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific" in various calls with foreign leaders, most interestingly with those of Australia, Japan, and India, i.e., the Quad.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, his Secretary of State nominee, Antony Blinken, has highlighted the need to work with like-minded partners "to strengthen and uphold a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific." Finally, with key US allies and partners such as France<sup>88</sup> and Germany<sup>89</sup> now adopting their own versions of an Indo-Pacific vision or road map, it would be increasingly difficult for a US president with an internationalist viewpoint not to do the same.

Arguably, it is fairly certain that the Biden administration would continue cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India through the Quad mechanism, including on jointly responding to COVID-19. First, Biden's likely pick for Secretary of Defense, Michèle Flournoy, wrote in June 2020 about the need to deepen Quad engagement to deal with Chinese assertiveness. "The incident at Galwan should serve as a clarion call to these major democracies, and other countries who are anxious about Chinese intentions and capabilities, to strengthen their bilateral and multilateral security cooperation. In a principle, it is a moment that demands US leadership to convene and mobilize the region's democracies," she said.<sup>90</sup> Second, Biden has spoken about the importance of coalition-building and has specifically mentioned democracies as key stakeholders he would like to engage in cooperating on global challenges. Thus, even if such a grouping does not have the same members as the Quad Plus, the objective of working together with like-minded nations that share values and interests and a common vision for the international order would be achieved.



However, if the Biden administration makes investments in continuing the Quad Plus collaboration, it could be a useful way of testing the utility of issue-based coalitions led by the Quad. **Can the Quad be an effective multilateral institution to check China's revisionist tendencies? Can it build a complementarity of interests with other regional groupings to respond to future global challenges like the coronavirus pandemic?**<sup>91</sup> Exploring this through regular Quad Plus dialogues, even when there is not a global emergency and perhaps with different rotating members based on the issue area, could help countries prepare for an unforeseen calamity and work together to ensure global stability. Whether the Biden administration continues the Quad Plus or not, their policies toward the Quad and the Indo-Pacific will be watched closely and are likely to be seen as a test of US resolve against China. ★

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# India and the Quad Plus

## Between Pointed-Alignment and Conjectural Alliance

DR. JAGANNATH PANDA

### Abstract

The conjectural alliance of “Quad Plus,” which is yet to find formal acknowledgment in the official discourse among the Indo-Pacific partners, is witnessing increasing traction, as the member countries fend to ensure regional stability, devoid of unilateralism and aggressive posturing. For India, the Quad Plus narrative holds immense strategic significance, since such an open framework exemplifies New Delhi’s evolution as a power in an emerging international order. With a focus on Indo-Pacific, India’s adherence to the Quad Plus framework comes as a symbolic gesture to New Delhi’s growing global outlook, where the strategic intent of having a pointed alignment with a more concentrated power structure and indistinct embracing of alliance politics, which is seeking to sustain India’s foreign policy posture within the framework of “multialignment” rather than “nonalignment,” is becoming aptly clear.

### Introduction

Alliances or alignments are the means through which states effectively secure their foreign policy advantages, and India is no different. However, as one of the few major powers that does not overtly endorse an “alliance framework”—which brings the United States, Australia, and Japan together—India has been an active partner in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (hereafter, Quad 2.0) process. More importantly, New Delhi has signaled its perception of the Quad framework more as a “conjectural alliance”<sup>1</sup> of “like-minded” countries in the Indo-Pacific. With conversations on the COVID-19 pandemic occurring both at the foreign secretary-level as well as the foreign ministers-level, there is a general acceptance of mutual commitment, building a consultative channel of understanding, and more importantly, trying to expand the compass of Quad 2.0 to a “Quad Plus,” among partner states.

While the term *Quad Plus* is yet to find an official mention in any formal statement or briefing, including those of India, the grouping has lately been gaining strategic traction. The inclusion of New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam in the weekly Quad 2.0 meeting of foreign ministry officials, initiated by the outgoing US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun in March 2020, marked the onset

of the Quad Plus mechanism.<sup>2</sup> This was followed by a higher-level meeting organized by the outgoing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in May 2020,<sup>3</sup> which saw the further addition of Brazil and Israel, indicating a grander global strategic intent. At the recently concluded Quad 2.0 second ministerial meeting in Tokyo under the new leadership of Japanese prime minister Yoshihide Suga, the foreign ministers “affirmed the importance of broadening cooperation with more countries for the realization of a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’,”<sup>4</sup> albeit through separate press statements. These measures have implied, though not explicitly stated, the importance attached to the Quad Plus narrative as a significant development for the Indo-Pacific region, especially for India.

This article examines the Indian perspective on the emerging Quad Plus framework, arguing that New Delhi’s adherence to the narrative is indicative of its changing foreign policy outlook, the strategic intent of aligning with a more concentrated power structure, and subtle embrace toward alliance politics, even though India would maintain a steadfast foreign policy posture within the framework of “multialignment” rather than “nonalignment.” India’s official stance is aptly illustrated in Foreign Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar’s statement that “India will never be part of an alliance structure.” Still, the subtle nuances shaping India’s post-Galwan outreach are being driven along the lines of alignment building with focused and pointed aims of building national security strengths vis-à-vis China in the Indo-Pacific—hence, a renewed emphasis on the Quad structures within and outside the region. Having a democratic disposition attached to it, a conjectural alliance like Quad Plus, which furthers India’s “pointed-alignment” ambitions of strengthening security, political, and economic partnerships within and outside the Quad framework, allows New Delhi to pursue India’s strategic interests in the complex regional order.

Thus, to comprehend this, the article will seek to understand the nuances attached to India’s active participation and promotion of the Quad Plus mechanism/narrative. The first part will build on the multipolarity-driven “pointed engagement” juxtaposition with pointed-alignment outlook, while analyzing the dynamics within India’s recent foreign policy overtures especially toward Quad partners and the overarching Quad Plus narrative. The next section will seek to explain New Delhi’s build-up of a conjectural alliance with the Quad Plus countries. The final section will highlight the rapidly changing India–China power-partner contention, with a primary focus on how China’s vision of Asia undermines that of India. Here, the Quad Plus framework emerges as India’s response in an attempt to protect India’s identity as an Asian power while building on the Indo-Pacific security alignments. The article concludes with an



analysis of the new normal emerging in India–China ties within the framework of the Quad and Quad Plus narratives in a post-COVID order.

### **Framing the Quad Plus Narrative**

A country's national policy is often strongly linked to its foreign policy. Yet, foreign policies, unlike national policies, are mostly “static and dynamic,” not prone to radical or revolutionary changes.<sup>5</sup> While the static notion in a foreign policy implies the sustenance of the status quo, thereby reducing risks, the foreign policy dynamism leading to activism is heavily nuanced and has stronger linkages with the external environment, implying revolutionary pathways or orientations that are both inbound (domestic) and outbound (external). Indian foreign policy follows a similar route, just like many other foreign policies in the world. However, what is unique is that New Delhi's foreign policy exhibits a mixture of both domestic and external characteristics that are close to India's aims and aspirations in a rapidly changing world order that complements the construct of national interests intertwined with India's international interests. The adherence to the Quad Plus framework is a part of this construct, which exhibits a universal, multilateral driven outlook of India without diverting much from its national interests to connect with a concentrated power structure.

New Delhi's adherence to a Quad Plus framework is a self-oriented pointed-alignment strategy that strengthens India's defense, security, and economic partnerships with the Quad (Australia, Japan, and the United States), while enhancing India's understanding with other associated partners such as Vietnam and South Korea in particular. Such an adherence builds a type of conjectural alliance without really engaging in formal alliance exercises that the United States shares with Japan and Australia in particular. Additionally, a framework of this nature imbibes the national character of universalism, endorsing the “rule of law,” democratic ideals, and free and open maritime domains that India advocates strongly in the Indo-Pacific. On the other hand, adhering to such a framework favors India's national security strategy, explicating its pointed alignment with a set of countries (mainly Quad countries), clarifying New Delhi's national security-focused character of building military strength or power in foreign policy, primarily to secure foreign policy strengths vis-à-vis adversary powers such as China.

Notably, adhering to the Quad Plus framework is part and parcel of India's competing space of being an emerging power vis-à-vis China. Emerging powers tend to go for an evolutionary yet dynamic foreign policy guideline. For instance, Beijing's political and diplomatic clout, as well as its international footprint, is a direct result of China's monumental economic growth and prowess; in 2019,

China's gross domestic product (PPP) was the largest in the world, totaling 22.5 trillion USD.<sup>6</sup> Hence, Chinese foreign policy has been deriving its direction and power from economic diplomacy and policies, especially post the global financial crisis.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, Indian economic growth has not been in tandem with that of China in the past few quarters. Indian foreign policy has always revolved around New Delhi's goal to secure India's national interests,<sup>8</sup> driven by a need to protect itself in a largely rival or unfriendly neighborhood with countries like Pakistan and China threatening India's territorial integrity and sovereignty. In the post-COVID order, this gap is only expected to widen.

India's synergy with the Quad partners has grown fundamentally more vital in the economic, security, and defense sectors. With respect to the Indo-Pacific, all four countries are increasingly finding consonance in advancing a "free, open, and rules-based" maritime order, with a focused effort to balance, if not limit or counter China's aggressiveness in the region. In fact, China's coercive posture in the South China Sea (SCS) and East China Sea (ECS) regions, Taiwan Straits, across the Line of Actual Control, and in Hong Kong, through the recently implemented National Security Law, undermine the freedoms in the region and is laying the foundation to the strengthening of strategic partnerships between the Quad member countries.

Further, the ideation of national initiatives by Quad partners has found synergy with India's own Act East Policy (AEP), Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) doctrine, Neighborhood Policy, and Indo-Pacific initiatives such as Sagarmala, which aims at rejuvenating 7,500 km of India's coastline in a major boost to its maritime sector;<sup>9</sup> Project Mausam, which focuses on better connecting Indian Ocean littorals by complementing the monsoon patterns;<sup>10</sup> and Cotton Route initiative, which emerged as a low-end balancing initiative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by aiming to improve India's ties with countries around Asia, Eurasia, or the Indo-Pacific at large.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, under Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) outlook, the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI)<sup>12</sup> and its synergy with India's AEP have resulted in extensive India-Japan collaboration, especially in India's Northeast, and specific cooperation in third countries. A collaboration between Asia and Africa is also being envisioned where India and Japan can take a leadership position to enhance an intercontinental level cooperation through public-private partnerships. Such collaborative efforts, coupled with an Asian geopolitical narrative, geographical closeness, and a mutual and historically cautious approach toward

China bring a natural political complementarity between India and Japan. These ventures, if anything, are crucial to forming a “continental connect” that India and Japan have long envisioned, both officially and unofficially.

With Australia, while India’s regional and bilateral synergy have only just started to develop, Canberra’s action-oriented Pacific Step-up policy, highlighted in its 2017 foreign policy white paper,<sup>13</sup> has arrived as a welcome addition for promoting greater collaborative synergy in the economic, political, and defense domains, wherein India and Australia are looking to indigenize as well as diversify. In the United States, the outgoing Trump administration revealed a foreign policy signifying deeper and active focus on the Indo-Pacific, more than the policy “pivot” of Pres. Barack Obama, with the establishment of multiple initiatives that are more likely to sustain as key projects with bipartisan support as Joe Biden takes office. Further, initiatives like Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP), Infrastructure Transaction and Assistant Network (ITAN), Asia Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy (Asia EDGE), and the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act of 2018 present a conjoined effort by Washington to focus on rebuilding and strengthening the US presence in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>14</sup> These initiatives are focused on not only challenging Chinese adventurism but also improving America’s strategic outreach to Asia, wherein India has emerged as a crucial partner. Among these national initiatives that have transformed into bilateral synergy, it is important also to note two key trilateral ventures: the India–Japan–Australia-led Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)<sup>15</sup> and the US–Japan–Australia-led Blue Dot Network (BDN).<sup>16</sup>

The implementation of such initiatives by Quad partners has enhanced the sphere of influence the grouping wields in the Indo-Pacific. By way of the Quad Plus narrative, much like how the synergy grew among the Quad partners themselves, an expansion of the outreach of such ventures with nations like Vietnam, New Zealand, Brazil, Israel, and South Korea can be promoted. By advocating for a truly global outlook via multilateral support for such ventures, they can together shape the post-COVID economic future of Asia and the Indo-Pacific sustainably.

For India, the Quad Plus conjectural alliance has received a more proactive thrust, particularly post the Galwan Valley clash with China. Even though the Quad Plus narrative does not imbibe to any military or security nexus, it allows India to stay in touch with a range of countries via the Quad, exemplifying India’s stature as an Indo-Pacific power. In other words, its national security calculus is encouraging India to take a more proactive foreign policy approach: protection of

Indian territorial resources, the maritime domain, and enhancing economic diplomacy are strong variables shaping New Delhi's changing China policy as well as India's increasing focus on the Quad framework. The nature of the conjectural alliance of Quad 2.0 is that of a strategic alignment that does not conform entirely to an alliance framework, unlike that of the United States and its partners. Here, it is essential to note that the COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a new era of regional flux and power balancing in Asia. India's post-Galwan foreign policy directive is shaping into a unique pointed-alignment outlook embracing a focus on stronger military, economic, and security ties with Quad 2.0 partners.<sup>17</sup> Significantly, this allows New Delhi to move away from China economically to an extent while securing India's national interests strategically. Hence, the promotion of economic synergy coupled with security understanding in frameworks like Quad Plus is vital for India.

### **New Delhi's Pointed-alignment and China**

Essentially, India's partaking in Quad Plus framework explicates a pointed alignment (as seen with Quad partners) and pointed engagement (as seen with Quad Plus partners) evolving strategy. A more robust defense, security, and economic engagement with Australia, Japan, and the United States illustrates New Delhi's pointed-alignment strategy, while India's association with Vietnam, South Korea, Israel and other countries such as France and the United Kingdom point to India's pointed-engagement strategy—even if some of these countries are not involved in fixed foreign-secretary and foreign-ministry level meetings. Such engagement complements New Delhi's pointed-alignment strategy, helping to build India's foreign policy strength in the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis China in a post-COVID-19 period. While pointed engagement is vaster in dimensions and geographical landscape, pointed alignment remains a more specific and focused strategy or outlook.

Over the past two decades—and even more in the months following Galwan—Indian foreign policy has undertaken an active outreach driven by concretization of bilateral partnerships, especially with Quad partners. While the advancement of such bilateral ties (or partnerships) has taken place across a wide spectrum of sectors, defense and military-strategic collaborations indicate how national security has shaped the Indian foreign policy landscape (table 1). In a quick recap, it can be noted that India–Australia ties have been upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with both nations signing a mutual logistics support arrangement.<sup>18</sup>

Further, India, which was elevated as a Major Defense Partner (MDP) by the United States in 2018,<sup>19</sup> has now signed the fourth and final foundational military pact with the United States: the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the signing of the much-awaited Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) between India and Japan, concluded amid India's rising tensions with China and domestic changes in Japan, signals the importance of strategic defense ties between the two nations at a time of regional and global uncertainty.<sup>21</sup> These agreements will set the stage for the future of security cooperation between India and the Quad; Japan already shares ACSAs with the United States and Australia, further strengthening the scope of regional, bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral modes of cooperation.

**Table 1. India's key defence/military agreements with Quad countries**

<b>Table 1. India's key defence/military agreements with Quad countries</b>				
S. No.	Name of Agreement	Year	Signatories/ Discussants	Key Features/Remarks
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>				
1.	<b>Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*</b>	JUN 2020	Indian PM Narendra Modi and Australian PM Scott Morrison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Shared values of democracy and rule of law</li> <li>b. Shared vision of a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region</li> <li>c. Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific</li> <li>d. Commitment to a new phase of Australia-India Strategic Research Fund to promote innovative solutions for responding to and treating COVID-19</li> <li>e. Commitment towards work in areas of digital economy, cyber security, and critical and emerging technologies under Framework Arrangement on Cyber and Cyber-Enabled Critical Technology Cooperation</li> </ul>
2.	<b>Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement (MLSA)*</b>	JUN 2020	Indian PM Narendra Modi and Australian PM Scott Morrison	Provides a framework for growing collaboration between the defence science and technology research organizations of both countries.

<b>Table 1. India's key defence/military agreements with Quad countries</b>				
3.	Framework on Security Cooperation†	NOV 2014	Indian PM Narendra Modi and Australian PM Tony Abbott	The action plan incorporated: a. Annual Summit on Foreign Policy Exchanges and Coordination b. Defence Policy Planning and Coordination c. Counterterrorism and transnational crimes d. Border Protection, Coast Guard, and Customs e. Disarmament, nonproliferation, civil nuclear energy, and maritime security f. Disaster management and peacekeeping g. Cooperation in Regional and Multilateral Fora
4.	Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation‡	NOV 2009	Indian PM Manmohan Singh and Australian PM Kevin Rudd	a. Bilateral cooperation through East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum and other multilateral frameworks b. Defence Policy Talks (Senior Officials level) c. Consultations between National Security Advisers of India and Australia
<b>UNITED STATES</b>				
1.	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)§	OCT 2020	Ministry of Defence (GoI) and National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA), US Department of Defense	BECA pertains to geospatial intelligence, sharing information on maps and satellite images for defence. This will allow India to use the US' advanced geospatial intelligence and enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons.
2.	Communications, Compatibility, Security Agreement (COM-CASA)¶	SEPT 2018	Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Indian EAM (late) Sushma Swaraj and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense James Mattis	Sharing of high-end encrypted communication and satellite data
3.	Master Information Exchange Agreement (MIEA)™	2018	Indian Ministry of Defence and US Department of Defense	Exchange of Research & Development information extended for another term of 15 years, i.e. up to Feb 2034

<b>Table 1. India's key defence/military agreements with Quad countries</b>				
4.	Memorandum of Intent <sup>⊙</sup>	2018	US Defense Innovations Unit (DIU) and Indian Defence Innovation Organisation - Innovations for Defence Excellence (DIO-iDEX)	Coproduction and codevelopment projects through the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), and to pursue other avenues of defense innovation cooperation.
5.	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)	2016	Indian Ministry of Defence and US Department of Defense	LEMOA gives access to designated military facilities on either side for the purpose of refueling and replenishment. Primarily, LEMOA covers port calls, joint exercises, training and HADR.
6.	India-US General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) <sup>τ</sup>	MAY 2002	Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Indian EAM S. Jaishankar and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper	Framework for exchange and protection of classified military information between India and US defense industries
<b>JAPAN</b>				
1.	Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) <sup>⊙</sup>	SEPT 2020	Indian Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar and Japanese Ambassador Suzuki Satoshi	Allows reciprocal provision of supplies and services between the Armed Forces of India and the Self-Defense Forces of Japan
2.	Implementing Arrangement for Deeper Cooperation between Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) and Indian Navy <sup>□</sup>	2018	Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera	Maritime domain awareness (MDA) - greater cooperation and exchange of information
3.	Agreement concerning Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation <sup>^</sup>	DEC 2015	Indian Foreign Secretary Dr S Jaishankar and Ambassador of Japan to India Kenji Hiramatsu	Enhance defence and security cooperation by making available to each other, defence equipment and technology necessary to implement joint research/development and/or production projects
4.	Agreement concerning Security Measures for the Protection of Classified Military Information <sup>#</sup>	DEC 2015	Indian Defence Secretary G Mohan Kumar and Ambassador of Japan to India Kenji Hiramatsu	Ensures the reciprocal protection of classified military information transmitted to each other

\* Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia," 4 June 2020, <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.

## *India and the Quad Plus*

† Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Framework for Security Cooperation between India and Australia," 18 November 2014, at <https://mea.gov.in/>.

‡ Australian High Commission, New Delhi, "India-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation," 12 November 2009, <https://india.embassy.gov.au/>.

§ Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Joint Statement on the third India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," 27 October 2020, <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.

¶ Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Joint Statement on the Inaugural India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," 6 September 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/>.

™ Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Ministry of External Affairs: Annual Report 2018-19," 6 August 2020, <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.

⊖ Press Information Bureau, India, "Indo-US 2+2 Dialogue," 31 December 2018, <https://pib.gov.in/>.

US Department of Defense, "U.S.-India Joint Statement on the visit of Minister of Defence Manohar Parrikar to the United States," 29 August 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/>.

τ Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Joint Statement of India-U.S. Defense Policy Group," 23 May 2002, <https://mea.gov.in/>.

⊘ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Agreement Between The Government of Japan and The Government of the Republic of India Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services Between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Indian Armed Forces," 9 September 2020, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/>.

□ Press Information Bureau, India, "Joint Press Statement on the India-Japan annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue," 20 August 2018, <https://pib.gov.in/>.

△ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of India concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology," <https://www.mofa.go.jp/>.

# Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of India concerning Security Measures for the Protection of Classified Military Information," <https://www.mofa.go.jp/>.

Beyond bilateral synergy, such a pointed alignment by New Delhi is taking shape in multilateral and trilateral forums as well. In this context, India's active support of and participation in the Quad Plus mechanism in itself is a defining factor of its emerging pointed-alignment strategies. Furthermore, Quad Plus has the potential to deepen other new and emerging initiatives in which India is involved. To export military hardware worth 5 billion USD by 2025, India has begun to move beyond its extensive defense procurement and import sector and to focus on exports by building on its initiatives like "Make in India."<sup>22</sup> Here, the United Kingdom's Democratic Ten (D-10) framework and the potential inclusion of India in the same sets a new reference for deeper tech-security collaboration in a multi-lateral framework driven by like-minded democratic countries.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the SCRI can seek to gain much broader implementation and success by closer economic integration among the Quad Plus partners.

Furthermore, India's bilateral ties with all-weather partner France have taken on greater proportions in the post-Galwan environment. France was the first country that offered India support of its troops in the immediate aftermath of the India-China Galway Valley clash. Furthermore, the accelerated delivery of Rafale jets to India showed the ever-growing alignment between the two nations. The trilateral



of India–France–Australia, which aims at creating an inclusive Indo-Pacific by rebalancing China’s assertiveness in the region, is a further testament to India’s pointed alignment.<sup>24</sup>

Factoring China in New Delhi’s foreign policy formulation or managing its relationship with Beijing is not a strategic choice for India; rather, it is a strategic necessity. A complex bilateral and neighborhood environment, competitive foreign policy discourse between the two sides, and China’s rise as an influential economic and political actor in the global decision-making process make these strategic necessities quite critical for India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Shangri-La Dialogue speech in June 2018 reflected this when he stated, “No other relationship of India has as many layers as our relations with China, and both the countries need to work together for a better Asia and the world, being ‘sensitive to each other’s interests.’”<sup>25</sup> A similar reference was equally discernible when former Indian prime minister (late) Atal Bihari Vajpayee accorded the Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation between the two nations during his state visit to China in 2003.<sup>26</sup> To this effect, India’s choices of interest in Asia and beyond vis-à-vis China is complex and raises complementarities as well as contradictions that are partly structural and partly systemic.

Additionally, India envisions a multipolar Asia, advocating a regional cooperative framework that is much more exclusive, contradicting the Chinese conception of Asia and regional order. In the Indian formulation, a multipolar Asia is more of a universal proposition than a constricted regional proposition. The Indian contention, as reflected in Prime Minister Modi’s inaugural speech at the Second Raisina Dialogue on 17 January 2017,<sup>27</sup> is that the world has absorbed multipolarity rapidly and a “multipolar Asia is a dominant reality.” India’s choice of a multipolar Asia rests on two critical aspects: (1) the diffusion of power making the notion of Asian security interlinked with global security, rendering the situation advantageous to New Delhi’s security interest regionally and globally; and (2) inclusivity should be the order of Asia, not exclusivity, indicating the possibility of bestowing a space for an external power like the United States to become part and parcel of the evolving regional security architecture.<sup>28</sup>

Such an open framework allows India to stay connected firmly with both the prime powers in the world, the United States and China. Additionally, in the Asian context, it will enable India to promote a regional paradigm of “shared leadership” among the three major Asian powers—India, China, and Japan—that offers equal opportunities to other emerging or middle powers in Asia to rise and be a part of this leadership framework. Australia, with whom India’s regional and bilateral synergy was not at par as compared to India’s other Quad partners, is also

quickly emerging as a major Indo-Pacific partner, encouraged by a “China disconnect” both countries are undertaking.

On the contrary, the Chinese conception of Asia entails an overhaul of the security structure, aimed at reducing the US-led security architecture that has been prevalent in the region since the Cold War. This assertion was evident in Chinese president Xi Jinping’s speech at the fourth Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures (CICA) in Asia in May 2014, where he endorsed the rising status of Asia in world affairs but advanced the concept of “Asia for Asians” to articulate a Chinese envisioned order with an exclusive regional character.<sup>29</sup> To China, the “Asia for Asians” proposition provides a context to bestow the security undertaking of the region in the hands of the Asian powers.

In this context, the Quad Plus framework has arrived at a crucial juncture with much to offer. India’s defense and security collaborations with the Quad Plus participating countries such as Israel, South Korea, Vietnam, and, to some extent, Brazil have been progressing over the years (table 2). Among these nations, Vietnam and India’s defense ties have seen the most amount of maturation, with Vietnam’s strategic importance as a claimant in the SCS and partnering for India’s oil exploration activities in the SCS being a resounding factor behind the dedicated focus on bettering ties. Defense ties with New Zealand, however, have seen a very minimal, albeit incremental, if not absent, growth. Complementarities in defense manufacturing, space, and nanotechnology, as well as defense cooperation, are some of the critical issues that India could pursue.

**Table 2. India’s key defense/military agreements with Quad Plus countries**

Table 2. India’s key defense/military agreements with Quad Plus countries				
S. No.	Name of Agreement	Year	Signatories/ Discus- sants	Key Features/ Remarks
<b>ISRAEL</b>				
1.	MoU to establish a new center for technical and maintenance support for India’s air defence systems*	FEB 2020	Israel Aerospace Institute and India’s Bharat Electronics Limited	Collaboration on establishing a new center for providing product life cycle support including repair & maintenance services for the air-defence systems in India.
2.	Strategic Collaboration Memorandum on UAVs†	FEB 2020	Israel Aerospace Institute and India’s Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Dynamatic Technologies Limited	That UAVs will be made in India

<b>Table 2. India's key defense/military agreements with Quad Plus countries</b>				
3.	Deal for supply of Barak-8 missile defense system by IAI for seven ships of the Indian Navy‡	OCT 2018	Israel Aerospace Institute (IAI) and India's Bharat Electronics Limited	This deal was a sign of a strong bilateral partnership in defense, which crossed 6 billion USD.
<b>VIETNAM</b>				
1.	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership§	SEPT 2016	Indian PM Narendra Modi and Vietnamese PM Nguyễn Xuân Phúc	Included a Line of Credit of 100 million USD for defense industry cooperation
2.	Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Relations for the period 2015-20‡	MAY 2015	Indian Defence Minister (late) Manohar Parrikar and Vietnamese Minister for National Defence Phùng Quang Thanh	This included an MoU on cooperation between Coast Guards of the two countries. This effort was projected as part of India's Act East Policy, aimed at deepening strategic and economic relations.
3.	MoU for the Establishment of Collaborative Relationship to Combat Transnational Crime and Development Mutual Cooperation‡	MAY 2015	Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and Vietnam Coast Guard	Following this agreement, the ICG ship ICGS Sarang conducted a four-day port call to the city of Ho Chi Minh from 27 to 31 August 2015 where the coast guards of both countries had elaborate discussions over antismuggling and antipoaching patrols.
4.	MoU on USD100 million Line of Credit for Defence Procurement"	SEPT 2014	General Manager, EXIM Bank of India Geeta Poojary and Deputy Minister of Finance of Vietnam, Trương Chí Trung	This MoU provides a concessional line of credit for procurement of defense equipment from India. This opens new opportunities in India-Vietnam defense cooperation.

5.	MoU on defense cooperation <sup>⊙</sup>	NOV 2009	Indian Defence Minister A K Antony and Vietnamese Defence Minister Ph ng Quang Thanh	To help build closer interaction between the two nations through regular defense dialogue, training, exercises, Navy and Coast Guard ship visits, along with capacity building.
6.	Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership	JUL 2007	Indian PM Manmohan Singh and Vietnamese PM Nguyễn Tấn Dũng	To intensify cooperation in defense supplies, joint projects, training, and intelligence. Also to enhance interaction between their respective defense and security establishments.
7.	Joint Declaration on the Framework of Comprehensive Cooperation <sup>τ</sup>	MAY 2003	Indian EAM Yashwant Sinha and Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyễn Dy Ni n	To enhance defense cooperation. This agreement binds both nations to conduct periodic high-ranking visits including the expansion of cooperation in defense and security spheres.
8.	Defence Cooperation Agreement/Defence Protocol <sup>⊙</sup>	MAR 2000	Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes Vietnamese Defence Minister Phạm Văn Tr	Included sale of advanced military light helicopters, assistance in repairs and overhaul of Vietnam's MiG-21 aircraft, and training assistance for pilots and technicians. Also included joint military exercises, joint campaigns on antipiracy in South China Sea and counterinsurgency training.

<b>Table 2. India's key defense/military agreements with Quad Plus countries</b>				
<b>SOUTH KOREA</b>				
1.	MoUs on Defence Cooperation□ (military logistics support agreement)	SEPT 2019	Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and South Korea's Defence Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo	To enhance defense educational exchanges and extend logistical support to each other's navies
	MoU on Defence Industry Co-operation in Shipbuilding^	APR 2017	Indian Defence Secretary Ashok Kumar Gupta and South Korean Minister of Defense Acquisition Program Administration Chang Myoung-jin	This was conceived under the overall umbrella of the Special Strategic Partnership of May 2015. This cooperation was part of the Make in India policy, under which warships will be built at domestic shipyards with South Korea's help.
2.	MoU for Cooperation between the National Security Council Secretariat of Republic of India and Office of National Security of Republic of Korea#	MAY 2015	Indian PM Narendra Modi and President of ROK Park Geun-hye	The MoU will finalise consultations between National Security Council structures in a number of areas
3.	Agreement between the Government of Republic of Korea and The Government of the Republic of India on the Protection of Classified Information+	JAN 2014	Indian Defence Minister A K Anthony and South Korea's Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se	To cooperation in the field of defense and to ensure the protection of classified military information
<b>BRAZIL</b>				
1.	Joint Venture Agreement for manufacturing an array of small arms"	JAN 2020	Jindal Defence (India) and Taurus Armas S.A. (Brazi)	Toward India-Brazil cooperation in the strategic defense sector. This agreement proposes setting up of a JV company at Hisar (Haryana, India) that will manufacture small arms based on the Transfer of Technology from Taurus to achieve localization of production in accordance with the Defence Procurement Procedure.
2.	Action Plan to Strengthen Strategic Partnership	JAN 2020	Indian PM Narendra Modi and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro	.

3.	Strategic Partnership <sup>⊕</sup>	2006	President of the Federative Republic of Brazil Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Indian PM Manmohan Singh	Based on a common global vision, shared democratic values and a commitment to foster economic growth with social inclusion for the welfare of people of both countries
4.	Defence Cooperation Agreement <sup>⊗</sup>	DEC 2003	Brazilian Defence Minister Jos Viegas Filho and Indian Defence Minister (late) George Fernandes	Cooperation in defense-related matters, especially in the fields of research & development, acquisition, and logistic support. Under this agreement, a Joint Defence Committee has been set-up that meets at regular intervals.

\* "IAI and BEL to Establish New Service and Maintenance Center for Air Defense Systems in India," Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), 5 February 2020, <https://www.iai.co.il/>.

† "HAL, Israel Aerospace Industries and DTL form strategic collaboration for manufacturing drones," Economic Times, 5 February 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>.

‡ "IAI to Provide \$777 Million worth of Barak 8 LRSAM Air & Missile Defense Systems to State-Owned BEL in India," Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), 24 October 2018, <https://www.iai.co.il/>.

§ Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Joint Statement between India and Vietnam during the visit of Prime Minister to Vietnam," 3 September 2016, <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.

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<sup>..</sup> "Jindal Defence signs JV pact with Brazil's Taurus Armas for manufacturing small arms," *Economic Times*, 30 January 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>.

<sup>o</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Action Plan to Strengthen the Strategic Partnership Between India and Brazil," 25 January 2020, <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.

<sup>≡</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, India, "India-Brazil Joint Communiqué," 12 September 2006, <https://mea.gov.in/>.

<sup>λ</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, India, "India-Brazil Relations," January 2019, <https://mea.gov.in/>.

India's support for the Quad and Quad Plus narrative, considering the post-Galwan security atmosphere, is evident and presents a grander strategic intent. In a tweet, Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar identified the first Quad Plus consultation as a "broad based virtual meeting" aimed at overcoming the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the Indian External Affairs ministry's press release titled "Cooperation among select countries of the Indo-Pacific in fighting COVID-19 pandemic" reflected more officially India's intentions to actively support the Quad Plus narrative.<sup>31</sup> More significantly, the support of a Quad Plus mechanism demonstrates India's developing grasp and embrace of an American perspective that aims to safeguard and fortify a liberal international order while zeroing in on building an Indo-Pacific narrative that has been undermined by the ascent of a revisionist China.<sup>32</sup> This is at a time when New Delhi has drawn its relationship with China on a "power-partner" contention.<sup>33</sup> To this effect, by seeking a case-by-case module in managing China, India has tried to fortify the multilateral method of relationship with Beijing, desiring to rejuvenate and improve the Bretton Woods institutions to build an agent and result-driven support for developing economies. Such a contention remained in place between the two Asian giants regardless of the developing strains with China over border conflicts and other international complexities: for example, a challenged Indo-Pacific maritime domain. India's multilateral associations with China in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB) under the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) structure and inclusion in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) are instances of such multilateral overtures by New Delhi.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to note that recognizing the Quad Plus structure does not imply that India will detach itself from these multilateral commitments with China. Likewise, India's endorsement of the Quad and the Quad Plus narrative equally lends to the fact that New Delhi might be envisioning a pointed purposive alignment with the United States. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that India is completely accepting of a US-led order that would see New Delhi give away its autonomous, independent, and nonaligned frame of foreign policy posturing.<sup>35</sup> What is rather clearly visible is India's 'pointed-alignment' within the rubrics of a multialigned foreign policy framework, which New Delhi has advocated more aptly in recent

times. Beijing's aggressive conduct on the India–China boundary, its efforts to promote friction between India and neighbors like Bhutan and Nepal (through Doklam and Kalapani, respectively), its gradually growing sea claims in the SCS and the ECS, and its forceful policies toward Taiwan and Hong Kong are all further guiding or prompting a case for change or reconsideration in India's China policies. US president Donald Trump's invitation to India, alongside Australia and South Korea, to join the Group of 7 (G7) mirrors the developing Indo-Pacific narrative in which a Quad Plus course of action fits well.<sup>36</sup>

Beyond India's existing and evolving ties with the Quad nations and countries like South Korea via the synergy found between New Delhi's AEP and Seoul's New Southern Policy, extensively covered in strategic circles,<sup>37</sup> a Quad Plus framework will further a pointed alignment, which is much needed in defense, economic, and political realms between New Delhi and Israel, Brazil, New Zealand, and Vietnam. Israel is vital to China's advancement of Xi's flagship BRI into the Middle East, and US pressure to choose between Washington and Beijing is a strategic problem for Israel.<sup>38</sup> India and Israel are already strong bilateral strategic partners, especially in the defense sector; historically, defense trade has surpassed 1 billion USD annually.<sup>39</sup> In 2020, the two nations began deepening their defense industry ties, with Israel seeking long-term partnerships via India's "Make in India" ventures. The Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and India's Bharat Electronics Limited have signed a memorandum to create a new center for Indian air defense systems.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, IAI and Hindustan Aeronautics and Dynamatic Technologies Limited have finalized a collaboration to build unmanned aerial vehicles in India.<sup>41</sup> This synergy must extend into a more profound defense alliance framework, possibly with the United States; while an economic synergy with China grows for Israel, a defense synergy with India must be encouraged at par. Under the Quad Plus framework, such defense synergy can be expanded via closer bilateral ties.

Like India, Vietnam has not shown much interest in alliance structures in the past; however, Hanoi is now looking to change its foreign policy rhetoric along realistic lines. In 2016, the two sides upgraded their ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership after almost a decade of Strategic Partnership.<sup>42</sup> As per its latest defense white paper, Hanoi has shown a clear indication that it is willing, even aiming, to pursue stronger military ties abroad.<sup>43</sup> This comes amid increasing Chinese sovereignty claims in the SCS, which Vietnam contests along with countries like the Philippines, Taiwan, Brunei, and Malaysia. China's military and technological lead in the SCS, especially maritime control of the Paracel Islands, which are claimed by Vietnam, has become a major concern for Hanoi. Looking for stronger Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) en-



gagement, Vietnam and India can indeed create a robust maritime alliance with a potential US trilateral base. Furthermore, via Quad Plus engagements, a more active thrust on the India–Japan–Vietnam trilateral could be encouraged.<sup>44</sup>

The inclusion of Brazil and New Zealand was surprising; but the motive behind the move comes from Washington and its alliance partners' attempts to disengage countries from Beijing that are extremely dependent on China. For India, Brazil is its most important trading partner in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region, with total bilateral trade worth 7.02 billion USD in 2019.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the two nations are part of multiple plurilateral frameworks such as BRICS, IBSA (a dialogue forum bringing together India, Brazil, and South Africa), the International Solar Alliance, UN, BASIC (a bloc of four large newly industrialized countries—Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), and G-20. Nonetheless, India–Brazil economic ties fall short of those shared between Brazil and China, while Beijing continues to be the leading trading partner for Brazil, with total trade worth 98 billion USD in 2019.<sup>46</sup> However, Brazil–China ties took a sour turn during the pandemic, with President Bolsonaro's son Eduardo (who is also a federal legislator and an advisor to the president) drawing a rebuke from China for comparing Chinese handling of the virus to the erstwhile Soviet Union's handling of the Chernobyl disaster.<sup>47</sup> Further, Brazil's Education Minister Abraham Weintraub, in a now-deleted tweet, said that China is using the pandemic to dominate the world.<sup>48</sup> Eduardo Bolsonaro, Weintraub, and Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo are among President Bolsonaro's high-profile advisors who advocate for less reliance on China and deeper convergence with the United States.<sup>49</sup> Hence, even though it is a member of BRICS and BASIC and a close trading partner of China, Brazil chose to be a part of the Quad Plus grouping, signaling a major potential shift in its commercial and political foreign policy in a post-COVID period.

With China being an indispensable trading partner to New Zealand, the inclusion of Wellington in the Quad Plus grouping was one of the more surprising ones. New Zealand has maintained a stringent policy of not appearing to target Beijing, despite being one of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing nations. By formally adopting the Indo-Pacific construct in February 2020, New Zealand's gradual pull away from China can be noticed.<sup>50</sup> India has been classified as a "priority for New Zealand." Hence, the mutual "interest in the prosperity and stability of the Indo-Pacific region" makes ties between the two nations poised for greater pointed-alignment.<sup>51</sup> New Zealand has highlighted in its *Strategic Defence Policy Statement* of 2018 that its "Indo-Pacific partners"—the Quad 2.0 nations of the United States, Australia, Japan, and India—are "reinforcing the rules-based order."<sup>52</sup> For India, which is now also actively working on improving ties with

Australia, a New Zealand–Australia–India trilateral, focused on the Pacific Ocean and maritime economy as well as security, can be a bold yet prudent step forward. This will allow India to not only improve economic synergy, especially within the Quad Plus framework but also expand its active maritime presence in the Pacific Ocean region—not limiting itself to the SCS or the Indian Ocean.

### **A “Conjectural” Alliance**

With New Delhi endeavoring to put preemptive pressure on China to address security concerns in the region, Beijing has been simultaneously and steadily promoting its establishment of a coercive maritime influence, mainly in the SCS and ECS zones. **Beijing’s gray-zone strategy, being largely inoffensive, offers it an adequate advantage to stake claims of its sovereignty over land, sea, and air.**<sup>53</sup> However, with the strategy gradually turning coercive, many are now finding it difficult to challenge. In fact, no one country can act as a balancer to China’s coercive maritime influence.

Contrastingly, India’s vision for the region stands at the significant intersection of partnerships and cooperation through shared goals. A multipolar maritime Asia facilitates a flexible strategic environment for India to operate with a range of countries, including the US, Japan, and other like-minded nations, through trilateral (India–Australia–Japan; India–Japan–United States) and quadrilateral formats—such as the Quad—stressing freedom of navigation and overflight. A multipolar Asia, thus, complements a conjoined and concerted maritime effort across the Indo-Pacific to balance out China’s adventurism.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, India realizes the Chinese prowess as well as the concerns in the American Cold War-style containment strategy, which is far from effective, and perhaps challenging to implement in today’s world.

The Quad Plus narrative is an evolving concept; its potential, limitations, and aspirations are at present only conjectural. With India’s pointed alignments and engagements emerging over the past decade with Indo-Pacific partners, the creation of Quad Plus and India’s participation in the same create an actively engaged and strategically aligned like-minded framework that does not completely conform to an alliance. Such a multilateral and universalist proposition promotes India’s active growth on global forums, while not departing from New Delhi’s age-old policy of eschewing an alliance framework. Allowing deeper engagement with nations like South Korea, Vietnam, and, potentially, France and the United Kingdom in a possible future, the Quad Plus is a crucial platform for the emerging international order.

If a multialigned policy strategy with a thrust toward strategic autonomy has emerged as the defining feature of Indian foreign policy,<sup>55</sup> it is to find a balance

or to accommodate China as a strategic partner in the Asian and global frameworks. Strategic autonomy offers the space to better position India's strategic interests in a systemic calculus, whereas the multialigned policy framework provides a multifold engagement structurally covering regional and global institutions, and across major, minor, immediate, and extended neighbors. Interestingly, this allows New Delhi to position India's interests both in China-centered and US-centered institutions or envisioned architecture without wholly subscribing to their respective regional visions. India's growing strategic outreach through its AEP, Link West Policy, Connect Central Asia Policy, and SAGAR in the Indian Ocean Region builds a strategic context in India's favor to back a multipolar Asian proposition where New Delhi can envision a greater role for itself in the regional decision-making process.

To this effect, the Quad Plus is instrumental in creating a channel of communication, with the strategic framework of the grouping highlighting the rapid creation of alignment structures toward a conjectural alliance. The recently concluded ministerial Quad meeting has been dubbed as an "exclusive clique" by China, focused on "harming third party's interests."<sup>56</sup> The current uncertainties in the geopolitical order present the right time for the Quad Plus and Quad 2.0 to rise as a functioning political collective or conjectural alliance. With India regularly being attributed as the most vulnerable connection of Quad 2.0,<sup>57</sup> New Delhi's post-Galwan international strategy indications have crucially demonstrated a more dynamic turn toward pointed-alignment and a more profound commitment with conjectural alliances like the Quad framework.

By supporting the Quad Plus ambit, India is seemingly becoming more accepting of the US perspective, with Washington having reciprocated by suggesting to include India in the recently expanded G7 aims. Likely to evolve as one of the most unique and vital Indo-Pacific networks of the post-COVID period, it is important that the Quad Plus framework focuses on recuperation from COVID-incited financial mishaps while defining ways toward accomplishing monetary independence. For instance, participating countries must consider removing barriers to trade and putting resources into vital activities like the SCRI.

In view of the BRI drawing focus for its alleged debt-trap setups, coupled with COVID-driven financial strains on small economies, Xi's China is undergoing a thorough worldwide examination in the post-COVID period. The United States, Japan, India, and Australia must, therefore, leverage this context to reinforce the Quad 2.0 grouping. They should cautiously actuate India to join initiatives like the BDN and expand solicitation efforts vis-à-vis the new Quad Plus countries. As an expansion of the Quad 2.0, Quad Plus seems to be allowing New Delhi to make a continental connect<sup>58</sup> and "corridor of communication," which must fur-

ther grow toward seeking a commitment from nations not aligned with China within the grouping. Prime Minister Modi's clarion call for self-reliance (*Aatmanirbhar Bharat*)<sup>59</sup> requires India to become less dependent on China-driven worldwide supply chain systems. Joining the BDN and using the Quad Plus framework to promote SCRI stands as a positive effort toward making stable supply chains and ensuring the public interest in the wake of a resurgent and hyperantagonistic China.

### **Quad Plus in the Wake of China's Assertive Rise**

China's vision for Asia, its planned military and economic rise within the region, and the inception of the Community with a Shared Future for Humankind (CSFH)<sup>60</sup> implicitly underpinning the goal to attain the "Chinese Dream" of national rejuvenation are crucial determinants pushing India toward the Quad 2.0. President Xi's efforts to present a universalist image of China via the CSFH framework, especially with its Asia-focused approach, have eroded over time, due to Chinese revisionist initiatives. Beijing's "charm offensive" strategy, shadowed by its simultaneous implementation of "wolf warrior" diplomacy, has only disenchanting Asia.

Countries like India have long been actively pushing against the BRI narrative and highlighting how China's hypocritical actions do not put its CSFH rhetoric to practice. Adding to this argument, Beijing has now sought to create its quadrilateral grouping in the South Asian trans-Himalayan region, which could be termed as the "Himalayan Quad," composed of China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nepal, under the premise of combating COVID-19.<sup>61</sup> This endeavor envisions several connectivity initiatives geared toward the overall objectives of procuring economic leverage and consolidating Beijing's normative power by spreading its influence — ultimately to cement Beijing's bid for global governance leadership. Unlike the Quad 2.0 or Quad Plus, the chances of the rapid securitization or institutionalization of a Chinese Quad are plentiful. Hence, these developments will continuously act as a backgrounder to remind and encourage India to accord increasing seriousness to the Quad process in times to come.

New Delhi, for its part, has implemented a power-partner balancing approach toward China in the different approaches India has taken vis-à-vis AIIB and BRI.<sup>62</sup> While India has welcomed most of the China-led multilateral institutions such as the AIIB and NDB, New Delhi has also opposed Chinese unilateral schemes such as the BRI. From the beginning, New Delhi has perceived the AIIB as a striking multilateral proposition coming from Asia that would benefit the country's resource accession in national and cross-border infrastructure projects. As a result, India is its second-largest shareholder in this bank.

In contrast, New Delhi has had strong reservations about the BRI from the very beginning. Its response to the Chinese invitation on the BRI was diplomatically stout and resolute. An explicit Indian stance on the BRI, which is rather dismissive, is seen in an official statement released on 13 May 2017.<sup>63</sup> The fundamental difference between the AIIB and the BRI, according to India, is the contested norms of universalism and unilateralism, respectively. To India, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a BRI project, comes as a first-scale strategic hindrance since it ignores New Delhi's sensitivities on territorial integrity.

Reciprocity has been an iron principle in foreign policy that India swears by; however, this principle is not visible when it comes to India-China relations, especially referring to the One China Policy.<sup>64</sup> China has been consistently undermining New Delhi's territorial sovereignty, vital interests in international organizations, border conflict, expanded maritime interests in the Indian Ocean, and the SCS,<sup>65</sup> all while India nurses a huge trade deficit with Beijing. In particular, lack of reciprocity in bilateral relations is reaffirmed as India shares China's sensitivities over Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang, but the same is not reciprocated by Beijing with regards to India's sensitivities over Ladakh, Kashmir, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Striking power parity with China in global decision-making bodies, particularly in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), has always been India's ambition. As reflected in Prime Minister Modi's speech at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in November 2015, more representation at the UNSC will only enhance its "credibility" and "legitimacy."<sup>66</sup> In other words, a multipolar Asia corroborates India's structural vision to reform the UNSC, with Asia having a better and bigger voice or representation in world affairs. Instead, the Indian proposition of a multipolar Asia looks to build India's strength globally, and support from China at the UNSC is a strategic necessity for India. Keeping such examples in mind, India's ties with China have been driven along a finely balanced line dividing competition and cooperation.

Hence, India's present China strategy is one of pragmatism, especially through promoting economic collaboration despite security differences. Amid this pragmatism, Prime Minister Modi planned to achieve equality of power in the bilateral and regional realm to situate India as a peer partner, rather than just a partner, of China. The signing of their "developmental partnership" in 2014, at the very onset of both Modi's and Xi's national leadership roles, was a key example of the expectations both held vis-à-vis bilateral ties.<sup>67</sup> Modi's China strategy has hence imbibed a particular portrayal of advancing commitment with balance or "engagement with equilibrium."<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, over the years, Chinese revisionist tendencies—coming to a head at Galwan—have left a lasting impact on China-India ties,

with the same changing along with the realist paradigms in the emerging security order.

The Galwan contention has embedded itself as a dark spot within the India–China ties and signals a developing distrust, regardless of diplomatic and military redressals, in the relations between the two countries.<sup>69</sup> India now appears to be ready to exploit the power distribution, reaching out past the Quad Plus nations. Such a cycle permits India to have more military, economic, and diplomatic engagement with nations that are vital to India’s emerging fortune in the Indo-Pacific. As such, Quad Plus enhancements provide a corridor of communication for India past the Quad nations, particularly with Brazil, Israel, Vietnam, and South Korea, and permits New Delhi to speed up a continental connect paradigm that India’s comprehensive Indo-Pacific standpoint has been pitching for quite a while.

Quad Plus is still in its nascence; admittedly, it does not have an institutional system, nor is it clear how it is going to proceed in the future. It is only natural that countries like Brazil, New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam are wary of taking part in an anti-China discussion, as every one of them shares large-scale economic ties with Beijing. Despite such limitations, the Quad Plus serves New Delhi’s enthusiasm for gaining power multilaterally, by reinforcing India’s relations with nations that are key stakeholders of the emerging order. The methodology of dealing with China under a power-partner parity is seemingly becoming outdated and is poised to undergo a lasting, rather concrete, change: China is now seen as a much stronger force that compromises Indian security, sovereignty, and sway.

### **The “New Normal” in India–China Ties**

Conclusively, it is important to note that India’s stake in a multipolar Asia comes more as a politico–security statement, visualizing a greater role for itself in this diffusion and distribution of power. This is primarily because it provides multiple choices to New Delhi’s rising power status and helps position India’s security interests better vis-à-vis China. This complements India’s multialigned foreign policy framework. It must be ascertained that pointed engagement refers to the broader narrative of India’s engagement with key partners across the world such as the United Kingdom, France, and the Quad Plus countries. Meanwhile, pointed alignment refers to the systematic economic, political, and military connection with Quad nations that have like-minded outlooks toward the security landscape of Asia and the Indo-Pacific. By merging these two foreign policy overtures, the creation of a conjectural alliance allows India’s foreign policy to gain much more adherence to alliance power structure and politics that nations like the United States espouse, without having to break away from the uniqueness of its own foreign policy commitment to non-alliance. The opportunities for multilateral

and bilateral synergy under such a policy are vast, allowing New Delhi to more systematically plan its post-Galwan emerging China Policy.

In this context, the Quad 2.0 and Quad Plus groupings have taken on a grander strategic significance for New Delhi, with a move away from strategic autonomy and toward defense cooperation emerging steadily. With India having recently invited Australia to the India–Japan–US trilateral Malabar naval exercise, the potential of a militarized Quad cannot really be discounted,<sup>70</sup> though India will not overtly support such a grouping to emerge as a NATO-like body. In fact, India’s hesitance to engage in a direct military-centric negotiation aimed against China will persist; a commitment to non-alliance remains vital to New Delhi’s foreign policy directions. China’s apprehensions of Quad 2.0 emerging as an “Asian NATO”<sup>71</sup> have held steady since the revitalization of the dialogue, with recent comments by the outgoing US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun at the US–India Strategic Partnership Forum discussing an “Indo-Pacific NATO” only accentuating such concerns.<sup>72</sup>

In the post-Galwan and the post-COVID period, anti-China rhetoric in India will progressively rise. The current times present an ideal opportunity for an administration-wide push to move supply chain reliance away from China, mainly under the aegis of Modi’s “Aatmanirbhar Bharat” and “Make in India” initiatives. Choosing to accept a more grounded approach to Chinese tech goliath Huawei’s incorporation in India’s 5G preliminaries is another area of reevaluation post-Galwan. It is currently an ideal opportunity for India to complete reforming and modernizing its military, especially in high-tech surveillance and defense technology and indigenization. Post-Galwan, the story of China as a partner will assume a lower priority in an official speech. The utopian goals of the India–China partnership will be supplanted by a more realistic view of their ties that puts India’s national security above any economic interests. Confrontation will no longer be an extreme reaction.

To India, China’s threat is not just military- or land-centric, it is also ideological, confronting normative ethics of the region that like-minded partners seek to preserve via a “free and open,” inclusive, and liberal rules-based international order. For India, to that effect, Quad 2.0 and Quad Plus are opportunities to create a lasting democratic security alignment, with pointed goals in economic, security, and defense terms. In the changing post-COVID order, enhanced synergy with Quad Plus nations, in an attempt to sway their own “China connect” policies and gradually break away from Chinese economic dependence, is crucial to New Delhi. ✪

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**Notes**

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# Japan and the Quad Plus

## A Japanese View for the Development and Expansion of the Quad in the Age of War on the Novel Coronavirus

HIDESHI TOKUCHI

### Abstract

The basic common principles and values of the visions for a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) are universal, and therefore not only closer partnership among the Quad members but also expansion of the Quad is necessary, based on the shared sense of the universal principles and values. In exploring the possibility of the Quad Plus, France, Germany, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the United Kingdom, and Canada would be good candidates to approach.

Despite the change in Japanese leadership from Prime Minister Shinzō Abe to Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo's commitment to FOIP and the Quad will remain unchanged. While Japan will also try to reach out to other partners, in particular ASEAN, to bolster FOIP and the Quad, a sophisticated approach toward China must be articulated, since the management of Japan–China relations will continue to be a major challenge for Japan.

### Introduction: The Concept of “Indo-Pacific”

Indian prime minister Narendra Modi said in his remarks at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, “The Indo-Pacific is a natural region.”<sup>1</sup> The factuality of that statement remains contested. The concept seems much more natural than before, but it still seems to be an artificial construct, which is inevitable, as there are not many countries that geographically face both the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

The Indo-Pacific concept tends to be viewed from the angle of the US–China rivalry alone. It is because the Indo-Pacific is not a genuinely geographical concept. It is often used with the two adjectives “free” and “open,” which means that it is value- and norm-oriented, particularly in security terms. China's behaviors are antithetical to the fundamental principles of the rules-based international order, and liberal democracies have to counter China. The rivalry and competition will be increasingly intense, and the interests of those who buttress the rules-based international order—such as the United States, Australia, India, and Japan—and the interests of those who do not, such as China and Russia, overlap less and less with each other.

There is a question as to whether those values and norms originating in Europe and the United States have become inherent in the minds of those who live in the Indo-Pacific region. Do they truly accept those concepts as their own? If the answer is affirmative, a coalition of like-minded countries—including all the Quad members—is highly promising, and even the possibility of a Quad Plus will be more likely. However, if the answer is negative, the Quad countries must address that repudiation by reconfirming their value and norm basis to promote the rules-based international order through implementing their respective visions for a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).

There is another question. Do the security interests of both sides of the systemic competition not overlap with each other? The international community should recall the multilateral relief efforts for the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami disaster of 2004, which eventually led to the creation of the Quad, and the success of the counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia in recent years. Although such nontraditional security threats as large-scale natural disasters and piracy do not always generate a successful international cooperative atmosphere, policy makers would be remiss if they neglected the opportunity to broaden the room for cooperation by identifying the convergence of interests. Right now, the international community is in the middle of another nontraditional security threat: the outbreak and spread of COVID-19 pandemic. As no one knows when or how it will end, the situation makes global cooperation in public health, medical innovation, and economic recovery more necessary and urgent than ever before for the survival and prosperity of humanity. However, the pandemic is exacerbating existing tension between the United States and China, which makes the urgently needed international cooperation difficult.

With these points in mind, this article will discuss Japan's FOIP vision in the context of the current international security environment surrounding Japan, the prospect of the Quad Plus, and the diplomacy of Japan's new administration for FOIP and the Quad Plus. It will do so based on the understanding that the Quad serves as the instrument for coordination and cooperation of the four maritime democracies to achieve their FOIP visions.

### **Japan's Security Perception and FOIP**

In November 1954, Japanese prime minister Shigeru Yoshida delivered a speech before the National Press Club in Washington, DC, during his visit to the United States, in which he said, "Japan has a vital stake in the progress of the free Asian countries. As an island nation, entirely dependent on trade, Japan knows she cannot survive unless there is free trade and friendly cooperation among us."<sup>2</sup> This recognition rings just as true today. He focused on the impact of China on Asia,

saying, “We also have a Communist China, a bleak fact of life in Asia that occupies our mind. And we have a number of new underdeveloped nations trying to make their way against the gravitational pull of Communist China.”<sup>3</sup> The FOIP vision that former Prime Minister Abe launched is an effort to address challenges caused by China, but it also takes a much wider perspective, including issues related to the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa.

Since Japan, as a maritime trade nation, has a huge stake in the stability in and free and unimpeded access to the global maritime space, China’s maritime expansion and assertive actions against the rules-based order at sea have caused major concerns in Tokyo. Kuni Miyake, special advisor to Prime Minister Suga’s cabinet is right in noting, “The vision of FOIP is not an exclusive international military order. Rather, it provides a basis for a more stable and prosperous arena in East, Southeast and South Asia as a whole. . . . Unlike the United States, Japan’s efforts to enhance the vision of FOIP is more focused on the areas of economic, cultural or law enforcement activities,”<sup>4</sup> but as the purposes of Japanese efforts to achieve FOIP include maintenance of fundamental principles and values of international order and commitment for peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region,<sup>5</sup> the security policy aspect of the FOIP vision is expected to be larger.

Though Northeast Asia, where Japan is located, has been enjoying a relatively peaceful environment, without any significant and prolonged armed conflicts for almost half a century, the environment is increasingly volatile. North Korea’s nuclear and missile development and China’s military buildup and maritime expansion are rapidly eroding the regional balance of power. The *National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG)* of 2018, Japan’s official defense policy states, “Thanks to further growth of national power of such countries as China, changes in the balance of power are accelerating and becoming more complex, thereby increasing uncertainty over the existing order.”<sup>6</sup> Japan neighbors China, North Korea, and Russia. China poses the most serious threat to Japan among these three neighbors. This prioritization of Japan’s threat perception is shown in the order of these countries in the assessment of the security environment in the *NDPG*.<sup>7</sup> Tokyo’s bottom line assessment of China is expressed in the *NDPG*: “Chinese military and other developments, coupled with the lack of transparency surrounding its defense policy and military power, represent a serious security concern for the region including Japan and for the international community. Japan needs to continue to pay utmost attention to these developments.” China’s maritime expansion in East Asia, particularly in the East and South China Seas, is the major factor in this assessment.<sup>8</sup>

The *NDPG* also refers to the importance of international partnership, saying, “In the international community, there is a broadening and diversifying array of

security challenges that cannot be dealt with by a single country alone.”<sup>9</sup> Based on this recognition, Japan holds the Japan–US alliance and international security cooperation indispensable to achieving Japan’s national defense objectives.<sup>10</sup> Although the *NDPG* is not specific about the relationship between Japan’s efforts to strengthen its alliance cooperation with the United States and promotion of the FOIP vision, the role of the Japan–US alliance as defined in the *NDPG* is worthy of attention in this context: “The Japan-US Alliance, with the Japan-US Security Arrangements as its core, plays a significant role for peace, stability and prosperity of not only Japan but also the *Indo-Pacific* region and the international community” (emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> It is the first time in the history of Japanese defense policy that the role of the Japan–US alliance has been defined using the Indo-Pacific nomenclature. Previously, it was labeled Asia-Pacific.<sup>12</sup> This change is subtle but significant, as, together with another sentence, it suggests the expansion of the scope of the alliance cooperation: “In order to create a desirable security environment including maintenance and enhancing *free and open* maritime order, and with an eye on increasing Japanese and US presence in the *Indo-Pacific* region, Japan will conduct bilateral activities such as capacity building assistance, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) and counter-piracy” (emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

The *NDPG* is much clearer about the relationship between international security cooperation and promotion of the FOIP vision: “In line with the vision of free and open Indo-Pacific, Japan will strategically promote multifaceted and multi-layered security cooperation, taking into account characteristics and situation specific to each region and country.”<sup>14</sup> In this context, the *NDPG* also says, “In implementing these initiatives [on defense cooperation and exchanges], Japan will position the Japan-US Alliance as its cornerstone and will work closely with the countries that share universal values and security interests, through full coordination with its diplomatic policy.”<sup>15</sup> In accordance with this precept, the *NDPG* prioritizes Japan’s defense cooperation with Australia and India.<sup>16</sup> As the previous *NDPG* of 2013 gave South Korea the first priority and gave Australia and India only the second and the sixth priority respectively,<sup>17</sup> the upgrading of security ties with these two partners is noticeably significant in the present defense policy.

There are three important points with regard to Japan’s approach toward the Quad in security terms. First, the FOIP vision has become a pillar of Japan’s security cooperation with its partners, but the national security aspect of the vision is not articulated in the *NDPG*. This disconnect renders the security aspect of the FOIP vision vague, though it makes flexible implementation of the FOIP vision by the Japanese defense forces possible.

Second, the quadrilateral security cooperation of Japan, the United States, Australia, and India is not mentioned in the *NDPG*. However, the policy declares Tokyo's intent to "strengthen cooperative relations under trilateral framework among Japan, Australia and the United States, which share universal values and strategic interests" and to "strengthen cooperation among Japan, India and the United States,"<sup>18</sup> and these two triangles will foster the Quad. However, the lack of any mention of the Quad itself in the *NDPG* of 2018 implies that Japan was not ready to fully integrate its military establishment into the Quad framework in 2018.

Third, the *NDPG* attaches importance to multilateral frameworks such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and the ASEAN Regional Forum and declares Tokyo's intent to contribute to strengthening cooperation and mutual trust among the countries in the region.<sup>19</sup> However, it does not say anything specific about Japan's prospect on the future mode of these existing frameworks. Therefore, the Japanese position was open at the time of creation of the *NDPG* about the possibility of the enlargement of the existing frameworks, including the Quad.

### **The Prospect for the "Quad Plus" to Achieve FOIP**

The basic common principles and values of the FOIP visions of the Quad members, including the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade are universal. While the strong partnership of the four major maritime democracies in the Indo-Pacific is indispensable to maintain and promote these principles and values in the vast and dynamic region, there is a limit to what these four countries can do in this regard. Outreach is inevitable. As a number of regional security frameworks and networks already exist, networking the Quad with these other endeavors will be more useful and realistic than trying to establish a new overarching framework from scratch. However, such networking is not the only option to promote the function and value of the Quad. Expansion of the Quad should be explored, and the basis of such expansion should and will undoubtedly focus on a sense of the universality of their shared principles and values.<sup>20</sup>

Incidentally, some other countries from inside and outside the region began to establish their own Indo-Pacific strategies or similar visions. These countries would be good candidates for the Quad Plus. For example, French president Emmanuel Macron delivered a speech in Australia in 2018, in which he referred to an Indo-Pacific strategy. The French strategy is not viewed as exclusively a military one,<sup>21</sup> but it is an expression of Paris's intention to contribute to regional stability through its military and security cooperation and to preserve free and open access to maritime lines of communication with its partners.<sup>22</sup> As the French



focus on the Indo-Pacific security includes not only the South China Sea and the freedom of navigation but also North Korea,<sup>23</sup> its scope overlaps with the Japanese FOIP vision more than some other countries' perspectives do, because North Korea has been one of the immediate threats to Japan.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, Germany established its policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific in September 2020. Berlin defined its interests as including the peace and security of the region, closing ranks with democracies and partners with shared interests in the region, and open shipping routes. The principles that guides the German policy include the rules-based order, emphasizing the rule of law in contrast to "the law of the strong."<sup>25</sup> Similar to the French strategy, the German policy also mentions North Korea as a priority.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the German policy shares a number of commonalities with Japan's FOIP. However, Peter Schoof, German Ambassador to Indonesia and ASEAN, commented about the policy guidelines: "Other countries that have engaged conceptually with the Indo-Pacific include Japan, the USA, Australia, India and France, as well as ASEAN as a whole with its 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.' Most of the concepts follow a cooperative approach towards China, as do the German guidelines, which stress that inclusivity is an important principle."<sup>27</sup> The existence of such a cooperative approach toward China is debatable. Schoof is right in saying that most of these countries stress inclusivity, but their emphasis on the fundamental principles and values is a sign of their competitive or even confrontational approach toward China. Though Japan will welcome Germany's growing attention to the Indo-Pacific and concept of FOIP, Japan might view Germany's emphasis on the cooperative approach toward China as rather naïve.

A similar point could be made regarding ASEAN's approach. In June 2019, the ASEAN published the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)*, following close on the heels the US Department of Defense publishing *America's Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*. Tomotaka Shoji argues that the *AOIP* seems like ASEAN's response to the US report, pointing out three major characteristics of the *AOIP*. First, it is a euphemistic expression of the ASEAN's refusal to join the encirclement of China. Second, the policy reaffirms the centrality of ASEAN and the importance of the multilateral cooperative framework of ASEAN. Third, the *AOIP* focuses not on security but on economy. Shoji also argues that the ASEAN's emphasis on a win-win relationship and economic factors, its expectation of a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and its avoidance of reference to security issues—including the South China Sea issue—show ASEAN's affinity for China's Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>28</sup> In November 2019, while attending the 14th EAS, Prime Minister Abe stated, "Japan fully endorses AOIP. Japan will cooperate with ASEAN toward materializing AOIP, by achieving synergies with

the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' concept advocated by Japan."<sup>29</sup> This position continues to be the Japanese position today. However, the ASEAN is divided in some of the fundamental values, such as the freedom of navigation, which reflects the difference of the positions of the ASEAN members on the South China Sea issue. Thus, it is uncertain if Japan could continue to fully support the AOIP. When the ASEAN is chaired by a country, such as Vietnam, that takes a tough position on China about the South China Sea issue, Japan's full support for the AOIP will be certain, but when less strident nations hold the chair, such support is less likely.<sup>30</sup>

The United Kingdom is also noteworthy as a potential partner. The country possesses territories in the Indo-Pacific and today pays more attention to the Indo-Pacific, showing a willingness to be more engaged in the region. Though the British *National Security Capability Review* of 2018 uses both the "Asia-Pacific" and "Indo-Pacific" nomenclatures, the Indo-Pacific is regarded as one of "the three primary centres of the global economy and political influence," and it says Britain "must maintain and build on our strong relationships across these regions."<sup>31</sup> This document also highlights Japan as one of Britain's "global strategic partners" and stresses the two nations' upgraded security and defense partnership.<sup>32</sup> In economy and trade, the United Kingdom has opened discussions with all the members of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) to discuss potential UK accession,<sup>33</sup> and during her visit to Tokyo in October 2020, British trade secretary Liz Truss expressed her country's strong interests in joining CPTPP in a meeting with Japanese economy minister Yasutoshi Nishimura. The Quad should not miss the opportunity to engage this maritime democracy.

Finally, Canada should be considered as well. Ottawa has become more engaged in Indo-Pacific affairs in recent years, including Canada's dispatch of aircraft and vessels to thwart ship-to-ship transfers circumventing maritime sanctions against North Korea. When Prime Minister Abe visited Ottawa in April 2019, he shared Japan's FOIP vision with Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau, and the two leaders agreed to advance it through a range of initiatives.<sup>34</sup> There is a media report that Canada is formulating a fresh Indo-Pacific policy.<sup>35</sup> Like the United States, Canada is both a Pacific and Atlantic nation and a NATO member. Therefore, Canada is expected to be a bridge between the Indo-Pacific region and the Atlantic region and to contribute to the enlargement of the scope of the FOIP vision. Additionally, Ottawa could assist in exploring partnership with like-minded countries in Europe.

Until recently, the Quad Plus was an abstract idea, and it does not seem that Japan was ready for its actualization. However, the Quad Plus is now becoming

a reality. On 11 May 2020, a video teleconference called “a meeting on the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) among foreign ministers of interested countries, hosted by the United States” was held, attended by the foreign ministers of the Quad’s four members and of South Korea, Israel, and Brazil. Attendees discussed the need for coordination and cooperation among relevant countries in relation to COVID-19 as well as measures to prevent the spread of infections.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to find any reference to Tokyo viewing this meeting as part of the Quad Plus efforts; however, some observers discuss this conference as such.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Japan’s efforts to share the FOIP vision with as many other countries as possible should be accompanied with similar efforts to enlarge the Quad construct. Incidentally, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo launched an idea of “a new grouping of like-minded countries, a new alliance of democracies” in his remarks on US policy on China in July 2020.<sup>38</sup> While Washington has not elaborated this idea yet, it would be consonant with the Quad Plus efforts. In this international environment, it is high time for Japan to seriously consider the idea of the Quad Plus in specific terms.

### **Prime Minister Suga’s Diplomacy and the Future of the Quad**

On 28 August 2020, Prime Minister Abe declared he would step down due to health issues. Yoshihide Suga, who had served in the Abe cabinet as Chief Cabinet Secretary, replaced Abe on 16 September.

The Abe administration’s national security policy had three major points: (1) passing security legislation to put the reinterpretation of the Constitution with regard to use of military force into practice, (2) strengthening the Japan–US alliance, and (3) procuring international cooperation based on Japan’s FOIP vision.<sup>39</sup> Upon assuming leadership, Prime Minister Suga pledged to “carry on the initiatives implemented under the Abe administration and advance them further.”<sup>40</sup> This pledge was made mainly in the context of Japan’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Suga’s intention to secure continuity of the diplomatic and security policy of the previous cabinet is obvious in his other statements. For example, he held a summit telephone talk with Australian prime minister Scott Morrison on 20 September, in which the two leaders confirmed “the importance of realizing the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific,’ deepening their cooperation for the stability and prosperity of the international community as a whole, and collaborating with like-minded countries in the region.”<sup>41</sup> A few hours later, Suga held his first telephone conversation with Pres. Donald Trump, in which the two leaders “shared the view that Japan and the United States would work closely together . . . to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific.”<sup>42</sup> Then, he addressed to the seventy-fifth session of the

General Assembly of the United Nations on 26 September, referring to the importance of the principle of the rule of law as the foundation of both domestic and international order: “Japan continues to promote a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, the foundation of regional peace and prosperity rooted in the global rule of law.”<sup>43</sup> From these statements, the political vector of the Suga cabinet to promote Japan’s diplomacy under the banner of FOIP and strengthening Japan’s alliance relationship with the United States is clearly demonstrated.

Then, two remarkable developments followed: the second Quad foreign ministers’ meeting in Tokyo, and Prime Minister Suga’s visit to Southeast Asia. First, Tokyo hosted the second Quad ministerial meeting on 6 October. According to the press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan,

The four Ministers affirmed the importance of broadening cooperation with more countries for the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” as the vision serves for the peace and prosperity of the region and its importance in the post-COVID world is increasing. In this regard, the four Ministers reaffirmed their strong support for ASEAN’s unity and centrality as well as the ASEAN-led regional architecture. They also reaffirmed their full support for the AOIP. They also welcomed proactive efforts by other countries including those in Europe toward a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.”<sup>44</sup>

While reference to their support for ASEAN Centrality is found in the statements of the other Quad members as well,<sup>45</sup> it is only in Japan’s press release that reference to European countries’ proactive efforts toward FOIP is made. This indicates that the four countries have built consensus to achieve closer partnership with the ASEAN. If so, the ASEAN will be a strong candidate for the Quad Plus. The Japanese press release also indicates Tokyo’s special attention and interest in partnering with European countries to realize FOIP, though it remains uncertain if the other three Quad members are as interested in a stronger partnership with European countries in the Quad context.

Second, the destination of Suga’s first official overseas trip as prime minister was Southeast Asia, a focal point of the FOIP vision. He visited Vietnam, this year’s ASEAN chair, and Indonesia, the biggest economy and most populous nation in the ASEAN. In his speech at the Vietnam-Japan University, Hanoi, Suga emphasized the commonalities between AOIP and FOIP:

What brought about the wide range of cooperation between ASEAN and Japan I have outlined so far? I believe the key is that ASEAN and Japan fully share fundamental principles such as the rule of law, openness, freedom, transparency and inclusiveness. . . . The ASEAN Outlook powerfully sets for the rule of law, openness, freedom, transparency and inclusiveness as the ASEAN’s principles for behavior. The fact that it shares many fundamental commonalities with the

FOIP Japan is advocating for is tremendously encouraging for me. I strongly support AOIP. I firmly believe that we can create a peaceful and prosperous future along with ASEAN with these fundamental values in common.<sup>46</sup>

Japan's continuous and increasingly stronger commitment to advance the Quad and also to reach out to other partners to promote FOIP has been demonstrated in these recent remarks and developments.

However, management of the Japan–China relation will continue to be a major challenge for Japan. In his first press conference as the prime minister on September 16, Suga stated, “I will protect the national interests to the end and for this purpose would like to strategically promote the Free and Open Indo-Pacific and to establish stable relations with the neighboring countries including China and Russia.”<sup>47</sup> It requires delicate efforts to promote the FOIP vision and simultaneously establish a stable relationship with China. Though FOIP is not exclusive in nature and the Quad ostensibly is not an alliance to counter anyone, confrontation with China is inevitable, as Japan is a staunch ally of the United States in this age of US–China rivalry. Thus, so long as China continue to raise objections to the rules-based international order, from which Japan has benefited for decades, unstable relations with the powerful and cumbersome neighbor would not be in Japan's interests. Soon after the Quad ministerial meeting in Tokyo, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi made comments against the Quad and FOIP during his visit to Malaysia:

In essence, [the Indo-Pacific strategy] aims to build a so-called Indo-Pacific NATO underpinned by the quadrilateral mechanism involving the United States, Japan, India and Australia. . . . What it pursues is to trumpet the Cold War mentality and to stir up confrontation among different groups and blocs and to stoke geopolitical competition. What it maintains is the dominance and hegemonic system of the United States. . . . In this sense, this strategy is itself a big underlying security risk. If it is forced forward, it will wind back the clock of history.<sup>48</sup>

In the face of Beijing's stance, Japan must undertake significant efforts to avoid unnecessary tension in the relationship with China.

Coincidentally, when asked about the idea of an Asian version of NATO, which one of his political opponents had advocated during the presidential election of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Suga responded, “The idea of an Asian version of NATO is wrong in the context of the US-China confrontation because it would be encirclement of China.”<sup>49</sup> Even though he clearly rejected the idea, China's aversion to the Quad will not disappear, as the Quad will be more operationalized and its function will be expanded. For example, the Malabar naval exercise held in

November 2020 brought together all four Quad partners, following India's invitation to Australia.<sup>50</sup> This event added a military security aspect to the Quad, and thus, China's criticism against the Quad might be even stronger.

Today's world has two faces: the international society of sovereign states and the global society transcending national borders. China is a competitor in the international society and a partner in the global society. The FOIP vision is a tool of competition and cooperation with China. A sophisticated approach toward China will have to be articulated in the implementation of FOIP and in the promotion of the Quad, including the quest for Quad Plus. Finding a balance is a common serious challenge for all the four Quad members. Japan, as a maritime nation situated on the periphery of the Chinese land mass, serving as a bulwark to block China's maritime expansion, will have to elaborate its own FOIP vision in the face of this intricate environment.

Japan's national security policy review is expected to conclude in December 2020. Though the primary focus of the review is on missile defense and counter-strike capabilities, the reform should not be limited to these issues. A whole set of clear answers about how to promote the FOIP vision to bolster the rules-based international order is anticipated. ♀

### **Hideshi Tokuchi**

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# A Quad Plus?

## The Prospects for Australia and New Zealand

MIGUEL A. HÍJAR-CHIAPA

### Abstract

Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new regional construct has emerged, illustrating the increasingly shifting balance of power: the Indo-Pacific. As a way to operationalize this idea, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States formed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, informally known as Quad, in 2007. But the initiative did not prosper and was disbanded a year later. Nevertheless, after being dormant for ten years, the Quad was revived in 2017 with the aim to respond to the challenges resulted from the changes in the status quo, especially those associated with the rise of China. In 2020, however, the COVID-19 pandemic became the most pressing threat to the stability of the region and, therefore, the four like-minded partners decided to gather to discuss this issue but this time with the involvement of additional states: the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand first, and then Brazil and Israel. This conjunctural expansion has led to the belief that a Quad Plus might be in the making. Although this enthusiastic view might be initially welcomed by Australia, it raises important questions for a country such as New Zealand that has been quite cautious about its engagement with the idea of the Indo-Pacific. This article aims to explore the potential ramifications of an expanded Quad for Australia and New Zealand, the interests that might come into play for both countries in taking part of such a grouping, and the broader implications for the regional order.

### Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—informally known as Quad—was initiated by Australia, India, Japan, and the United States in 2007 as a way to materialize the idea that came to be known as the Indo-Pacific, a vast maritime zone comprising the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the states littoral to it. The forum and the military exercises parallel to it were widely seen as a response to the challenges resulting from the changes in the status quo since the turn of the century, especially those associated with the rise of China. This move triggered immediate diplomatic protests from Beijing to the four members, something that is thought to have motivated Australia's withdrawal

from the forum. This was one—if not the main—of the many causes of a long hiatus that finally ended in 2017 with the revival of the group.

In 2020, however, the COVID-19 pandemic became the newest and most pressing threat to the stability of the region. Consequently, the Quad partners decided to gather to discuss this issue. However, this time, they sought the additional involvement of three more states: the Republic of Korea (ROK), Vietnam, and New Zealand. Then, at a later stage, Brazil and Israel were also included. This conjunctural expansion has led to the belief that a broader partnership might be in the making in the form of a Quad Plus.

For Australia, one of the most ardent promoters of the new construct, the potential incorporation of these actors could be seen as a positive step toward wider acceptance of the proposal for an Indo-Pacific order. Nevertheless, such an enthusiastic view raises important questions for a country such as New Zealand, which has been quite cautious about its engagement with the new idea of the region mainly due to its strong economic ties with China.

Therefore, this article aims to explore the questions that an expanded Quad may raise for Australia and New Zealand, how their identities and interests might come into play in deciding to take part of such a potential alliance, as well as the potential effects on their behaviors and their relations with other actors in the region.

### The Rise, Fall, and Revival of the Quad

The discussion about the Quad is embedded in a broader debate about the regional—and, to an extent, global—order, that is, the “pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society.”<sup>1</sup> This pattern, however, is not the unintended consequence of international anarchy, but rather a social construction,<sup>2</sup> for, as Alexander Wendt claims, *anarchy is what states make of it*.<sup>3</sup>

This means that states act toward others on the basis of the meanings they give to those others, because “it is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions. Actors acquire identities—relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self—by participating in such collective meanings.”<sup>4</sup> The Quad, in this sense, is not the mere result of the interaction between sovereign states in an anarchical environment but the product of a new collectively built conception of the regional order: the idea of the Indo-Pacific.

While it is argued that the Quad has its origins in the Tsunami Core Group, which formed to cope with the effects of the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004, it was not until two years later that the stars really aligned.<sup>5</sup> In 2006, India and

Japan announced their interest in having a dialogue with other like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region on themes of mutual interest.<sup>6</sup> The United States and Australia soon joined in,<sup>7</sup> and so the stage was set for the inaugural meeting of Quad 1.0 on 25 May 2007 on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, which highlighted the democratic nature of the group.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, in August 2007, Japanese prime minister Shinzō Abe presented to the Indian Parliament the idea of this “broader Asia” taking shape at the “confluence of the two seas” of the Indian and Pacific Ocean, with Japan and India coming together and incorporating the United States and Australia. He then emphasized how the identities of these four states imprinted this new construct with a distinctive seal and a special mission:

Can we not say that faced with this wide, open, broader Asia, it is incumbent upon us two democracies, Japan and India, to carry out the pursuit of freedom and prosperity in the region? . . . From now on let us together bear this weighty responsibility that has been entrusted to us, by joining forces with like-minded countries.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, in September of that year, the four like-minded countries (plus Singapore) held the Quadrilateral Malabar Exercise in the Bay of Bengal, operationalizing the security dialogue.

It is no coincidence that these states decided to form the Quad, for it was their identities as democracies, the meaning they gave to each other, and their collective environment that constituted the basis for action. This shared identity was even invoked by Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh when the newly created group was met with condemnation from China: “I spoke to President Hu and explained that there was no question of ganging up . . . We met to exchange views on development from our experiences as democracies.”<sup>10</sup>

Although the ire of Beijing is thought to have led to the withdrawal of Australia in 2008 and, thus, the disappearance of the first iteration of the group, the Quad was revived at the foreign ministerial level on 12 November 2017 as a response to an increasingly changing regional landscape and as a reconfirmation of its original spirit: “The quadrilateral partners committed to deepening cooperation, which rests on a foundation of shared democratic values and principles, and to continue discussions to further strengthen the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>11</sup> Since then, the four partners have moved toward closer engagement and cooperation in diverse areas, and that is precisely what lies behind the convening of the ad hoc group now being dubbed Quad Plus.

In the midst of the global pandemic of COVID-19 that started in China in late 2019 and rapidly spread throughout the world in early 2020, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun summoned foreign officials from India, Japan, and Australia, as well as from New Zealand, the ROK, and Vietnam, for the first of regular weekly meetings to discuss policy responses to the public health emergency.<sup>12</sup> Then in May 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hosted a foreign ministers' meeting on the novel disease—and the post-pandemic state of the international order—which also included the representatives of the aforementioned countries—except for New Zealand and Vietnam—plus Brazil and Israel.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, a Quad Plus narrative was triggered in mass media, academic, and strategic circles, although there has not been any official mention of the term. This raises questions about the prospects for such a group to emerge—not only as a result of the health and economic crises, but also of a sense of shared interests and goals.

Official statements from the United States,<sup>14</sup> India,<sup>15</sup> Japan,<sup>16</sup> the ROK,<sup>17</sup> and Vietnam<sup>18</sup> merely highlighted cooperation with partners across the Indo-Pacific region to counter the spread of the virus, develop vaccines, address the challenges of stranded citizens, and mitigate the impact on the global economy (while Brazil and Israel have not released any statements on the meetings yet). However, official statements from Australia and New Zealand went further, calling to “build support for an independent review of the COVID-19 outbreak, emphasise the importance of rules-based open markets,”<sup>19</sup> and uphold the “fundamental Indo-Pacific principles of openness, transparency, respect for sovereignty and adherence to international law.”<sup>20</sup> Could this be a sign of a strong commitment from these two countries to the idea of the Indo-Pacific and a possible first step toward closer collaboration in the form of a Quad Plus?

### **Australia and the Quad**

Although now regarded as one of its most ardent advocates, Australia has been blamed for abandoning and, therefore, putting an end to the first iteration of the grouping to avoid enraging China.<sup>21</sup> Reality, however, was much more complex than that. As former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has claimed in an effort to set the record straight, it was not only his decision of suspending Canberra's participation—which was surprisingly announced by then-Foreign Minister Stephen Smith while in a joint press conference alongside his Chinese counterpart in Beijing<sup>22</sup>—that disbanded the forum, but also New Delhi's limited enthusiasm, Washington's reticence, and Tokyo's change of priorities after Abe's first stint as prime minister was suddenly ended in September 2007.<sup>23</sup> Yet, Australia had to do damage control

and, as Prime Minister Scott Morrison has argued, work “patiently to restore trust and confidence.”<sup>24</sup>

Fast forward to 2017, with trust rebuilt—and a much more assertive China in sight—with the governments of Shinzō Abe, Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, and Malcolm Turnbull on the same page again, the Quad was reconvened. Since then, Australia has continued to actively engage its three partners to deepen their security cooperation. And now, with the world facing a grave health emergency, the incentives for further collaboration are even stronger, for, as the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade media release on the Quad Plus meetings maintains, “the stability, prosperity and resilience of the region will have a direct impact on Australia’s interests.”<sup>25</sup>

Notwithstanding the lack of recognition of a possible expansion of the original group in any of the official statements of the seven of the nine countries that have been involved in the meetings (Brazil and Israel have not released any), questions about its feasibility are being raised. But, given the many opportunities this scenario could present to advance Australian interests, it would not be too audacious to say that Canberra could positively welcome a Quad Plus. The logic behind this claim rests on Australia’s enthusiasm in reimagining the regional order.

Australia’s first official embrace of the idea of the Indo-Pacific took place in 2013 with the release of the *Defence White Paper*, in which, it was insisted, the country was going through an “economic strategic and military shift to the Indo-Pacific.”<sup>26</sup> However, discourse was also accompanied by policy and, therefore, the importance “to create and deepen defence partnerships and contribute to regional security architecture”<sup>27</sup> was highlighted. Then in 2016, a new *Defence White Paper* was published, establishing a stable Indo-Pacific region as one of Australia’s three key Strategic Defence Interests.<sup>28</sup> The document indicated that Australia will continue to work with the United States under the Australia, New Zealand, and United States (ANZUS) Treaty<sup>29</sup> to pursue close collaboration with strategic partners.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* asserted Canberra’s determination “to realise a secure, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific, while also strengthening and diversifying partnerships across the globe.”<sup>31</sup> Due to this emblazonment of the new regional construct across its strategies, Australia has sought to build and deepen strategic partnerships with India, Japan, the ROK, and the countries of Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia and Vietnam), and its close friend New Zealand—apart from its alliance with the United States.

Although Australia’s partnerships with Japan and India have continuously deepened since the first decade of this century, the Indo-Pacific rationale has furthered this process. In 2014, the relationship between Australia and Japan was elevated to a Special Strategic Partnership.<sup>32</sup> That same year, building on the basis

of the 2009 strategic partnership<sup>33</sup> and Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation,<sup>34</sup> Australia and India extended defense cooperation.<sup>35</sup> Then in 2017, the three countries welcomed “continued and deepened trilateral cooperation and dialogue.”<sup>36</sup> And more recently, in the context of the ongoing global pandemic, Australia reaffirmed with Japan their commitment to combat the pandemic and build “a prosperous, open and stable post-COVID-19 world, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific region,”<sup>37</sup> and decided with India on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region<sup>38</sup> and elevated the bilateral Strategic Partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Something to note is that the joint statement highlighted the consultations on COVID-19 with Japan, New Zealand, the ROK, Vietnam, and the United States and “welcomed the inaugural Quad ministerial meeting with Japan and the United States in September 2019, and reaffirmed their commitment to ongoing Quad consultations” in the same paragraph.<sup>39</sup> Whether this might be a subtle nod to the idea of expanding the Quad or not, deeper multilateral cooperation would be the natural next step for Australia, given the diverse range of partnerships and plans that it has agreed with New Zealand, the ROK, and Vietnam.

Australia and the ROK share values and a common strategic outlook and also enjoy a mature economic relationship, yet cooperation on political, defense, and security issues needs to be enhanced.<sup>40</sup> In 2009, both countries agreed on a comprehensive Action Plan for Enhanced Global and Security Cooperation, which committed to annual foreign ministers’ meetings and cooperation on a wide range of issues.<sup>41</sup> Then in 2014, a Vision Statement for a Secure, Peaceful and Prosperous Future was issued<sup>42</sup> and to that followed a Blueprint for Defence and Security Cooperation in 2015, which extended security and defense cooperation.<sup>43</sup> And while the 2019 Foreign and Defence Ministers’ 2+2 meeting resulted in a commitment to support a peaceful, prosperous, and stable Indo-Pacific region through closer engagement and coordination between Australia’s Indo-Pacific strategy and the ROK’s New Southern Policy,<sup>44</sup> the long due strategic partnership that could elevate ties between both like-minded middle powers remains to be agreed.<sup>45</sup>

The relationship with Hanoi, nevertheless, is rather different to the one with Seoul. Although no references are made to shared values between Australia and Vietnam—due to the very different nature of their political systems—official statements have always alluded to shared interests. Consequently, both countries decided to establish a Comprehensive Partnership in 2009; a Plan of Action followed suit.<sup>46</sup> Then in 2015, Canberra and Hanoi committed to enhance the Comprehensive Partnership and develop a second Plan of Action.<sup>47</sup> Their growing mutual interests finally led to the establishment of a Strategic Partnership three years later, pledging to work to ensure that the “region remains peaceful, resilient

and shaped by the rules and norms that have prevailed for decades”<sup>48</sup> through wide-range cooperation. This particular case shows that convergent interests can also help create a sense of community—of a shared, collectively built idea of the region—even between states with different identities and values.

On the other hand, the relationship with New Zealand is indeed one based on shared identities and values and a common history that have turned the two countries into “natural allies with a strong trans-Tasman sense of family.”<sup>49</sup> But, this is not like any other partnership with a like-minded state: it is Australia’s closest and most comprehensive of all its bilateral relationships. Canberra and Wellington’s strong security ties have been formalized through the 1944 Canberra Pact, the 1951 ANZUS Treaty, the 1991 Closer Defence Relations agreement (updated in 2018), and a framework for closer consultation and engagement on defense that has been implemented since 2012 (in accordance with the recommendations of the 2011 Review of the Australia-New Zealand Defence Relationship) and materialized through a long history of joint deployments and operations around the globe. Furthermore, their prime ministers hold annual formal talks and their foreign, trade, and defense ministers meet regularly to discuss the bilateral relationship and their close cooperation in global and regional fora.<sup>50</sup> And, although Australia recognizes “that New Zealand will make its own judgements on its national interests, and that New Zealand’s military capability choices may not always reflect Australia’s,”<sup>51</sup> more recently, following the pledge made in the 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper*, Canberra and Wellington have aligned their Pacific Step-up and Pacific Reset policies and have committed to deepen further their essential partnership in support of the economic growth, stability, and security of the region.<sup>52</sup>

Even though Brazil and Israel have not issued official statements on the Quad Plus meetings, it is worth exploring Australia’s relations with these two countries. Although there are historical links between Australia and Israel, closer cooperation on security issues is of recent advent. Since 2017, both countries have expanded cooperation on national security, defense, and cybersecurity. Accordingly, annual strategic talks between defense officials started in 2018, while in early 2019, a resident defense attaché to the Australian Embassy in Tel Aviv was appointed and the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on cybersecurity cooperation.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the bilateral relationship is far from being at the same level as those with Seoul, Hanoi, or Wellington. In the case of Brazil, a Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of an Enhanced Partnership between the two countries was signed in 2010 and in 2012 a Strategic Partnership was agreed. The joint statement emphasized priority areas of dialogue and cooperation, such as the global economy, international security, trade and investment, resources



and energy, education, science and technology, development cooperation, environment and sustainable development, and natural disasters. They also agreed to intensify contacts between leaders, ministers, and high-level government officials.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, the real potential of the strategic partnership has not been exploited, for there have not been substantial engagements since then.

The establishment and deepening of these Comprehensive and Strategic Partnerships and the strong links that already exist among Australia and New Zealand, the ROK, and Vietnam could serve as the basis for welcoming a potential expansion of the Quad (although the same cannot be said of Israel or Brazil, notwithstanding the Strategic Partnership with the latter). After all, Canberra's priority of working with its "Indo-Pacific partners in other plurilateral arrangements"<sup>55</sup> could be materialized in the form of a Quad Plus.

### **New Zealand and the Quad**

For the past few years, New Zealand has actively tried to follow a pragmatic and logical approach to the increasingly changing landscape of the region, by focusing on its trade relations with China and other Asian markets while maintaining close cooperation with other like-minded states and traditional partners, such as Australia and the United States.<sup>56</sup> However, this balancing act between Wellington's economic and geopolitical interests has become a very difficult task.

New Zealand has always tried to espouse an independent foreign policy to avoid the fate common to small countries of being used by their more powerful allies. Notwithstanding, it has also recognized the need for US security architecture in the region and has accepted and subscribed to it, albeit exerting its sovereignty.<sup>57</sup> Although the United States suspended its ANZUS treaty obligations to New Zealand in the 1980s following a series of disputes due to Wellington's stance on nuclear weapons, repair efforts started in the mid-1990s that restored elements of functionality and resulted in major improvements in the 2000s, laying the foundations for the Wellington and Washington Declarations during the 2010s. Since then, the bilateral relationship has warmed and grown closer, as the US role as a guarantor of regional stability and prosperity—and New Zealand's traditional security partner—has been successively acknowledged.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, however, Wellington has been dealing with an increasingly prosperous China that has become New Zealand's largest trading partner<sup>59</sup>—due to the Free Trade Agreement signed in 2008 and upgraded in 2019—and a participant in almost all regional and global international organizations of interest to New Zealand, hence in all dimensions, a country that Wellington needs to engage and exchange views with.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, while Chinese prosperity has benefited New Zealand and several other countries around the world, it has also

turned into a source of distress, for China's ambition to resume what it sees as its rightful place as not only the predominant regional power, but also a major global power, is reshaping the security environment.<sup>61</sup> And even though it is impossible to predict the outcomes of the aforementioned process, there is an ongoing debate about the future of the region: on the one hand, a China-centric vision of the Asia-Pacific; on the other, the Indo-Pacific. This situation, evidently, is of great concern for New Zealand, which has been walking a fine line in its dealings with both sides.

In a speech to the Otago Foreign Policy School in 2018, Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters insisted that an Indo-Pacific configuration makes a lot of sense for some countries, but the Asia-Pacific resonates more with New Zealanders because of their own geography and the term's consistency with—and complementarity to—Wellington's partners' policies.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, rhetoric and policy started shifting that same year, with the Ministry of Defence using the Indo-Pacific concept in its *Strategic Defence Policy Statement* of 2018, as well as breaking new and forthright language in the way New Zealand talked about China and its behavior in the region.<sup>63</sup> To that document, followed the *Advancing Pacific Partnerships Executive Report* of 2019, which also engaged with the construct. Moreover, in late 2018, Foreign Affairs Deputy Secretary Ben King presented the ministry's outlook on the Indo-Pacific, adding that New Zealand understands and is quite comfortable with the concept and how its interests are positioned within that.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, in 2019, Winston Peters made a departure from his previous articulations and welcomed the engagement with New Zealand's regional partners on the challenges facing the Indo-Pacific in what can be read as the country's first official adoption of the terminology in a foreign policy statement. This embrace, consequently, has resulted in a different approach to Wellington's relations with the Quad partners as well as other countries in the region.

Illustrative of this is Minister of Defence Ron Mark's visit to Washington in January 2020 to meet his counterpart to discuss challenges that New Zealand and the United States share in the Indo-Pacific region, and his later travel to Honolulu for his first visit to the recently renamed US Indo-Pacific Command.<sup>65</sup> Another example is Jacinda Ardern's visit to Sydney that same month to meet with Scott Morrison, in which they emphasized the familial relationship between Wellington and Canberra and the benefits they can reap from their mutual effort to support an open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region and deepen partnerships with other actors.<sup>66</sup> Among these partnerships, of course, are those with Tokyo and New Delhi.

New Zealand's relationship with Japan is characterized by common values and shared interests, as well as substantial political, trade, economic, tourism, and

people-to-people links.<sup>67</sup> Security and defense cooperation is mainly underpinned by a MOU signed in 2013 as a result of the Strategic Cooperative Partnership between both countries.<sup>68</sup> Yet, in September 2019, Jacinda Ardern visited Japan to meet Shinzō Abe, and both leaders expressed their ambition to further strengthen the Strategic Cooperative Partnership and the security and defense relationship. In this context, they welcomed commencing a joint study toward negotiating a security information-sharing agreement and decided to develop a joint declaration to strengthen coordination and cooperation in the Pacific. At the same time, the leaders raised concerns about the situation in the South China Sea and the East China Sea and insisted in the need to closely cooperate in the cybersecurity and outer space realms. And, as a sign of further alignment, they “reiterated their commitment to working proactively together to maintain and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>69</sup>

India and New Zealand have long-standing, friendly, and growing ties that go back to the 1800s. The relationship has become a key priority for New Zealand due to India’s strong economy, large population, and international influence and the values and interests they share.<sup>70</sup> And now, with the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic concept, both countries find themselves increasingly linked by what they have in common.<sup>71</sup> This situation was emphasized during Winston Peters’ visit to India in February 2020. In a speech to the Indian Council of World Affairs, Peters highlighted the alignment of Wellington’s and New Delhi’s Indo-Pacific policies and the shared commitment to a stable, peaceful, open, and secure region. He also took the chance to call for Indian leadership in regional and global governance issues and announce the launching of a refreshed New Zealand–India strategy for investing in the relationship.<sup>72</sup> This document sets out a framework for New Zealand government agencies and partners to grow a more enduring strategic relationship with India over the next five years.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, while it is generally argued that “New Zealand cannot afford to take sides in the US-China rivalry,”<sup>74</sup> Wellington’s recent embrace of the Indo-Pacific concept might be a signal of its willingness to cautiously align with the Quad partners, rather than avoiding choosing sides. Adding to this, relations with Beijing have come under increasing strain due to several situations. These include the postponement of plans for a work plan for the Belt and Road Initiative<sup>75</sup> to determine an agenda that really includes New Zealand’s interests<sup>76</sup> and values;<sup>77</sup> Wellington’s ambiguous position on Huawei<sup>78</sup> due to the identified “significant network security risk;”<sup>79</sup> New Zealand’s deep concern due to national security legislation relating to Hong Kong;<sup>80</sup> and Winston Peters’ decision to publicly endorse the admission of Taiwan to the World Health Organization with an observer status.<sup>81</sup>

Could this motivate Wellington's interest in joining an expanded version of the Quad? In a visit to India in 2018, New Zealand's Chief of Defence Force Lt Gen Tim Keating queried the objectives of the freshly resurrected group and asserted that he would be very interested in engaging his counterparts "to see what Quad means to them and put a question—do they see a role for New Zealand?"<sup>82</sup> The most important question is, however, **if New Zealand envisions a role for itself within a potential Quad Plus.** It is therefore worth asking if its links to the other potential new members could serve as solid foundations for an extended group too.

Brazil and New Zealand enjoy a friendly relationship, assisted by growing people-to-people links and reflected in the growing numbers of Brazilian visitors and students in New Zealand. But, while the two countries are members of the New Agenda Coalition, focused on nuclear disarmament, security and defense cooperation has not been furthered.<sup>83</sup> The relationship with Israel has been rather complex in recent years. In 2004, two Israeli citizens were jailed for attempting to gain New Zealand passports illegally and working with organized criminal gangs. Then-Prime Minister Helen Clark insisted that the two men were Mossad agents and that such acts were a violation of the country's sovereignty. New Zealand then imposed diplomatic sanctions on Israel and demanded an apology.<sup>84</sup> The formal apology arrived in 2005 signed by then-Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, and friendly diplomatic relations were resumed.<sup>85</sup> Then in 2016, New Zealand co-sponsored United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, which condemned the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. The move prompted Israel's decision to recall its ambassador to New Zealand and ban New Zealand's ambassador from Israel.<sup>86</sup> A few months later, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to downgrade Israel's diplomatic ties with New Zealand by not returning Israel's ambassador to Wellington and leaving only a *chargé d'affaires*.<sup>87</sup> It was not until June 2017 that diplomatic relations between New Zealand and Israel were restored after a letter from then-Prime Minister Bill English expressing regret.<sup>88</sup> The rapprochement, nevertheless, has not resulted in closer engagement since then.

**Relations with Seoul and Hanoi, on the other hand, are close and strong.** New Zealand and the ROK cooperate in regional and global fora and have agreements for film, science and technology, education, and Antarctica projects, as well as a Free Trade Agreement, which was signed in 2015. Additionally, a defense relationship has developed out of New Zealand's involvement in the Korean War. Since then, New Zealand continues to support efforts to bring peace and security to the Korean Peninsula and to contribute a small number of New Zealand Defence Force personnel to the United Nations Command Military Armistice

Commission.<sup>89</sup> These links have also led to the signing of the Information Sharing Agreement in 2012 and the Defence Materiel Cooperation Arrangement in 2019. Furthermore, Hyundai Heavy Industries is currently constructing a new supply ship for the Royal New Zealand Navy. Seoul has also committed to the Christchurch Call to Action to eliminate violent extremist content online, which resulted from the attacks of 15 March 2019 against New Zealand's Muslim community. There is also strong regional and multilateral cooperation between both countries—especially in the Pacific—born out of common interests and shared values.<sup>90</sup>

In the case of Vietnam, political, trade, defense and security, and people-to-people links have grown closer and stronger since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975, and especially since the agreement of the Comprehensive Partnership in 2009. In addition, trade ties have been underpinned by the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership, signed in 2009 and 2018, respectively.<sup>91</sup> Building on that momentum, and driven by their growing shared interests, common outlook, and mutual trust, Wellington and Hanoi decided to formally elevate their bilateral relationship to a Strategic Partnership in July 2020. Through this, both countries committed to deepening bilateral political cooperation through frequent high-level exchanges—particularly regular meetings between prime ministers and annual meetings between foreign, trade, and defense ministers—and closer defense cooperation, including through high-level defense visits, port calls, policy consultations, strategic dialogues, education and training, United Nations peacekeeping operations, intelligence exchanges, information sharing, maritime security cooperation, and enhanced coordination in regional fora.<sup>92</sup>

New Zealand has insisted it needs “to keep working on deepening political partnerships across the region and with other partners” and, above all, to put its “principles into action, maintaining the ethos of partnership and respect that has underpinned New Zealand's engagement to date.”<sup>93</sup> In this context, Wellington's recent engagements with the United States, Australia, Japan, India, the ROK, and Vietnam (unlike those with Brazil and Israel) have the potential to serve as an excellent foundation on which to build the Quad Plus.

## Conclusions

Imagining a potential expansion of the Quad is just another sign of the times. Beijing's increasingly assertive behavior and China's rivalry with the United States have created a hostile environment in the Indo-Pacific, and this situation has raised crucially important questions for actors such as Australia and New

Zealand, both of which could immediately feel the consequences of the potential conflicts between the two leading powers of the region.

For Australia, an ardent supporter of the Indo-Pacific construct and a founding member of the Quad, the inclusion of the ROK, Vietnam, and New Zealand to the group would be a logical and very positive step forward. Canberra's close links to Seoul, its Strategic Partnership with Hanoi, and its special relationship "built on deep mutual security interests, shared values and long-standing people to people linkages"<sup>94</sup> with Wellington are naturally an ideal platform for such an expansion.

Wellington's recent invocation of the Indo-Pacific in its dealings with Canberra, New Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington and its recent inquiries about its potential role within the security dialogue might be signs of a shift in New Zealand's strategy of avoiding choosing sides in the ongoing strategic competition. Added to the increasingly complicated relationship with Beijing, this new resolve may result in "closer New Zealand involvement with the Quad mechanism, which would be welcomed by all current Quad members."<sup>95</sup> Additionally, the close relationship with the ROK and Vietnam could also help trigger the interest in building a Quad Plus with them on board.

Although Brazil and Israel have been part of the Quad Plus narrative, their geographical position, outside the boundaries of the Indo-Pacific region; their perceived lack of interest in the ad hoc group, as evidenced by the absence of official statements; and lack of firmer bases for closer collaboration with these partners might result in a Quad Plus of only seven members instead of nine.

Nevertheless, any attempt to expand the Quad could use some lessons from its own past. If the four democracies want to include other Indo-Pacific partners, they have to think carefully about the seal they want to imprint into the partnership, for, as Rory Medcalf warned back in 2008, "such ventures will be more sustainable if based on convergent interests and the ability to contribute rather than on shared values."<sup>96</sup> In this sense, softening the discourse about the democratic identity of the group might be wise, for, in that way, non-democracies such as Vietnam could be easily integrated.

In that same spirit, the Quad must clearly communicate its purpose as a forum for information sharing and policy coordination<sup>97</sup> and its agenda of convergent interests to avoid any misperceptions. While Beijing does not hide its displeasure at certain aspects of the existing order and is certainly guilty of not always following its rules,<sup>98</sup> the debate about the expansion of the Quad Plus is not about the world ganging up on China. As Medcalf has also insisted, it is about "rather seeking safety in numbers: creating a context where China cannot coerce us individually, and has to engage with norms, rules and material realities set by a community of interests."<sup>99</sup>

An international society exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests, and perhaps some common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another—such as that they should respect one another’s independence, that they should honor agreements into which they enter, that they should be subject to certain limitations in exercising force against one another, and that they should cooperate in the working of common institutions.<sup>100</sup> In this sense, the prospects of a Quad Plus for Australia and New Zealand could be very positive, for if they build it—along with the United States, Japan, India, the ROK, and Vietnam—around a convergence of interests, a new international society with clear rules that can be followed by all the powers in the Indo-Pacific may emerge, and this can lead to an improved regional and, by extension, global order. 🌐

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# Whose Centrality?

## ASEAN and the Quad in the Indo-Pacific

DR. EVAN A. LAKSMANA

### Abstract

Why has Southeast Asia been particularly lukewarm to the idea of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad)? If Japan, India, Australia, and the United States collectively work under the Quad to confront China, Southeast Asia's biggest and most difficult strategic challenge, should not the region embrace and support the Quad? This article seeks to answer these questions by examining the different Southeast Asian views on the Quad. It further examines whether and how the Quad leaders could gradually develop mechanisms to induce a strategic buy-in from Southeast Asia. I argue in particular that the Quad should not reinvent the wheel in terms of regional architecture building and instead seek to become a "strategic filler" for and a "strategic amplifier" to existing ASEAN-led mechanisms and institutions. Furthermore, as far as Southeast Asians are concerned, the idea of the Quad boosting ASEAN institutions is perhaps more appealing than expanding the Quad into a "Quad Plus" by inviting, for example, South Korea, New Zealand, Brazil, Israel, and Vietnam. The key to a future Quad-ASEAN relationship therefore lies in finding a calibrated partnership based on shared principles and interests as well as practical cooperative engagements. The following sections expand on and elaborate these arguments.

### Is There an "ASEAN View" of the Quad?

It should be noted from the outset that there is no "ASEAN view" of the Quad, whether in its first iteration in 2007 or the latest Quad 2.0 that reconvened in 2017.<sup>1</sup> What we have are different "Southeast Asian views" of the Quad. This distinction between ASEAN as a regional multilateral organization on the one hand and the different Southeast Asian states on the other is not simply a matter of semantics. The distinction matters because it tells us there is no single, agreed-upon consensus in Southeast Asia about the Quad. There is certainly no official ASEAN-related mechanisms or dialogues, as of yet, involving the Quad. Different Southeast Asian states have also expressed different views about the potential benefits and challenges associated with the Quad. In general, despite the different rationales, most Southeast Asian states are not publicly and fully

embracing the Quad, nor are they energetically working to challenge or denounce the nascent dialogue.

A recent regional elite survey by the Singapore-based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute) shows for example that support for the Quad was “soft,” as less than half the respondents consider the grouping as having a “positive” or “very positive” impact on regional security (more than half view it as having either “negative,” “very negative,” or “no impact”).<sup>2</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, however, many (more than 60 percent) expressed that Southeast Asian countries should participate in the Quad’s security initiatives and military exercises. However, different Southeast Asian countries appear to have different degrees of ambivalence. According to the same survey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia are top skeptics of the Quad; Vietnam and the Philippines, on the other hand, are the biggest supporters.

These recent findings mirror and confirm earlier surveys that show the different degrees of ambivalence among Southeast Asian states over the Quad. For example, according to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), roughly more than half of regional experts were on the fence, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the Quad.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the same survey notes that almost 40 percent thought that the Quad had more of a “diplomatic and symbolic value,” rather than becoming a critical initiative for the Indo-Pacific. It also notes that different Southeast Asian countries view the Quad differently. On the one hand, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines appear to be among the biggest supporters of the Quad, while Singapore and Indonesia were the skeptics.<sup>4</sup>

While these two elite surveys differ in some of their specific country-by-country results, they still demonstrate the absence of a coherent picture. On the one hand, the Quad skeptics do not necessarily share identical reasonings for their reticence. Indonesia is more concerned about the sidelining of ASEAN—and by implication, its own regional leadership profile—while Singapore is likely to be more concerned about the sharpening of the US–China competition. Indonesia under the current Joko Widodo administration also appears to be less concerned about foreign policy issues that are not “popular among its people,” including the Quad.<sup>5</sup> Laos and Cambodia, meanwhile, are more likely to be wary of the impression of the Quad as an “anti-China” coalition—given their increasingly close ties with Beijing.

On the other hand, those who are potentially more welcoming of the Quad seem to share similar concerns over China’s recent behaviors, especially in the South China Sea. Vietnam and the Philippines, for example, are perhaps the two South China Sea claimants that have been increasingly at loggerheads with China lately.<sup>6</sup> This was particularly the case over the landmark 2016 UNCLOS

tribunal ruling that favored Manila over Beijing—and practically invalidated China’s infamous “nine-dash line” map. It should be noted however that other South China Sea claimants like Malaysia and Brunei appear to be more muted in their responses to China’s militarization and aggressive behaviors—largely due to domestic politics and economic constraints.

In any case, there is no clear, consistent, and coherent picture of Southeast Asian views of the Quad other than the fact that some appear to be skeptical of the grouping while others may (partially) welcome it. Aside from the country-specific concerns above, this general lack of clarity seems to be a function of several factors. First, there is a lack of clarity among the Quad states themselves; they have yet to fully agree on what the group is and could be (although this might be changing in light of the growing tension between India and Australia with China). They also define the broader Indo-Pacific region in different ways.<sup>7</sup> The group’s 2017 meeting addressed seven broad themes: (1) a rules-based order in Asia, (2) freedom of navigation and overflight in the maritime common, (3) respect for international law, (4) enhancing connectivity, (5) maritime security, (6) the North Korean threat and nonproliferation, and, (7) terrorism.<sup>8</sup> However, it remains unclear how exactly the Quad will proceed on these major policy areas. The latest Quad meeting in October 2020 in Tokyo also did not address practical initiatives on those seven issues—focusing instead on future meetings.<sup>9</sup>

Second, there is a lack of a clarity among Southeast Asian states on whether China—the unspoken primary “threat” the Quad is seeking to address—represents the biggest challenge for their respective interests. Numerous studies have noted that different Southeast Asian states consider China as representing varying degrees of opportunities (especially economic) and challenges (especially security).<sup>10</sup> For that matter, Southeast Asian views of the United States have also been historically ambivalent as well.<sup>11</sup> Despite the aspirations of many regional analysts, the structural ambivalence between Southeast Asia and the great powers is unlikely to change anytime soon. In other words, the more the Quad seeks to engage Southeast Asia driven by great-power politics, the more likely the structural ambivalence among Southeast Asian states becomes more pronounced.

Finally, there remains a concern among Southeast Asian states about the extent to which the Quad may or may not supplant existing ASEAN-related institutional mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS) or the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).<sup>12</sup> There is also a concern that the Free and Open Indo-Pacific outlook inherent in the Quad may simply be another way to “step on China’s toes.”<sup>13</sup> These concerns persist, even though in reality, Quad meetings have taken place on the sidelines of the ARF and EAS meetings and have focused on issues

promoted by ASEAN. In short, ASEAN-related mechanisms have “facilitated the Quad process rather than the Quad process threatening ASEAN.”<sup>14</sup>

However, the concerns over the Quad’s supposed challenge to ASEAN is less about multilateral institutions and regional groupings coexisting in the same strategic sphere. Instead, such concerns are about: (1) whether the Quad gets to drive the broader regional agenda (a distinct possibility given the strategic heft of its members), (2) whether different members of ASEAN, ARF, and EAS might decide to spend more energy and resources for the Quad rather than ASEAN-related institutions, and (3) whether some ASEAN members like Indonesia could afford to surrender regional order management to others at a time when they could not develop new strategic alternatives beyond ASEAN.<sup>15</sup> In other words, for all the talk about ASEAN Centrality, some ASEAN members remain deeply insecure about the prospect of an alternative regional order-making institutions like the Quad.

It should perhaps be noted that ASEAN Centrality is more of a process than an outcome. As defined by the ASEAN Charter, Centrality is the notion that ASEAN should be the “primary driving force” in shaping the group’s external relations in a regional architecture that is open, transparent, and inclusive. In other words, ASEAN Centrality is, at heart, an ongoing process of continuous engagements with external partners.<sup>16</sup> As such, a significant feature of ASEAN Centrality lies in whether regional and great powers are “willing” to surrender regional initiatives and agenda-setting to ASEAN.<sup>17</sup> This is part of the reasons why ASEAN champions like Indonesia are often “sensitive” to the possibility of ASEAN no longer driving the regional agenda.

### **What Should Be the Quad’s Ideal Role?**

Given the above structural ambivalence and concerns, what should be the next ideal step for the Quad? First, the Quad needs to provide a systematic, coherent, and consistent framework to institutionalize and deepen the cooperative mechanisms among its member states. If the Quad members cannot agree on a long-term strategic framework for the grouping, there is no reason the rest of the region should take it seriously. How do we know, for example, that the Quad will not fade away once again as it did when Australia pulled the plug in 2008? If anything, the Quad could perhaps learn from ASEAN’s missteps when the latter organization tried to expand its mechanisms beyond Southeast Asia in the 1990s and 2000s too soon without first solidifying its own community-building and integration projects.<sup>18</sup> Overall, the Quad’s prospects will be determined by the extent to which national interests and threat perceptions align across all four of its members.<sup>19</sup>



Second, if and when the Quad could develop and implement its own long-term strategic framework, then perhaps there are ways to consider how the group could engage Southeast Asian states as well as ASEAN-related institutions. After all, there is no consensus across Southeast Asia rejecting any future role for the Quad. Indeed, almost half the respondents in the 2018 ASPI survey thought that the Quad complements existing regional security frameworks to varying degrees.<sup>20</sup> Again, bearing in mind the concerns above, there is nothing inherently toxic about the Quad's future engagement with ASEAN.

The key, therefore, is to find “the right ladder and the right rung.” The Quad's external engagement with ASEAN would be effective if it meets the strategic interests of both groups (the right ladder) and when the specific engagement mechanisms are a good match for ASEAN's pre-existing initiatives and capacity with what the Quad could offer (the right rung). In the long run, finding the right ladder means figuring out the convergence of strategic interests between the Quad as a minilateral grouping and ASEAN as a multilateral one. These include, for example, (1) the extent to which regional order depends on multilateral and collective efforts, rather than unilateral power projections; (2) the extent to which regional institutions enhance strategic autonomy, rather than becoming extensions of great-power politics; and (3) the extent to which prosperity and security are not mutually exclusive, just as no regional country should be left out of regional institutions.

These normative benchmarks should not be too difficult for leaders of the Quad and ASEAN to agree on. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), for example, is filled with normative principles and norms many regional countries have agreed on for years. Surely the Quad members could easily align the group with and support the AOIP in principle. After all, since the AOIP commits no resources and practical mechanisms, there is virtually no risk for the Quad members to come out and publicly declare their support for AOIP. In other words, while the AOIP may have been defective at birth as far as strategic outcomes are concerned, it can still provide an initial normative launching pad for closer collaboration with other regional groupings such as the Quad.<sup>21</sup> The more difficult challenge lies in how the two groups could potentially build on shared normative principles to practical engagements.

In this regard, finding the right rung is essential. This means that the Quad should avoid reinventing the wheel in terms of regional initiatives, whether about maritime security, trade, or military exercises. Instead, the Quad should aim to be a strategic filler, supporting and elevating existing ASEAN-led initiatives where they exist and suggesting collaborative new ones where they are absent. In the defense and security sphere, for example, the Quad could provide an additional

layer of cooperative engagement, from joint exercises to training, in areas where ASEAN-related institutions (e.g., ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting–Plus [ADMM+]) remain underdeveloped.<sup>22</sup> The Quad could also support ASEAN-led initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity. After all, ASEAN has traditionally been more comfortable with the so-called “ASEAN Plus” mechanisms—dialogues and cooperative mechanisms between ASEAN and a single or several strategic partners.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, for more than a decade, ASEAN Plus forums like the ARF, EAS, and ADMM+ have been among the premier tools of the group in its efforts at regional architecture building. In essence, the Quad should find areas where it can boost ASEAN institutions rather than seeking to create new ones as alternatives.

Taken together, the Quad should ideally first recognize that as far as its external engagement is concerned, it should invest and seriously consider how it could persuade and obtain buy-in from Southeast Asian states. Differences regarding China aside, almost every Southeast Asian state is unlikely to turn its back on initiatives seeking to strengthen existing ASEAN-led mechanisms and institutions. Given the geopolitical and geostrategic centrality of Southeast Asia within the Indo-Pacific theater, whether there is regional buy-in could very well determine the long-term strategic viability of the Quad. The Quad leaders should, therefore, also formulate a gradual, long-term engagement strategy built around (1) a strategic commitment to a set of shared principles and interests and (2) a set of institutionalized mechanisms to provide strategic amplification to ASEAN-led mechanisms and institutions. In other words, rather than waiting for different Southeast Asian states to finally come around on their own volition to engage the Quad, leaders of the Quad members should find ways to present how the grouping could strengthen and support ASEAN. At the very least, the effort made to find the right ladder and the right rung between the Quad and ASEAN could create channels of communication and habits of dialogue that were not present before.

### **Quad Plus: Whose Centrality?**

The potential for a dialogue or an engagement mechanism between the Quad and ASEAN is more strategically productive than seeking to expand the former. The expansion of the Quad Core group of Australia, Japan, India, and the United States to a Quad Plus format, including possibly Vietnam, New Zealand, South Korea, Israel, and/or Brazil has recently gained some traction.<sup>24</sup> Japan, for example, sees the Quad Plus idea as potentially beneficial to strengthen its “strategic synergy” in the maritime defense domain with the new set of countries, while Tokyo seeks to create a sustainable economic post–COVID-19 structure in Asia.<sup>25</sup>

There are certainly plenty of reasons to expand the Quad, but to include ASEAN member states like Vietnam could strengthen the critiques that the Quad undermines ASEAN Centrality. While joining the Quad and remaining an ASEAN member is certainly not mutually exclusive, the Quad would nonetheless miss out on gaining the buy-in of a wider set of countries. For one thing, many in Southeast Asia do not appear excited for the expansion of the Quad. As the 2018 ASPI survey notes, a median of 68 percent across all ASEAN member states think that the Quad should not be further expanded.<sup>26</sup> For another, if the Quad presents itself less of an alternative to ASEAN and more of a strategic complement, it has the potential to develop more sustainable partnerships across Southeast Asia, rather than with just one or two countries.

Such an argument of course requires a mental switch. If the Quad leaders remain convinced that it needs to compete with or confront China—in whatever terminology accepted—than the goal should not be how to “pry away” a few Southeast Asian states from China. Instead, they should focus on boosting the region’s strategic autonomy as a collective whole. For all its faults and inability to deal with immediate strategic crises like the South China Sea, ASEAN remains the only regional mechanism that all Southeast Asian states still embrace. Finding mechanisms to strengthen ASEAN-related institutions would also complement existing bilateral and minilateral engagements each of the Quad members has developed with different Southeast Asian countries over the past decade (including maritime capacity building, for example). In other words, for the Quad to remain “central” in the minds of Southeast Asian policy makers, the group should find practical ways to boost ASEAN Centrality.

The COVID-19 pandemic and China’s growing tension with India and Australia have given new impetus for the Quad. After the latest Quad meeting in early October 2020, for example, it is likely that Quad meetings may evolve into stand-alone events, rather than relying on the sidelines of ASEAN-related venues.<sup>27</sup> On the military side, India has recently extended an invitation for Australia to join the trilateral India–Japan–United States Malabar exercises. This would mark the first military exercises by all four members of the Quad since the group reconvened in November 2017.<sup>28</sup> Bilaterally, the signing of the India–US Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement in late October 2020 could further boost the Quad’s increasingly militarized outlook.

As these developments suggest an upward strategic trajectory for the Quad, the leaders from all four countries should start engaging Southeast Asia early on—before the voices of regional insecurities grow louder. Additionally, the Quad should consider new diplomatic and economic initiatives when engaging Southeast Asian states. If the Quad only develops institutionalized cooperation built

around the defense sector, Beijing could easily present the Quad as nothing more than an “anti-China coalition” to Southeast Asian states. If there are concerns that the Quad is moving too fast and too furious at challenging China while sidelining ASEAN-related mechanisms, it would be harder to gain strategic buy-in from Southeast Asia.

## Conclusion and Implications

The Indo-Pacific is in a state of strategic flux. The strategic competition between the United States and China risks creating a new bipolar structure across the region. The frequency and duration of crises among the region’s powerholders—between Japan and South Korea, India and China, Australia and China, North and South Korea and others—have also grown in recent years. Historical legacies, territorial and maritime disputes, as well as broader strategic competition are all creating regional flashpoints.<sup>29</sup> While these strategic trends are slowly unfolding, day-to-day security challenges, from illegal fishing to transnational crime, continue to strain the resources of regional countries. Domestic political populism across the region has also led to stronger protectionist and isolationist impulses, leaving cumbersome multilateral institutions fiercely competing for attention. The pandemic has also likely accelerated and exacerbated these destabilizing trends.

Under these conditions, it would be strategic malpractice for Indo-Pacific states to not develop new foreign policy options. For more than two decades, ASEAN-led regional institutions have tried to develop a region-wide habit of dialogue and cooperation, on the one hand. On the other, traditional bilateral alliances and strategic partnerships have also proliferated. However, as the Indo-Pacific increasingly becomes a single geostrategic and geopolitical theater, the slow-paced nature of multilateralism and the limited scope of bilateral partnerships are no longer seen as sufficient. **The rise of minilateralism—more than two countries but less than a full multilateral grouping—across the Indo-Pacific has increasingly become a “new normal.”**<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the rise of the Quad certainly fits this pattern.

In this regard, the Quad may seem like a strategic inevitability, even though many argue **it is nothing more than “a forum for discussion and information exchange intended to lead to better policy coordination” between the four countries.**<sup>31</sup> The United States, Japan, India, and Australia certainly cannot hope to “compete” with China on their own without each other. While paying regular homage to ASEAN Centrality, the fact of the matter is that **these countries no longer consider ASEAN institutions as sufficiently agile and capable to respond to the strategic challenges posed by China.** Policy makers in Tokyo, New Delhi,

Canberra, and Washington are certainly aware of how divided ASEAN has been in recent years and how some member states are now publicly aligning themselves with China. Therefore, Southeast Asian leaders are aware that getting the Quad leaders to disband once again may seem like a fool's errand. After all, ASEAN itself has increasingly seen its own minilateral arrangements. The ASEAN Our Eyes information-exchange initiative on violent extremism, radicalization, and terrorism (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) under the purview of the ADMM builds on existing subregional cooperation such as the Malacca Strait Patrols (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) and the Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement in the Sulu Sea (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines).<sup>32</sup>

This is one of the reasons why Indonesia has pushed for the AOIP. If Southeast Asia cannot stop the Quad in its strategic tracks, it can at least articulate an alternative strategic vision—no matter how devoid of resources and practical steps it may be. After all, as Indonesian scholar Dewi Fortuna Anwar notes, because Southeast Asia is located at the geographic midpoint between the Indian and Pacific oceans and all the lands around and within them, ASEAN must, in Jakarta's view, continue to retain its centrality in the evolving Indo-Pacific construct.<sup>33</sup> Southeast Asian states in general, after all, remain committed to strategic nonalignment and hedging in the Indo-Pacific—if only to avoid the impression that they are taking sides in the face of growing great-power rivalry.<sup>34</sup> However, that does not mean that they would seek to push back or prevent the Quad from moving forward.

As the above analyses have shown, the challenge is figuring out whose centrality matters and how to ensure that both the Quad and ASEAN can not only coexist but also complement one another in regional architecture building. As a relatively new grouping, the ball is in the Quad's court, so to speak. The Quad leaders should be the ones to persuade Southeast Asia of its strategic utility, rather than the other way around. As I have suggested above, finding the right ladder and the right rung is essential for the future of Quad–ASEAN relations. The Quad becoming a strategic filler to and a strategic amplifier for existing ASEAN initiatives and institutions are certainly not the only means forward. However, at this point, such cooperation provides perhaps the best chance to get a region-wide buy-in from Southeast Asia. By strategically positioning the Quad as a strong supporter of ASEAN, the new grouping can certainly challenge the Chinese view that it will be nothing more than “a foam in the ocean.” ★

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# Britain and the Quadrilateral

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## Abstract

The assumptions made about British involvement in the Indo-Pacific and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the “Quad”) tend to rely on the constraints of geography rather than on interests in a rules-based system. This article argues that not only does Britain share interests with the Quad members in a free trading order—something that is threatened by Chinese and Russian policies—but it has also developed a set of capabilities and facilities across the region that give it reach. From the Persian Gulf and Oman, from Diego Garcia to Singapore, Britain’s role in the Five Power Defence Arrangements and strategic relationships with regional powers mean that it is already an Indo-Pacific maritime power. Questions as to Britain’s inclusion in the still-evolving Quad are therefore entirely political in our opinion. Given the openness of Japan and the United States to external members, Britain could make for an interesting and useful addition to the Quad in the years ahead.

## Introduction

The current international order is in flux, and the international security environment has become considerably more unstable and threatening. The *Third Annual Report of the UK’s National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review* cites the “resurgence of state-based threats and intensifying wider state competition and the attack on the rules-based international order, making it harder to build consensus and tackle global threats,”<sup>1</sup> while the United Kingdom’s 2018 *National Security Capability Review* asserts that “as the world has become more uncertain and volatile, we [the UK] remain committed to deploying the full suite of our security, economic and influence capabilities to protect and promote our security, economic and influence interests.”<sup>2</sup> A major cause of this deterioration in the strategic environment is the persistent, multifaceted, and incremental challenges posed by China and Russia to the global order and their efforts to divide and subvert the Western alliance—the United Kingdom, United States, and their allies—through influence operations and political warfare.<sup>3</sup> As the recently published UK Ministry of Defence’s *Integrated Operating Concept* recognizes, the alliance is confronted by “adversaries [who] don’t recognize the rule of law”<sup>4</sup> and who employ “an expanding, diverse and largely unregulated set of

information tools to influence target audiences' attitudes, beliefs and behavior . . . above and below the threshold of war."<sup>5</sup>

Before we show why the United Kingdom is likely to become more active in the Indo-Pacific in the years ahead, it is important—both for context and for the sake of our argument—to spend some time describing the nature of Russian and Chinese challenges to the maritime trading order (the “*mare liberum*”), because they directly impact states in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific.

Since the 1960s, when British strategists first conceptualized an “Indo-Pacific,”<sup>6</sup> and the end of the Cold War, the United Kingdom's interests and capabilities in the region have more waned than waxed, particularly after its decision to focus more on the Soviet threat in Western Europe.<sup>7</sup> The apparent disconnect between British capabilities and interests remains very much at the heart of the current debate as to whether Britain can and should become a partner or member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the “Quad”). In the wake of that decision taken in 1968, Britain's security posture as a Euro-Atlantic power was gradually solidified as forces were gradually withdrawn from the Indo-Pacific region. However, since at least 2013, there have been growing voices in London arguing that the time has come to rekindle a posture “east of Suez.” That year, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)—Britain's oldest strategic policy think tank—published an essay entitled *A Return to East of Suez?* RUSI's director, Michael Clarke, asserted in the foreword: “It may not yet be declared government policy, but the UK appears to be approaching a decision point where a significant strategic reorientation of its defence and security towards the Gulf is both plausible and logical.”<sup>8</sup> The report noted that new British facilities in the Gulf would allow the United Kingdom to deploy greater power into the region. Since then, the topic has remained an on-and-off again favorite of think tanks but only began to take shape when the United Kingdom started to recast its posture in the wake of Brexit. This article joins that pedigree and takes the argument into the thorny question of the United Kingdom's involvement or membership to the Quad.

This article focuses on these two aspects—interests and capabilities—and follows three lines of argument: first, that as China and Russia challenge the historic *mare liberum*, the United Kingdom—with its historic interest in unfettered maritime communication lines—has similar interests to the Quad's members. Second, that many of the assumptions made about the limits to a British role in the Indo-Pacific and in relation to the Quad are based on misconceptions or simplifications of interests and capabilities. We explore what some of those assumptions are and why Britain's interests and its capabilities make it a possible Quad partner, even a future member. The question, we assert is one of politics and one of prioritization. Third, we explore the capabilities the United Kingdom has in the region and how these

have expanded in recent years, noting the recent extension of Britain's geostrategic presence and ability to project power in the Indo-Pacific. We attempt to assess whether these will plateau, reduce, or continue rising and what this means for Britain's role in relation to the Quad.

### **The Challenges Posed by Russia and China to *Mare Liberum***

While each of the Quad members has different motives for being part of it, their common concern has been China's behavior in the maritime space, particularly in the South China Sea, where Beijing claims most of the sea's fisheries, energy resources, and international waters. In a 2019 report "The South China Sea: Why it Matters to Global Britain,"<sup>9</sup> we argued that China's unlawful and excessive claims in the South China Sea were both a threat to an open maritime order and to the UK's direct national interests—some 12% of British trade transits the waterway.<sup>10</sup> However, we would like to focus this first argument on something altogether grander, and that is the health of the global maritime system and how it aligns the Quad members with the United Kingdom's historic role as the guarantor of a "free and open" system. Indeed, the Royal Navy's primary role for much of Britain's history was to support the principle of *mare liberum*, or freedom of the seas, and this often forced British warships into conflict with states that sought to control or restrict shipping. In the case of China and Russia, this expansion of de facto sovereign control over what were once free seas and the jurisdictional claims that negate the historic principle of "innocent passage" are a direct threat to the maritime system as it has existed for some 300 years.

If we examine what China has done in the South China Sea, it becomes clear that China's Communist Party has sought to effectively extend its political remit over the maritime space, a policy the naval historian Andrew Lambert describes precisely as "continentalization."<sup>11</sup> China has asserted the right to demand other countries' vessels transiting areas of maritime space that it claims as its own territorial waters and exclusive economic zones gain advance permission.<sup>12</sup> This fundamentally threatens countries' right of innocent passage as guaranteed in Section 3, Article 17 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which China has ratified.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, China has steadfastly refused to utilize international law or the international courts to resolve the issue and has determined to confirm its interpretation through its own means—including through the implied use of force.<sup>14</sup>

Russia has adopted a similar approach. In March 2019, Moscow implemented a policy requiring foreign warships to give 45 days' advance notice to gain "permission" to transit the Northern Sea Route (NSR) in the Arctic, citing Article 234 of UNCLOS, which allows for special rules by coastal states in ice-covered regions to

protect the environment. Again, it has in effect threatened the right of innocent passage. In addition to this, Russia demands each vessel include its name, purpose, route, timetable, and technical specifications, a gross violation of the sovereign immunity enjoyed by warships at sea. This restriction also followed legislation in 2017 that restricted foreign commercial vessels from loading and unloading at ports along the NSR,<sup>15</sup> which is counter to Article 234's "nondiscriminatory" requirement. In the case of Chinese claims in the South China Sea and Russian claims in Arctic, it is apparent that both states are asserting—using the threat of military coercion<sup>16</sup>—massive extensions of sovereignty over international seas and over the rights of marine traffic, challenging the historic principle of *mare liberum* and specific codes of the UNCLOS, upon which that is based.

### **Testing Common Assumptions on the Quad's Membership and Interests**

With regards to the Quad, a number of common assumptions are widely held: first, that the Quad is a geographically grounded grouping, with an explicit Indo-Pacific focus and identity. Second, that its four members are primarily interested in: the growth of China's military capabilities and bases; China's activities in the South China Sea; and the Chinese navy's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean. When it comes to assumptions about Britain in relation to the Indo-Pacific and Quad, the following are often cited: first, that Britain is far from the Indo-Pacific, the central interest point of the Quad, and therefore unlikely to partner with the grouping in a meaningful way. Second, that Britain is constrained by budgetary factors and lacks the regional footprint and therefore must prioritize closer to home in the Euro-Atlantic, and perhaps the Middle East. While we do not contest these assumptions entirely—they have traction—we do think they are open to alternative framing. Let us deal with them, one by one.

First, the argument that the Quad is geographically fixed or has a fixed membership is open to debate. If one considers the recent widening of its membership to a "Quad Plus" format, to seven countries,<sup>17</sup> it is apparent that the body is not yet fixed and remains in a highly fluid state, evolving and changing as the four nations decide the group's equities across a range of sectors. Nor is it clear that they hold a clear position on the inclusion of external powers, particularly other large powers with sovereign interests in the Indo-Pacific. At the most recent meeting in Tokyo in October 2020, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo discussed the possibility of adding countries like the United Kingdom and France to the grouping. Motegi responded that it was "important to cooperate with as many nations as possible that share

these basic values and common rules.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in his recent speech in London, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, the foreign secretary of India, praised the Netherlands, Germany, and France for their Indo-Pacific strategies and expressed hope that “the UK too will finalize its Indo-Pacific strategy.”<sup>19</sup> Clearly, the participation of external powers in the Quad has not been ruled out. Thus, while we cannot argue that the United Kingdom has a right to be a Quad member, it is impossible to argue that its membership is unlikely or impossible. The decision is, we believe, **ultimately a political one.**

Second, the assumption that the Quad members’ interests are narrowly defined by the Indo-Pacific region is worth exploring. To some extent, we agree that this is true but respond with two counterpoints. First, the Quad is interested in the maintenance of a free and open maritime space and sustainable development, areas where the United Kingdom has commitment and capacity (for example, its official development assistance (ODA) budget is one of the largest in the world).<sup>20</sup> Second, if one employs the Japanese and Indian geographical definitions of Indo-Pacific (i.e., to the shores of eastern Africa), then the United Kingdom is very much an Indo-Pacific power with interests and capabilities from the Persian Gulf, across the Indian Ocean Region, right through to Southeast Asia. It is also the leading party of the region’s only multilateral security grouping—the Five Power Defence Arrangements, established in 1971 to underline British support for the security of the Malay Peninsula after the termination of the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement. When the geography of the Quad is considered in relation to this axis and in terms of Britain’s support for the *mare liberum*, then the United Kingdom’s inclusion is not only possible but also desirable. It is only when we think of the Quad as geographically focused around the area under the US Indo-Pacific Command (“from Hollywood to Bollywood”), that Britain’s inclusion in the Indo-Pacific and as a Quad member looks peculiar; alternatively, when viewed through the prism of Britain’s growing role in the Persian Gulf and broader Middle East, it looks more natural.

As a final argument, there have been at least two other regional organizations that have opened their membership to nonregional states. The first is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which Britain joined in 2015—though it was originally conceived as a region-only group to finance China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects.<sup>21</sup> The second is the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPATPP), another group with an ostensibly regional identity. Despite this, in October 2018, Japan signaled its willingness to include Britain in the grouping, to which the United Kingdom has also expressed interest.<sup>22</sup> Again, our point is not to say that Britain’s potential membership within the Quad is likely or probable but instead to argue that its

involvement will be based on political factors and common interests and capability, not on geography.

### **Britain's Footprint in the Indo-Pacific**

We will now discuss in greater depth the level of Britain's footprint in the Indo-Pacific to **determine what the country could offer the Quad**. While it is true that the British home islands are located thousands of kilometers away in the north Atlantic, the United Kingdom remains, by virtue of its overseas territories—Pitcairn in the Pacific and the British Indian Ocean Territory in the Indian Ocean—a “native” or “resident” power in the Indo-Pacific. Despite having deliberately “pivoted” away from the Indian and Pacific oceans during the second half of the twentieth century to deter the Soviet Union in the Euro-Atlantic region (as already discussed), Britain retained the military means to reach into the Indo-Pacific in the event of a strategic emergency. This was proven in the regional conflicts in the 1990s and 2000s in the Middle East—twice in Iraq and once in Afghanistan—where Britain deployed large numbers of armed forces. The Royal Navy also sent a large naval group—Taurus—to Singapore in 2009, to demonstrate its continued ability to project power further east and underscore Britain's continued commitment to the Five Power Defence Arrangements.

Britain's ability to project power has been predicated on a “geostrategic array” of military and logistical facilities that stretch from the Middle East to Southeast Asia.<sup>23</sup> These are linked by the strategically pivotal British Indian Ocean Territory, home of the giant UK–US naval, air, and space facility on Diego Garcia. These points allow British naval and air forces to access the region from the Mediterranean, not least via Britain's naval facilities at Gibraltar and the Royal Air Force's Akrotiri air station in the British Sovereign Base Areas on Cyprus. In addition, the United Kingdom has long operated military and logistical facilities in Kenya, Nepal, Singapore, and Brunei. In Kenya, the British Army has a training unit in Nanyuki, supported by smaller offices in Nairobi. In Kathmandu and Pokhara in Nepal, Britain operates facilities for the recruitment of the Ghurkas, while at Sembawang, in Singapore, it operates a refueling station for British and allied warships. And at Sittang Camp and the Medicina Lines, Brunei acts as host for the British Army's Jungle Warfare Training Division.

It is important to note that these British Indo-Pacific military facilities are *not* merely the relics of empire; instead, they form part of a dynamic geostrategic network that the United Kingdom has continued to modulate in accordance with evolving strategic requirements. Indeed, in keeping with the British government's announcement to refocus east of Suez after 2013, Britain's geostrategic network has grown in the western-most edge of the Indo-Pacific.<sup>24</sup> The Royal

Navy's shore facilities in Bahrain were upgraded between 2015 and 2018 to become a fully-fledged naval base—HMS Jufair—while a “defence hub” was established in 2017 in Duqm, Oman, to replenish and service British warships operating in the Indian Ocean, including the largest vessels, such as assault ships and aircraft carriers.<sup>25</sup> New British regional defense staffs—for the Middle East and Southeast Asia—were set up in 2016 in the United Arab Emirates and Singapore, respectively.<sup>26</sup> And in December 2018, Gavin Williamson, the then defence secretary, announced that the Ministry of Defence was investigating plans to transform Britain's logistical facility in Singapore to a naval base and/or open an entirely new one in Brunei.<sup>27</sup>

Besides acting as points to uphold Britain's sovereign claims and geostrategic presence in the Indo-Pacific, these military and logistical facilities also function to support the presence and reach of the British Armed Forces, particularly the Royal Navy. Already, in 2011, the Royal Navy had large naval and auxiliary ships on the scene after Typhoon Hainan to deliver disaster relief faster than many regional powers, including Australia and Japan.

In keeping with the United Kingdom's renewed focus east of Suez, this presence has also witnessed a considerable uptick in recent years as several Royal Navy vessels have been deployed to the region. In August 2018, HMS *Albion*—a large amphibious assault ship—steamed through the Paracel archipelago en route to Hanoi from Tokyo. At that point, the Royal Navy became the only navy, other than the US Navy, to directly challenge China's illegitimate maritime claims—in this case Beijing's imposition of so-called “straight baselines” around the Paracel Islands—in the South China Sea.<sup>28</sup> Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson promised that the increased presence would not be “a flash in the pan but actually a commitment to the region that goes forward over the coming years.”<sup>29</sup> He was not joking. In 2020, the Royal Navy deployed six warships—supported by logistics vessels from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary—to the Middle East alone, building on a plethora of vessels fanning out across the Indo-Pacific the year before, some of which took part in naval drills with Japan and the United States.<sup>30</sup>

This rise in UK strategic activity is part of a wider—but often overlooked—British “tilt” toward the wider Indo-Pacific region, a policy that has been underway since at least 2012. That year, Britain signed a new defense treaty with Japan, followed a year later by one with Australia.<sup>31</sup> In 2014, the UK National Strategy of Maritime Security noted the importance of the South China Sea and linked Britain's maritime strategy with protecting “the rule of law and freedom of navigation and trade.”<sup>32</sup> London followed through on this by signing a naval trilateral agreement between the Royal Navy, the US Navy, and the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces in 2016.<sup>33</sup> This resulted in trilateral antisubmarine exercises in

December 2018<sup>34</sup> and January 2019, followed by a US–UK exercise in the South China Sea shortly after.<sup>35</sup> Initially, much of this activity was an attempt to provide balance in relation to the government of David Cameron’s geo-economically driven attempts to court China, a policy that has fallen flat given China’s increasingly revisionist tone in recent years.

It has also been animated by Brexit, particularly as the government has sought to flesh out the concept of “Global Britain”—the slogan that was adopted after the referendum to account for the country’s new post-EU international approach. Serving as foreign secretary in 2016, Boris Johnson explained at the Manama Dialogue that Britain’s “policy of disengagement East of Suez” during the Cold War “was a mistake” and that “in so far as we are now capable, and we are capable of a lot, we want to reverse that policy.” He went on to outline that the renewed British effort east of Suez would drum up sales for British manufacturers and service providers, contribute to regional peace, and ensure the United Kingdom remained “active in and deeply committed to the region.”<sup>36</sup>

Since then, Britain has not only stepped up its diplomatic engagement east of Suez but has also begun to appraise its conceptual understanding of the region. In 2018, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)—amplified its diplomatic presence in the South Pacific, a point British diplomats have been keen to trumpet.<sup>37</sup> Equally, joining Japan, India, Australia, the United States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and France, UK officials and political leaders have also begun to adopt the term “Indo-Pacific;” in 2020, for example, the FCDO established a new Indo-Pacific section, replacing the older section dealing with the “Asia-Pacific.” In 2020, the United Kingdom has sought to deepen its relations with ASEAN, even applying for “Dialogue Partner” status, and Japan, through the signing of a Free Trade Agreement, which both countries are reported to see as the stepping-stone for Britain to join the CPA-TPP.<sup>38</sup>

Most importantly of all, just before winning the general election in December 2019, Boris Johnson, pledged to undertake a wide-ranging and integrated strategic review, which he promised would be “the deepest review of Britain’s security, defence and foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.”<sup>39</sup> He also stated that the review would look carefully at the significance of “shifts of power and wealth to Asia,”<sup>40</sup> a region, accordingly, the review is likely to place additional strategic emphasis on, to the extent that Britain may be about to tilt further into the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, Anne Marie Trevelyan, the former Secretary of State for International Development, who has worked on the review, explained at a side event at the Conservative Party’s annual conference in September 2020 that the review would probably be maritime-centric and would involve the redistribution of British ODA



efforts to counter China's debt diplomacy and provide an alternative to the BRI, particularly in light of Beijing's response to COVID-19.<sup>41</sup>

At the time of writing, however, this national strategy will likely be delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is reported that the prime minister and the chancellor are unable to agree on the financial settlement for the new strategy, which is thought to demand an extra £15 billion in UK defense and foreign policy spending out to 2025.<sup>42</sup> In any case, in 2021, the British government has confirmed that the Royal Navy's new supercarrier—HMS *Queen Elizabeth*—will be deployed on its maiden operational tour with a full strike group to the Indian and Pacific oceans.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

It is almost certain that Britain's presence in the Indo-Pacific will increase in the coming years. This was never dependent on the United Kingdom's membership of the EU; as we have shown, the British tilt toward the Indo-Pacific began long before the referendum of 2016 and has occurred across several planes. That said, the decision to leave the EU has amplified the United Kingdom's desire to branch out and consolidate its initial gains; the election of Boris Johnson as prime minister has only compounded that desire.

There are several forces drawing Britain further into the region:

1. **Economic interests**, particularly as the Indo-Pacific continues to grow in its position as the economic core of the world; in October 2020, it showed that by signing its first post-Brexit agreement—the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement—with Quad member, Japan. It is currently negotiating FTAs with Australia and the United States;
2. **Geostrategic interests**, in upholding British sovereignty over the British Overseas Territories and dissuading China's attempts to control the South China Sea and the maritime space, but also in terms of providing an alternative to Chinese economic coercion through the BRI;
3. **Diplomatic interests**, in providing support to close British allies, such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, but also to increasingly close partners such as Japan, the ASEAN countries, and India; and
4. **Humanitarian interests**, in supporting democratic forces, reducing extreme poverty, and implementing policies designed to counter environmental degradation, whether in terms of greenhouse gas emissions or oceanic contamination.

It is hard to imagine that these forces will not continue to pull Britain into the Indo-Pacific in the years ahead.

However, due to the geographic location of the British home islands, the United Kingdom will always look at the Indo-Pacific as something of an outsider, despite its equitable claim—through its overseas territories—to be a native or resident power in the region. But this does not necessarily matter, not least because the Indo-Pacific is becoming increasingly woven into, and bound up, with other areas of the world. As countries in Europe, and then the Euro-Atlantic region, grew in organizational and economic power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they reached out and bound other regions into their internal affairs. In the twenty-first century, countries in the Indo-Pacific are doing the same: Japan, China, India, and the rest, are reaching out—albeit in different, often competing, ways—connecting themselves, and the region they inhabit, to the world beyond their shores. Consequently, Europe, Africa, and Asia are all bound increasingly together, giving fresh animation to Nicholas Spykman’s “rimland” concept—the vast littoral space stretching around the southern underbelly of Eurasia, from the British Isles in Europe to Japan in the Pacific.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, insofar as Europe and Africa are now as much part of this broader strategic theater as the Indo-Pacific, Britain’s presence, posture, and role in the Indo-Pacific cannot be seen in zero-sum terms. Its role in the Euro-Atlantic should not be seen in opposition to its role in the Indo-Pacific. Already, in their 2017 Joint Statement on Security Cooperation, Britain and Japan recognized this fact when they declared one another “to be the closest security partners respectively in Asia and Europe.”<sup>45</sup> Consequently, British support for a free and open Indo-Pacific may come directly: through new military facilities, diplomatic posts, ODA, and the persistent, even permanent, deployment of Royal Navy warships—even integrated carrier strike groups, acting as the centerpieces for multinational naval cooperation. The Quad should welcome this input, even actively encourage it.

But the Quad should also recognize that British support for a free and open Indo-Pacific may also **come indirectly**, through the United Kingdom’s role in the defense of the wider Euro-Atlantic region. Through so doing, Britain would free up US resources for deployment elsewhere, not least to the Pacific. Moreover, by dissuading potential, and deterring active, revisionists closer to home, the United Kingdom could assist with constraining China’s westward geostrategic push, manifested today through the BRI, but likely tomorrow via a growing Chinese military presence. Indeed, if primarily Euro-Atlantic powers like the United Kingdom (and France) have to adjust and tilt to new realities in the Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific powers—Japan, India, and Australia chief among them—will have to do the same in reverse.

But what of British cooperation with the Quad? **Until recently, the Quad has been in its infancy. To fully mature, it will need to grasp, firstly, that it will need to**

expand and/or build partnerships with other countries, even those “external” to the region; and, secondly, that it cannot work in geographic isolation. Britain may never become a full member, rendering the Quad a Quint, but the country could become—based on its already-established relations with the United States, Japan, Australia and India—a key partner, insofar as it has much to offer in terms of capability, knowledge, and expertise. ✪

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

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## Abstract

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

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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# Israel and Quad Plus

## A Pivot to Asia and through the Indian Ocean

DR. GIUSEPPE DENTICE

### Abstract

Since the mid-1990s, Israel has looked at new trajectories in foreign policy to broaden its diplomatic horizons and to elevate its status as an influential middle power. Not surprisingly, Jerusalem's reinforced relationship with India and renewed interest in the Indo-Pacific region respond to multiple needs. Israel must contain numerous security and geopolitical threats, especially from Iran. In this regard, Israel sees in the Indo-Pacific region as a functional arena to penetrate newly enlarged markets, as well as to expand its exports, particularly in the hi-tech sphere. A reinforced partnership with India, as well as the opportunity to strengthen cooperation with New Delhi within the framework of the Quad Plus Dialogue, fits exactly into Israel's eastward policy. How important is Quad Plus for Israel? Can India and Israel move beyond tactical responses to their strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific? What role will Israeli foreign policy play over the next few years in this quadrant? And, finally, what prospects are there for regional cooperation? In this context, this article first gives a summary of Israel's developing relations with India. Second, it will try to explain the nature of the developing relationship with India, examining the geostrategic context in the current scenario, and third, it will seek to answer what possible challenges the Indo-Israeli ties will face in the future.

### Introduction: Israel in Asia

Since the twentieth century, classical authors like Karl Haushofer and Halford Mackinder have discussed the growing importance of Asia in modern geopolitics. According to these authors, control of Asia because of competition between international powers would have produced a competitive advantage over any rival.<sup>1</sup> Although Haushofer and Mackinder used the term "Pacific Rim" and "Eurasian Rim" to identify the Asian geopolitical space in the early twentieth century, only after World War II did these concepts begin to take shape. The extraordinary economic progress of Japan in the 1950s and 1960s followed by the remarkable advance of the so-called "Asian Tigers" (Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian countries) until the end of 1990s represent a first turning point in this evolving contest. In fact, the impressive growth of China

and India has characterized a watershed, clearly indicated by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping during a 1988 meeting in Beijing with the Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. Deng, on that occasion, stated that “the next century will be the century of Asia and the Pacific,” meaning the origin of a new age for the Asian region:<sup>2</sup> a new era in which China (especially in Deng’s vision), India, and Japan dominated the growing influence of Asian countries in the world, thanks to high rates of economic growth, demographic factors, and deepening interconnectedness. This approach views the “Asian century” not only as something inevitable or predestined but also as an overwhelming geopolitical vision that aims to overcome the Europeanized and Americanized ideas of global order in favor of a new Asianized vision of the world. This basically represents a direct derivation of what was the British Empire in the nineteenth century and the “American century” in the twentieth. A new concept—more economics oriented—aimed to create an Asia-led, or, more likely China-led, international order, in which Asia is positioning itself as a multipolar system that goes from Saudi Arabia to Japan and from Russia to Australia, extending far beyond its geographical and political boundaries.<sup>3</sup> In other words, a theory that considers the Asian powers (China and India in particular) as the next world’s dominant forces in the twenty-first century, supplanting the United States. This Asianization of the world has gained greater attention in the contemporary geopolitical discourse over the past decade. In fact, this assumption was revitalized by different analysts and scholars (such as Gurpreet S. Khurana, Fazal Rizvi, Jagannath P. Panda, Parag Khanna, John Hemmings, and Michael Auslin) with a reinterpreted concept of the Asian area, in which they consider the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific—and in particular the Indo-Pacific region—in terms of geopolitics and regional security as a reflection of US, Russian, and Chinese global strategies to strengthen their respective regional positions. In fact, today, Asian countries have increased their global roles in different sectors (trade, capital, people, knowledge, transport, culture, and resources) and the political dimension, becoming in a certain sense the center of numerous global trends.<sup>4</sup>

In this act of rebalancing from West to East, Israel also has been attracted to expanding its diplomatic network, engaging in good relations with Asian powers such as China, India, and Japan. From the Israeli perspective, this is a choice aimed not to replace its strategic alliance with the United States and its important trade relations with Europe (63 percent of Israel’s trade is still with Western partners),<sup>5</sup> but instead an attempt to balance its Western alliances and interests with stronger economic and strategic ties in Asia.<sup>6</sup> This path has strengthened, especially since the disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991) and the establishment of full diplomatic ties with China and India (1992). These developments

created new opportunities for Jerusalem to open new links and expand Israel's diplomatic networks with Asian countries in several fields of cooperation: i.e., security, agriculture, medicine, culture, science, and aviation.<sup>7</sup> Together with the global trends that have pushed several middle and great powers to "look East," this rebalancing in Israeli foreign policy also permitted Jerusalem to revamp its traditional diplomacy, which had been based on an outdated "security-based approach," and to make its diplomatic posture more effective and influential.<sup>8</sup>

In this regard, Israeli authorities have launched a new version of the country's traditional "periphery doctrine," an ambitious multidimensional, foreign policy strategy that called for Israel to develop close strategic alliances with non-Arab Muslim states in the Middle East. This refashioned contemporary form of the periphery doctrine seeks to expand Israeli diplomatic networks—particularly toward Asia, Africa, and Latin America—with the energy question and maritime dimension as centerpieces.<sup>9</sup> Many of these issues found growing weight in Israel's international talks, especially after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's state trip to Singapore in 2017, during which he announced that Israel intended to expand relations with Asia in a very targeted way. From this perspective, Israel has developed particular bilateral cooperations in several fields—specifically, security, defense and cyber matters, technology, innovation, telecoms, agri-tech, health, and environment—with some Asian countries, including China, India, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Among these, China and India represent the powerhouses in Asia and the main actors with whom to plan possible comprehensive strategies.<sup>10</sup> Basically, Israel's reorientation has staged a diplomatic offensive in foreign policy, which has had great success in improving relations with East African, Central and Far East Asian, and Gulf countries. In particular with the latter, Israel has pursued a rapprochement based on shared interests and enemies, which has been amplified by current regional events that seem to have marginalized the relative importance of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and increased the prospects for creating a tactical and strategic Israeli–Arab cooperation amid a containment policy against Iran.<sup>11</sup>

According to Jacob Abadi, this peculiar Israeli pivot to Asia is aimed at overcoming the international isolation into which hostile neighbors (and dynamics) since the early 2000s had forced the country and to search for new partnerships outside Israel's immediate regional sphere.<sup>12</sup> As part of this new approach in foreign policy, closer ties with India and the renewed interest in the Indo-Pacific quadrant have been a functional breakthrough for Israel's leverage in Asia. In fact, from the Israeli perspective, relations with India serve Israel's multiple economic, political and strategic needs based on (1) containing Iranian pressures, in the maritime dimension, the Persian Gulf, and the Indo-Pacific region; (2) achieving

a new international and reliable status as an influential middle power in Asia; and (3) contributing to forging a strong regional system in the Indo-Pacific as a functional arena for penetrating newly enlarged markets, as well as for expanding Israeli exports. Moreover, relations with India are important for Israel to develop other means of soft power in terms of identities (such as supporting Jewish communities in the country or building ties among emerging leaders in India through nongovernmental organizations like the Israel-Asia Center). At the same time, the Israeli invitation to participate in the previous meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—also known as the Quad Plus Dialogue—responds exactly to Jerusalem’s needs, also demonstrating the strategic importance that the Asia-Pacific region holds, politically and economically, in Israel’s foreign policy priorities.<sup>13</sup>

### **Indo–Israeli Relationship under Netanyahu and Modi**

Much of the success in this refreshed relationship is mainly due to the efforts of Indian prime minister Narendra Modi. Before becoming prime minister in 2014, Modi was Gujarat’s chief minister (2001–2014) and in this position flew to Israel in 2006 to reinforce his personal interest in the country. That interest continued and strengthened when he became premier in 2014 and especially after Modi’s historic visit to Israel in July 2017, which can be considered as mostly successful since seven memorandums of understanding (MoU) between the countries were signed. Moreover, during the visit, Modi met with the Indian diaspora in Israel and announced Overseas Citizens of India cards for Indian Jews and for those who had completed their military service in the Israeli Defense Force. This visit was variously proclaimed as “historic” and “special” not only by the media of both countries but by Modi and Netanyahu themselves. In this regard, Modi’s visit to Israel was a break from the past, because it confirmed a new direction in the bilateral relationship, which was further confirmed by Netanyahu’s trip to India in January 2018.<sup>14</sup>

On this reciprocal visit, Netanyahu received a warm welcome. A large delegation of prominent Israeli business leaders accompanied the prime minister. During the visit, both countries reinforced their fields of cooperation like defense, trade, science, and technology, signing nine MoUs. In addition, akin to Modi’s tribute to the Indian diaspora in Israel, on his Indian trip Netanyahu paid homage to the Indian soldiers killed a century ago in the Battle of Haifa during the last months of the Palestine campaign of World War I. As well as leveraging great symbolism, both visits highlighted the growing personal appreciation between the two leaders and their political interests in basing the bilateral relationship on the idea of a vital partnership upheld by a security approach and on a moral foundation of democracy.<sup>15</sup> In other words, Modi and Netanyahu used their “excellent”



personal relations to deepen the bilateral ties that are moving in an “upward trajectory,” as also stated by India’s Ambassador to Israel, Pavan Kapoor, in an interview released to the Indian newspaper *The Hindu* in June 2019.<sup>16</sup> In fact, during the visit, Netanyahu also participated in the annual strategic and military multilateral conference known as the Raisina Dialogue, in which the Israeli and Indian delegations discussed their successes and the challenges affecting their bilateral relations and Indo-Pacific regional security. In this sense, India reshaped its relations with Israel to promote bilateral ties and to raise this relationship to a new dimension of the strategic partnership.<sup>17</sup>

Compared with the past 25 years, in which the relationship has always been a balancing act given India’s sizable Muslim population and the country’s dependence on oil imports from Arab countries and Iran, Netanyahu and Modi have inaugurated a new momentum, or, with more emphasis, “the dawn of a new era” in the Indo–Israeli relationship, as reported in a recent article on the *BBC*.<sup>18</sup> This new relationship developed simultaneously with the slow eclipse of two traditional leftist parties (India’s Congress Party and Israel’s Mapai/Labor Party) and the rise of new rightist alignments in both countries: the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India and the Jewish conservative Likud in Israel. The improved relationship has produced a strategic alignment not only on security matters but also regarding water and agricultural needs.<sup>19</sup> From Netanyahu’s perspective, the rapprochement with India has been aimed at breaking long-standing anti-Israel stereotypes and providing benefits to the Indian population from Israel’s know-how in innovation and technology. From the Indian perspective, Modi’s government aimed to overcome the Nehruvian ideology that has prevailed since India’s independence to build a new image and international vision of a modern India, with a foreign policy at the center of the changes in the global order.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Role of the Military Dimension in the Bilateral Relationship**

Undoubtedly, the main pillar of the Indo-Israeli relationship is the military/security factor. After the Cold War, India established an informal, largely sceptical relationship with Israel focused on low-level cooperation on intelligence and handicapped due to the two nations’ relationships with competing superpowers. In fact, the purchase of Israeli military equipment—employed in the wars against China (1962) and Pakistan (1965, 1971)—was the only exception to this in their diplomatic ties.<sup>21</sup> Following the conclusion of the Cold War, India boosted its military cooperation with Israel. In fact, since the mid-1990s, Israel has become one of India’s main arms suppliers, a decisive factor that allowed India to regain possession of Kargil during the war against Pakistan (1999).<sup>22</sup> According to Sanjay

Singh, Israel's fundamental assistance to India in the conflict transformed the relationship into a *de facto* strategic partnership.<sup>23</sup>

Following the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, bilateral trade between Israel and India increased from 200 million USD in 1992 to 5.84 billion USD in 2018. This increase intensified after the BJP came to power in May 2014. Since then, trade in the defense and security sectors has witnessed—and will likely continue to see—significant growth. In particular, arms sales, technology transfers, and licensed production have emerged as important dimensions of the Indo–Israeli strategic relationship.<sup>24</sup> Today, Israel is second only to Russia among India's largest arms suppliers, with sales worth an average of 1 billion USD each year. According to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, India accounted for 45 percent of Israel's arm exports between 2015–2019.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the Indian Ministry of Defence signed several offset deals with Israeli defense companies. One of these companies is Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, which signed a 100 million USD contract with Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems Ltd. India (KRAS) in 2019 to manufacture and supply 1,000 surface-to-air missile systems for the Indian army and air force. In addition, the state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries signed a contract worth almost 2 billion USD to supply India's army and navy with missile defense systems.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the undeniable weight and importance of arms sales in the Indo–Israeli relationship, other security and defense affairs have witnessed tremendous growth as well. Counterterrorism and general military ties have been in the forefront of this cooperation. In fact, both leaders consider and perceive militant Islam to be one of the main domestic threats to their countries' security and a common source of concern in South Asia. After the Mumbai attack in November 2008,<sup>27</sup> both countries exchanged information on the finances, recruitment patterns, and training of terrorist groups—exchanges conducted away from the public eye. In fact, Israel and India are part of the Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism and have signed several deals on cooperation in homeland security, protection of classified material, and cybersecurity. Further, among the different cooperation activities, Israel's National Police Academy hosts members of the Indian Police Service every year for training, and the Indian Border Security Force uses Israeli security technologies (smart fencing systems, radar, and other surveillance technology) in sensitive border areas such as the volatile region of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.<sup>28</sup> In fact, it is not by chance that another key element in this bilateral strategic partnership is the regional variable. The growing border tensions with China along the contested Line of Actual Control in the Himalayan region of Ladakh has forced India to speed up the purchase of military hardware from the United States, Russia, France, and, obviously, Israel. In this race for rearmament,

India is looking to buy from Israel the Firefly loitering munition, Spike antitank guided missiles, Spice guidance kits that can be mounted on standard bombs to convert them into smart weapons, and an operational surface-to-air missile system, as a 2017 order worth 2 billion USD for such advanced systems to take down hostile aircraft and missiles demonstrates.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, with the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a joint team including representatives from the Indian and Israeli ministries of defense, foreign affairs, and health has collaborated to develop a rapid screening test system to track down coronavirus patients. From this perspective, the significant improvement in the bilateral relations, especially under Modi's premiership, has favored an important convergence of interests on a range of issues aimed to define a new pattern in their cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the growing partnership in this specific domain shows that Israel and India has reached a significant level of cooperation, considering that the two countries are facing both traditional and nontraditional security threats but are not formally bound by a military alliance.<sup>31</sup> In fact, according to Alvite Ningthoujam, the increasing "demand for defense items due to these emerging security challenges, the quest for technological advancement in defense industries, and Israel's readiness to meet some of the requirements of India—will lead to further expansion of defence cooperation."<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the Indo-Israeli security cooperation is a "strategic asset" in which Israel will remain an important source of defense equipment and technology for India and a reliable key source to help New Delhi in developing a self-reliant national defense industry.

### **Israel and India: An Evolving Partnership**

Considering this, it is evident that both countries have pursued a pragmatic approach in their foreign policy. The geopolitical shift that has seen an improvement in ties between Israel and the Gulf States, coupled with the seemingly diminishing role played by the Palestinian issue, has similarly influenced on the Indo-Israeli bilateral agenda. This, in turn, has led India, especially under Modi, to strengthen its ties with Israel, disengaging the relationship from the Israeli-Palestinian question.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, it is interesting how India's policy toward the Palestinian cause has changed, although in New Delhi's official narrative the Indian government continues to support the Palestinian cause. To support this, the government cited multiple examples, such as the Modi's February 2018 visit to Ramallah and the Palestinian territories—becoming the first-ever Indian prime minister to visit these territories. And to counter accusations concerning a lack of solidarity with the Palestinian cause, India's deputy permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador K. Nagaraj Naidu, said that the Indian government has increased its annual financial contribution

to the core budget of the UN Relief and Works Agency fourfold, from 1.25 million USD in 2016 to 5 million USD in 2018, pledging the same contribution also in 2020.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the need to pursue independent relationships with Israel and the Palestinian Authority has primarily driven Modi's uncritical support for the Palestinian cause, allowing greater maneuvering space with both.<sup>35</sup> For the same principle, based on the need to balance state interests with opportunities and goals in foreign policy, Modi has never officially made any declarations about the Israeli plan to unilaterally annex parts of the West Bank.<sup>36</sup> Conversely, Indian foreign minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar has welcomed the agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates on the normalization of relations, focusing on the agreements opportunities for peace in the Middle East and for boosting regional cooperation with Gulf monarchies and Jerusalem in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>37</sup> It is crystal clear that the marginalization of the Palestinian question on the Indian foreign policy agenda strongly facilitated engagement with Israel.<sup>38</sup> In fact, New Delhi considers Jerusalem a strategic partner, as well as the Gulf countries in the Middle East–North Africa (MENA) region, with whom India has good relations. Since his first term in 2014, Modi has vigorously engaged with Gulf leaders, attempting to preserve huge interests, given the number of Indian workers living in those countries—about 7.6 million people, vastly more than the 85,000 Indian Jews in Israel—and India's dependence on them for energy sources.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, this approach is aimed to neutralize domestic pro-Arab and Palestinian opposition groups (leftist forces, the Congress Party, and the Muslim minority) and to safeguard India's shared regional goals with Arab countries and Israel. The main issue in which security and geopolitics create common axes of convergence among Israel, the Gulf monarchies, and India is related to the growing leverage of Iranian foreign policy in the MENA region and in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO)—an instrumental and recalibrated posture that not only drives India and Israel relations toward each other but also confirms a strong interdependence between the Middle East and India.<sup>40</sup>

However, this triangulation in the bilateral relationship also has some shadows. While New Delhi is helping Iran to develop its port in Chabahar, maintaining close energy ties, Gulf monarchies boost relations with Islamabad to isolate and counter Tehran's growing influence in the Middle East. It is evident how peculiar the Indian role is in this triangulation, because it is in New Delhi's interest to counter possible Iranian support for Pakistan's positions on Kashmir but also to impede a strong relationship between Islamabad and Gulf monarchies aimed to diminish and isolate Indian leverage in South Asia. On the contrary, in this path Israel may be exposed to Iranian pressure, particularly if Indian and Gulf interests do not symbiotically collimate against Tehran but work indirectly in its favor.

According to Yiftah Shafir, “India is attempting to walk a fine line: to maintain its ties and essential interests with Iran, which is an energy supplier and an important land bridge to Central Asia and has cultural and historical importance to India, and at the same time, to preserve its important strategic ties with the United States and with Israel.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, full Indo–Israeli relations are still dependent on multiple changes in the status of Arab–Israeli ties and India’s relations with the MENA countries, including Iran and Turkey, which are hostile to Israel, as well as on the marginalization of the Palestinian cause from regional and international agendas that could impact different regional dynamics of cooperation between Western Asian countries and nations of the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the Indo–Israeli nexus has various implications related to China’s growing presence in the WIO, where India is an important actor and Israel is trying to stimulate greater interest.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, from an Israeli perspective, it is evident that the growing relationship with India reflects the awareness of the structural changes in the international system that place Asia and the Indo-Pacific region in particular at the center of multiple dynamics.

### **Israel amid US–China Global Competition**

Also fitting into this process of transregional realignments is Israel’s attempt to reinforce its diplomatic ties with China. Today, China is a reliable partner of Israel (second only to the United States), with bilateral trade of around 15 billion USD in 2018 and some 22 percent of all Israeli exports now destined for China.<sup>44</sup> This new step in the Sino–Israeli relationship began in 1992, but their bilateral ties have expanded significantly in the past 10 years. At the same time, Jerusalem and Beijing had begun extensive military cooperation as early as in the 1980s—exactly as in the case between Israel and India—even though no formal diplomatic relations had been forged. This evolution in their relationship has forged a comprehensive strategic partnership. In fact, in 2017, during a state visit to China, Netanyahu said that the bilateral partnership between Israel and China “was a marriage made in heaven.”<sup>45</sup>

While Jerusalem is a fundamental key partner for Beijing and a gateway to the Mediterranean in China’s global strategy also known as the One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR), for Israel, its relationship with China represents an opportunity to shift its foreign policy approach from a close Western (and in particular a pro-United States) alliance to a new Eastern geopolitical approach. From this perspective, Jerusalem became a member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Israel’s geostrategic proximity to the Red Sea and Suez Canal places the country at the center of Chinese interests. Furthermore, Israel has shown great support for China’s Belt and Road Initiative, hoping that the entry of Chinese companies

into Israel will lead to better infrastructure and collaboration with Israeli companies, especially in hi-tech fields. For these reasons, Beijing has invested massively in upgrades to the ports in Haifa and Ashdod, as well as in the Med-Red railway between Eilat and Ashdod.<sup>46</sup> The Shanghai International Port Group, one of the most important assets in China's foreign strategy, has already invested over 2 billion USD in the Haifa port, which some US officials believe could be used to conduct surveillance on the US 6th Fleet operating in the Mediterranean. In addition, the China Railway Tunnel Group has a contract worth 1.4 billion USD to dig tunnels and operate electronic systems for a new Tel Aviv commuter line. Undoubtedly, the Sino-Israeli convergence of interests created enough concerns in the United States and India to be highly criticized by both powers. In fact, both the US and Indian strategic positions fit into the Indo-Pacific region as geopolitical crossroads among the Gulf Peninsula, East Africa, and South Asia. This allows for a commercial and military projection in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole but also the chance to secure oil trade and freedom of navigation through the straits of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb. A strong partnership between China and Israel, and Beijing's growing leverage in the Middle East and Iran, is a vital concern both for Washington and New Delhi.<sup>47</sup> In other words, in this global competition between the United States and China, Israel must choose a side to solve this strategic dilemma.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, after years of blooming bilateral relation, the Trump administration expressed its displeasure with increased Chinese investment in Israel. The White House is even more concerned about the depth of Chinese investment in Israel, particularly in the technological, commercial, strategic, and security sectors. For this reason, Washington remonstrated Jerusalem, pressuring Israel to downsize its ties with Beijing and to support the US global response strategy against China.<sup>49</sup> In January 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that unless Jerusalem reduced its ties with China, Washington might reduce intelligence sharing and security facilities with Israel. Then in May 2020, Pompeo further insisted that Israel sever ties with China in security matters. Not surprisingly, indeed, US policy makers pressured the Netanyahu cabinet to choose a local company (IDE Technologies), rejecting the Hong Kong conglomerate CK Hutchison's project to build Israel's largest water desalination plant in the Dead Sea for 1.5 billion USD.<sup>50</sup> Although Israel has substantially reduced its ties with Beijing, Jerusalem has come to depend on China to upgrade its infrastructure. Conversely, the country is less dependent on American influence, and this has caused great displeasure in the Trump administration.

Beyond discussing the role of US grand strategy in the Middle East and Asia, this situation poses a security dilemma in terms of alliances with traditional

partners.<sup>51</sup> Another clear example of the US–China competition involves the Persian Gulf and the historical alliance between Arab Gulf monarchies and the United States. Although Chinese influence in the Arabian peninsula has grown immensely in the last decade, the Gulf monarchies will not risk turning away from Washington’s leverage to preserve China’s interests in those areas. In this geopolitical pattern aimed to deter China from the Middle East, the Israeli–Gulf normalization also becomes a key part of a much bigger game in which Asian powers (primarily China and India) are also trying to decodify the shifting geopolitics in the Middle East.<sup>52</sup> It is clear that Israel is part of the US–China strategic competition and obvious that this pattern could be replicated in several other geostrategic issues related to the rising and assertive role of Beijing in Asia, which endangers American hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, and no less important, is the domestic factor caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The second wave of coronavirus has imposed a new nationwide lockdown that could have important implications in terms of economic impact in Israel. The United States has used China’s lack of transparency in managing this crisis to criticize Beijing and to convince Netanyahu to cut ties with China. In this sense, Washington is trying to use the COVID-19 situation as a test not only to strengthen its relations with Israel but also to influence—and possibly to sever—cooperation between Jerusalem and Beijing.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, if US leadership aims to maintain a strategic primacy in those areas to contrast Beijing rising power, Washington should consolidate its highly complex project of establishing a global militarized anti-Chinese bloc among its European, Middle Eastern, and Asian allies—a scenario in which Israel could play a crucial role in the US pivot to the Indo-Pacific.<sup>55</sup>

### **Israel and the Quad Plus: Between the Indian Ocean (geopolitical) Implications and the Washington Dimension**

This geopolitical dilemma in the Israel–China–US triangle also affects the Indo–Israeli nexus that is not directly dependent on the US factor but is of great importance in Washington’s efforts to secure US assets in those areas. Indeed, the Indo–Israeli relationship reflects several emerging geopolitical and geo-economic needs affecting many international players involved in the Indo-Pacific region (such as China, the Gulf countries, and Iran).<sup>56</sup> An explanation for this evolution is what Ashok Sharma and Dov Bing underlined about the role of United States in the Indo-Pacific: Washington feared that strong Israeli cooperation with China—particularly in the military sector—could directly endanger US strategic interests, while this was not perceived in Indo–Israeli security ties. In other words,

the United States confirms itself as a strategic power in the region, trying to guide or influence several dynamics, such as the reinforced Indo–Israel relationship, into the US sphere of geostrategic interests.<sup>57</sup> From this perspective, the Trump administration has tried to redefine and shift, coherently with the Obama administration’s Pivot to Asia, US strategic priorities from the MENA region to the Indo-Pacific region, at the same time building a parallel security system that connects Western Asia with South Asia. However, to achieve this ambitious goal, it is necessary to build the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA, also known as the “Arab NATO”) in the MENA region and to transform the Quad Plus into an articulate military and security architecture that protects both US and Asian interests against China’s growing leverage in those areas.<sup>58</sup>

All these developments are further encouraging Jerusalem to revisit its current approach toward Beijing to preserve Israel’s broader strategic interests. In fact, the opportunity to expand the original Quad Plus<sup>59</sup> to other countries (such as South Korea, New Zealand, Vietnam, Brazil, and Israel) in a “2.0 version” responds to the different needs and convergent geopolitical alignments, strongly supported and shared by the United States and its Asian allies. In this scenario, it could be useful for Jerusalem to reinforce strategic partnerships with Washington and its Asian allies.<sup>60</sup> In fact, Quad Plus can help Israel elevate its status and capabilities in the international system, as a maritime power and a fundamental player involved in freedom of navigation in the WIO region. In addition, growing Israeli involvement in the Indo-Pacific dynamics under the banner of Quad Plus can help Jerusalem weaken Chinese influence in the country, diversify Israel’s supply chains, and encourage alternative infrastructural outlets, for example, under the Blue Dot Network Initiative.<sup>61</sup> Further, from the Israeli perspective, this strategic reengagement with India fits into a fluid geostrategic scenario aimed to protect and expand Israeli commercial and security routes that connect the MENA countries’ interests in East Africa and the Red Sea, creating a new potential bloc with other coastal states (Gulf countries in particular), with whom Israel shares a common vision and aspirations in Indian Ocean dynamics.<sup>62</sup>

In fact, the Israeli outlet on the Gulf of Eilat (more commonly known as Gulf of Aqaba), ensured by the homonymous port of Eilat, allows a certain penetration in the oil and commercial routes to and from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, as do the Suez Canal and the strait of Bab al-Mandeb. The geographical contiguity between these two subregions once again clarifies the strategic importance of the WIO quadrant and its surrounding littorals. This renewed Israeli interest in Asia focuses on the opportunity to expand its know-how and skills in terms of technologies, innovation, and security matters and to develop economic ties and penetrate new giant markets in the wider area. At the same



time, this new approach shows a constant growth in status and leverage of Israeli diplomacy in Asia, also favored by convergences of interests with those countries of the WIO region (especially with Egypt, East African countries, Gulf monarchies, and South Asian states as a whole) in the military and security fields to fight terrorism, illegal trafficking, and piracy between the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, as well as to manage several crises (such as in Somalia, Yemen,<sup>63</sup> and the Nile dam issue) or tensions (in the Persian Gulf and in the Pakistan–Iranian corridor) in that quadrant. This growing cooperation between Israel and Afro–Asian countries could represent an extremely important factor of change in the Israeli attempt to define a new and coherent focus in its own pivot to Asia.<sup>64</sup> Thus, strategic trends seem to dictate a strong alignment between Israel, India, the United States, and the latter’s key allies in the Indo-Pacific (such as Japan and Australia), particularly in the maritime domain. At the same time, this new development also reinforces the foreign policy status of India, which has developed excellent diplomatic relations with many Arab states, who see in New Delhi an important alternative to their economic dependence on China. Finally, this new era in the regional context demonstrates how fundamental the US factor still is in Indo-Pacific dynamics (especially in the security dimension) and how stridently US policy makers are working to forge a coherent and strong security architecture between the Near East and the Indian Ocean to counterbalance China’s multilayered presence in those areas.<sup>65</sup>

### **Conclusions and Perspectives**

The new start in the Indo–Israeli relationship is a diplomatic success of Israel’s eastward pivot. Beyond the bilateral interests within the relationship, Indo–Israeli ties depend on multiple factors that have surfaced in the Indo-Pacific region in the past two decades. In fact, these numerous geopolitical and geostrategic issues continue to deeply influence the development of bilateral and multilateral alignments as well as Israel’s capability to coherently evolve its foreign policy.<sup>66</sup>

Basically, Israel and India share a convergence of interests with numerous implications on multilayered dimensions and dynamics due to favoring a balance of power through cooperation and partnerships. In fact, both countries discovered a higher affinity in some common geopolitical goals, sharing strategic interests and targets in a wider range of fields that converged with the strategies and projections of some Arab countries. All these elements also show the strong connection between the burgeoning Indo–Israeli relationship and the different regional dynamics in West Asia and in the Indo-Pacific, as part of the United States’ multidecade political and strategic shift and priorities.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, differing security priorities between New Delhi and Jerusalem have emerged in this

axis. India is more concerned about China, while Israel is wary of Iran. In this sense, India and Israel should try to align their respective “Look East” and “Look West” policies and expand their cooperation beyond defense and military matters. At the same time, the triangular interaction among the United States, Israel, and China could create distrust and more competition not only in the Middle East but also in the troubled Indo-Pacific region, putting India at a strategic disadvantage.<sup>68</sup>

In conclusion, for Jerusalem it will be important to strengthen relations with India and other Indo-Pacific US allies (India, South Korea, Japan, and Australia) to enhance Israel’s role in the structural changes in the international system that see the Indo-Pacific as a new pole of global dynamics. Such a strategy will also require Israel’s utmost attention to avoid being caught in the crossfires of great-power competition while simultaneously preserving Israel’s independence and freedom of action. ⬠

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# France's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Quad Plus

CÉLINE PAJON

## Abstract

In France, the launch of the Quad Plus raised little attention. The emergence of yet another minilateral framework in the Indo-Pacific attracted some interest but also raised many doubts about the sustainability of this initiative. The general impression was that this new grouping was quite heterogeneous and maybe not the most relevant to tackle the challenge it ambioned to address: the COVID-19 crisis. So, while it might be too soon to tell if Paris would be ready to join such a scheme, the examination of France's various engagements in the Indo-Pacific can provide some clues regarding the synergies or divergences with the Quad Plus initiative.

In 2018, Paris unveiled its own Indo-Pacific strategy. It reflects a strategic reassessment of the region for French interests: the area is now widely acknowledged as the world economic powerhouse, and major trade partners are located there. The Indo-Pacific is also a key region when it comes to the governance of the commons and multilateralism. At the same time, there is now a recognition that China's rise is increasingly challenging French interests in the region. Maritime security is a core interest and objective in developing an Indo-Pacific approach. The Indo-Pacific terminology serves to highlight the strategic dimension of France's comprehensive approach to the region, by providing it with a powerful narrative. This narrative also strengthens Paris's legitimacy to act in the area and is useful to develop and expand cooperation with like-minded partners. Through its Indo-Pacific strategy, France can thus more adequately protect its sovereign interests while promoting and advancing its very own vision for a balanced, multipolar, inclusive Indo-Pacific regional order, upheld by key liberal principles and multilateral schemes.

The French Indo-Pacific vision relies on key strategic partnerships with all the members of the Quad. However, a concern to keep its strategic autonomy in the context of a worsening US–China rivalry and the strong interest to coordinate with European partners in the Indo-Pacific explain why Paris would be reluctant to join the Quad Plus in its current form. Paris would certainly favor minilateral or multilateral initiatives in which France would find more aligned interests and retain greater autonomy, as well as a deepening of the bilateral relations with the members of the Quad Plus and ad hoc coordination on specific issues.



## **Introduction**

In France, the launch of the Quad Plus raised little attention. The emergence of yet another minilateral framework in the Indo-Pacific attracted some interest but also raised many doubts about the sustainability of this initiative. The general impression was that this new grouping: the Quad (the United States, Japan, India, and Australia) plus New Zealand, South Korea, Vietnam, Brazil and Israel was quite heterogeneous and maybe not the most relevant to tackle the challenge it ambioned to address: the COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, Washington initiated the so-called Quad Plus in March 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, to exchange best practices and coordinate consular policies and strategic supplies between like-minded countries. From mid-March to mid-May, officials from the foreign affairs services held weekly discussions on practical issues pertaining to the management of the COVID crisis (visa exemptions, repatriation of nationals, maintenance of critical medical supplies, and so on).<sup>1</sup> It is unclear if this group has continued to meet since then. The Quad Plus, nevertheless, prompted a flurry of comments and discussions about the opportunity for the Quad to expand its membership and develop cooperation in domains other than maritime security, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR), or connectivity.

Because the Quad Plus is still a very nascent and debated initiative, it is difficult to discuss how Paris sees it and how France could formally associate or cooperate with the grouping. That said, the examination of France's various engagements in the Indo-Pacific can provide some clues regarding the synergies or divergences with the Quad Plus initiative.

In 2018, Paris unveiled its own Indo-Pacific strategy, which reflects a strategic reassessment of the region for French interests: the area is now widely acknowledged as the world economic powerhouse, and major trade partners are located there. The Indo-Pacific is also a key region when it comes to the governance of the commons and multilateralism. At the same time, there is now a recognition that China's rise is increasingly challenging French interests in the area. The Indo-Pacific terminology serves to highlight the strategic dimension of France's comprehensive approach to the region, by providing a powerful narrative. This narrative also strengthens Paris's legitimacy to act in the area and is useful to develop and expand cooperation with like-minded partners. Through its Indo-Pacific strategy, France can thus more adequately protect its sovereign interests while promoting and advancing its very own vision for a balanced, multipolar, inclusive Indo-Pacific regional order, upheld by key liberal principles and multilateral schemes.

This paper will offer perspectives on the development of the French Indo-Pacific strategy over the past two years. France's vision for the regional order will

be highlighted. It appears that maritime security is a core interest and objective in developing an Indo-Pacific approach. The French Indo-Pacific vision also relies on key strategic partnerships with all the members of the Quad. However, a concern to keep its strategic autonomy in the context of a worsening US–China rivalry and the strong interest to coordinate with European partners in the Indo-Pacific explain why Paris would be reluctant to join the Quad Plus in its current form. Paris would certainly favor minilateral or multilateral initiatives in which France would find more aligned interests and keep greater autonomy.

### **France's Indo-Pacific Strategy Vision**

The Indo-Pacific concept has recently entered the French narrative. Pres. Emmanuel Macron referred to an “Indo-Pacific axis”<sup>2</sup> when he visited Australia in May 2018, and subsequently, both the Ministry of the Armed Forces (MAF) and the Ministry of the European and Foreign Affairs (MEFA) issued key documents to present the French vision of the region.<sup>3</sup>

France has interest to act sovereignly in the Indo-Pacific area, having territories both in the Indian Ocean (La Réunion and the Scattered Islands) and the Pacific (New Caledonia and French Polynesia). Among these territories, 1.5 million citizens are living—along with approximately 200,000 French living in other countries throughout the region—and more than 90 percent of France's large (9 million km<sup>2</sup>) exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is located in the Indo-Pacific. France maintains a modest military presence of 7,000 personnel to protect this vast area. There is now a wide recognition that the deterioration of the security environment in Asia puts these interests at risk. The 2017 *Defense and National Security Strategic Review* notes that French overseas territories as well as freedom of supply and navigation are at risk.<sup>4</sup> President Macron repeatedly underlined the risks of a Chinese hegemony and the need for France to develop its own approach of the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond this, the Indo-Pacific is now recognized as a central stage where major transformations are ongoing that have global consequences, with direct implications for French interests. The Indo-Pacific is the economic epicenter of world trade and production and hosts vital sea lines of communications (SLOC). It forms a security continuum where freedom of navigation (FON) should not be challenged, in which issues such as terrorism, environmental issues, and great-power politics trigger tensions and where different models of development, cooperation, and regional integration compete. The region is also a central stage for key issues regarding the governance of the commons (oceans, cyber) and of transnational challenges such as climate change and biodiversity and a crucial milieu for the shaping of international norms. President Macron made clear that he wanted to

restore France's global influence by upholding its values and principles and for Paris to be a central player for global governance and multilateralism.<sup>6</sup> The Indo-Pacific is at the core of challenges to the world order, and therefore, France should be engaged as a responsible stakeholder there.

France seeks to develop a principled approach to the Indo-Pacific and aims to maintain a multipolar and law-based order in the Indo-Pacific and to encourage multilateral regional cooperation to tackle the challenges in the security, political, and economic spheres. France supports a multipolar, inclusive, and balanced region, "where hegemonic tendencies along with temptations of division or confrontation [should be] discouraged."<sup>7</sup> In particular, "The rise of an increasingly assertive China" is mentioned as a challenge, both for the diversity of the region and the maintenance of multilateralism. The focus on multipolarity and multilateralism is certainly different from the Trump administration's more confrontational vision of an Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at building anti-China coalitions. France is not supporting Washington's attempt to decouple economically from China. Also, Paris insists that its Indo-Pacific strategy is not military-driven, which again is a significant difference from the American one (for example, the renaming of the US Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command [INDOPACOM]). France's vision encompasses broader issues such as the blue economy and environmental questions.

Taking into account the coexistence of several models—for example, the Belt and Road Initiative, Free and Open Indo-Pacific, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-led multilateralism—France's aim is to "propose an alternative aimed at promoting a stable, law-based and multipolar order," in an inclusive and balanced way.<sup>8</sup> The stability should be fostered through "an international order based on dialogue and multilaterally set rules" to deal with transnational risks and governance of the commons (maritime security, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, climate change and biodiversity, cyber, and space).<sup>9</sup> Three major pillars have been identified: maritime security, connectivity and infrastructure, and environmental issues (climate and biodiversity). All three priorities relate to the ocean, the good order at sea, the sustained management of the marine resources, and safety of the sea lanes.

### **The Prevalence of Maritime Security**

In its approach to the region, Paris is placing the priority on the broadly defined maritime security. At the 2019 Raisina Dialogue, French admiral Christophe Prazuck, Chief of Naval Staff, presented a holistic approach regarding protecting the commons at sea: France is interested in keeping the safety of "dots" (chokepoints like Hormuz, Malacca, and Bab el-Mandeb Straits), SLOCs, and stocks (fish, hydrocarbons, and rare earths present in respective EEZ).<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, France supports the strict application of the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea, contributes to actions against crime at sea, and is keen on actively demonstrating its commitment to the FON. In 2016, the statement of the then Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian at the Shangri-La Dialogue emphasized the need to discourage unilateral *coups de force* in the China seas, for fear that such actions might expand in other strategic areas like the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>11</sup> Thus, while not taking sides on sovereignty matters, Paris has consistently sent its ships to the South and East China Seas in recent years, through the passing of the *Jeanne d'Arc* mission or the surveillance frigates based in New Caledonia. Last June, the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* was dispatched to Singapore during the Shangri-La Dialogue. The French Minister of the Armed Forces, Florence Parly, then promised that French vessels would sail at least twice a year in the South China Sea and will continue upholding international law in a “steady, non-confrontational but obstinate way.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, maritime security prevails in today's French Indo-Pacific approach. It has been so far embodied mostly by naval diplomacy through the dispatches of frigates or aircraft carrier groups to the region. But beyond the military dimension, other issues, such as the blue economy, are of interest for France.<sup>13</sup> The management of the large French EEZ in the region requires proper protection of the marine resources and a sustainable development of these resources. In addition, President Macron has identified the blue economy as an important engine for growth in the context of the COVID-19-induced economic crisis.<sup>14</sup> The security implications of environmental issues such as the depletion of resources (fisheries) and climate change are also core issues of concern. These kinds of risks, along with natural disasters, actually represent the primary threat to human lives in the Indo-Pacific area.

Therefore, France aims to develop its maritime surveillance capability in the region, through capacity-building, networking of partners, and information sharing. Maritime security and surveillance may indeed be the least common denominator that gathers the majority of the Indo-Pacific countries, from great powers to small islands states. Maritime domain awareness (MDA) is a requirement for better managing one's own sovereign territory and EEZ but also to ensure the safety of international waters, SLOCs, and FON. It is also instrumental to prevent crises resulting from environmental issues such as natural disaster or fishery depletion. Thus, it is possible to foster international cooperation on a crucial capacity (a shared MDA) but in a consensual, or nonconfrontational, manner (environmental crisis prevention). To concretize this project, France is building up on its strategic partnerships in the region.

## A Partnership-based Approach

To increase its leverage and compensate for limited capacities, France is putting a priority on strengthening relations with its partners and building up a network of strategic partnerships with India, Australia, and Japan, as well as Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Therefore, Paris has already initiated a dynamic cooperation with all members of the Quad and many of those envisioned as members of the Quad Plus.

During his visit to Australia in May 2018, President Macron referred to a “Paris-Delhi-Canberra axis,” bound to expand. The two key partnerships, with Australia and India, are founded upon common values and similar interests and are supported by defense equipment sales and concrete security cooperation (facilitated by acquisition and cross-servicing agreement [ACSA] deals) with a strong focus on maritime security.

In January 2017, India and France signed a white shipping agreement to enable information sharing on maritime traffic and MDA in the Indian Ocean Region. In March 2018, a logistics exchange memorandum of agreement, granting reciprocal access to each other’s bases.<sup>15</sup> Since then, the French frigate *Cassard* made a port call in the Mumbai harbor (January 2019) and in March 2020, despite the pandemic, an Indian Navy P-8 aircraft visited La Réunion to conduct a coordinated maritime patrol with French forces.<sup>16</sup> In Spring 2019, France and India held their biggest naval exercises, with a total of 12 warships and submarines, including the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, patrolling off the coast of Goa for the annual Varuna exercises.

The two countries have signed a common strategic vision for their cooperation in the Indian Ocean, including maritime intelligence and protection and exchange of sensitive information. India and France are co-developing a constellation of satellites to monitor the Indian Ocean, in an effort to strengthen the MDA.<sup>17</sup> France was also the first country to send a liaison officer to the Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), created in Delhi in 2018. Finally, the two countries are deepening their coordination in multilateral settings, with New Delhi supporting Paris’s application to join the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

While maritime security in the Indian Ocean lies at the core of the Franco-Indian partnership, the cooperation extends beyond that, in the realm of climate change and global commons for example. France and India jointly launched the International Solar Alliance (ISA) at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in Paris, and the first ISA summit, dedicated to the promotion of solar energy, was held in March 2018—the ISA is the first international

organization headquartered in India. The ISA is now gathering 121 member countries. However, Quad Plus countries such as the United States, Vietnam, and Israel are still not part of this grouping. Promoting and enlarging the ISA to these countries and implementing projects under the ISA umbrella would be a way to feed the cooperation among these countries. India, as well as Australia, was among the few nonmember countries invited by President Macron to the G7 Summit in Biarritz last year, demonstrating that Paris considers New Delhi and Canberra as key players for global governance.

The strategic partnership with Australia has been concentrating more on the South Pacific region. The two countries, plus New Zealand, are part of the 1992 FRANZ arrangement, signed to coordinate their assistance for Pacific island nations during natural disasters. Paris and Canberra also coordinate with Washington and Wellington within the Pacific Quadrilateral Defense Coordination Group, which coordinates maritime security efforts in the Pacific. The partnership is also developing along the lines of an important industrial cooperation, after the French company Naval Group (formerly known as Direction des Constructions Navales or DCNS) won the bid in 2016 to provide 12 submarines to be phased into the Australian navy until 2050. This long-term deal implies that France will stay engaged in the region for the coming decades, and in 2017, the two countries signed a joint statement to set their cooperation in the years to come. France was the first partner of the 2018-founded Australian Space Agency, and the two partners cooperate on monitoring of climate change and sustainable development issues (biodiversity and fisheries) in the South Pacific.<sup>18</sup>

The French ambition is to develop regular trilateral discussions out of these two parallel partnerships. This has been done at the Track 1.5 level in 2019, and the first trilateral dialogue at the official level was held in September 2020. The talks focused on enhancing cooperation in the maritime sector, promoting global commons (climate, environment and biodiversity, health) and multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>19</sup> The Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region,<sup>20</sup> issued in March 2018, and the Vision Statement on the Australia-France Relationship,<sup>21</sup> released in May 2018, also mentioned the possibility to coordinate with third partners through trilateral dialogues and joint exercises. From this perspective, Japan appears as a key partner for France, as it has the capacity to help monitor the SLOCs and shares France's concern about keeping multipolarity in the region and avoiding Chinese hegemony. The bilateral security cooperation has expanded in recent years and has been gradually institutionalized. Beyond the annual 2+2 meeting (between the defense and foreign affairs ministers), an agreement on the transfer of defense equipment and technology, in force since December 2016, has opened way to a joint research

and development of new-generation underwater minesweeping technology. In July 2018, an ACSA was signed to allow the sharing of defense supplies and services, an important step to expand cooperation in peacekeeping and HA/DR operations and facilitate more ambitious joint exercises. So far, the bulk of bilateral cooperation has been focused on maritime security, mostly in Asia, where Japan is taking part in HA/DR joint training held by France in the South Pacific, for example, but also in the Gulf of Aden with participation in multinational antipiracy operations. A maritime dialogue has been launched with Tokyo in 2019, and a joint reflection to identify concrete areas of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is ongoing.

Other identified partners to expand the network are Malaysia, Singapore (where a French liaison officer is dispatched at the Intelligence Fusion Center), New Zealand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. A deepening of the relations with the ASEAN countries is set as a priority. ASEAN Centrality is seen as a stabilizing factor, given that Southeast Asia is again a milieu for the Great Game between China and the United States. Therefore, the aim is to achieve a convergence of views on a number of issues and to help build up these countries' resilience vis à vis China, through maritime capacity-building assistance. This kind of activity can also be coordinated with local partners such as Japan, India, or Australia. The ultimate aim is to build up an open, inclusive, and transparent cooperation architecture that will allow a shared MDA to prevent or manage crises resulting from environmental issues, natural disaster, crimes at sea, or so forth.

While France does not share the confrontational and militarized approach that the Trump administration developed in the Indo-Pacific vis à vis China, the United States is also a powerful partner in the region. A French liaison officer is hosted in the US INDOPACOM, and naval exercises have provided opportunities to strengthen ties. Quadrilateral drills on amphibious operations held in Spring 2017 among Japanese, French, US, and British ships as part of France's *Jeanne d'Arc* mission near Guam. In May 2019, France led the *La Pérouse* exercises with the Japanese, US, and Australian navies, conducting their first joint exercises in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>22</sup> The progress in the Indo–Australia relations and the conclusion of a defense agreement could facilitate the organization of a joint trilateral exercises in the years to come.

Therefore, France maintains close and dynamic strategic partnerships with the four members of the Quad countries. However, France has so far refused to formally be associated with the Quad. This has to do with Paris trying to walk a fine line on China; while it is clear that France's Indo-Pacific strategy is motivated by China's rise and has elements of a hedging approach vis à vis Beijing, by sending signals and seeking to gain leverage through its partners, France seeks to avoid

antagonizing China. Paris indeed highlights the importance of engaging China, keeping a robust dialogue and partnership, and encouraging Beijing to play the role of a responsible stakeholder on issues such as climate change or the reform of the World Trade Organization.<sup>23</sup> This ambiguous approach generates frustrations internationally as well as domestically and so far has prevented France from joining initiatives that may have anti-China connotations. This position is also about maintaining France's strategic autonomy amid the growing rivalry between China and the United States.

### **Strategic Autonomy, EU Backing, and the Quad Plus**

Keeping its strategic autonomy will indeed be key to determine how France will navigate in the Indo-Pacific. An inclusive, multilateral approach is preferred, even if the reality of cooperation points toward more limited groups of like-minded countries to advance an agenda in an efficient way. Paris will promote flexible tools such as ad hoc, minilateral groups to tackle a specific issue and uphold common understanding and norms as a regime. France will also take advantage of its overseas territories to play as a local actor, nurture cooperation with regional partners, and maximize its military presence in the area. The focus will be on upholding principles, multilateralism, maritime security, and environmental matters.

In this perspective, the formation of the Quad Plus appears as a positive development. It encourages greater coordination between interested countries to work on a specific topic (the management of the COVID-19 crisis) rather than to cooperate "against" an actor. It encourages a minilateral initiative (the Quad) to expand into a more multilateral setting, without being institutionalized. However, seen from Paris, the Quad Plus also has some drawbacks—the more important one being that it came at the initiative of a Trump administration that was eager to shape the narrative on the initiative to make it a joint reaction to global crisis created by a China-originated virus. The United States also reportedly planned to use this format to launch its Economic Prosperity Network, aimed at accelerating the restructuring and relocation of supply chains out of China.<sup>24</sup> This American, or more precisely Trumpian, print on this initiative would make France very cautious to join if it were invited, especially as this Quad Plus was launched during the last months of the current US administration. Another concern is about the relevance of the group of countries that were gathered in the Quad Plus. In particular, when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo upgraded the session at the political level in May, he invited his counterparts from Brazil and Israel to join.<sup>25</sup> This grouping makes little sense in terms of Indo-Pacific strategy or COVID-19 crisis management but points again to a US-led initiative that may not be attractive to France. It is



worth noting that even the terminology Quad Plus stemmed from the media and analysts, not the participants' public diplomacy.

France will more likely go on with its own initiatives, emphasizing their inclusive nature (as long as partner countries share a basic understanding and principles). Paris will favor multilateral settings and, more importantly, is emphasizing the importance of a coordinated European approach in the region.

In the maritime security domain, coordinating with European partners is indeed also a way to enhance the visibility and the significance of the French deployments and activities. Back in 2016, Jean-Yves Le Drian called for a greater European presence in the region, through a better coordination, especially in the South China Sea.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, 52 British troops and their helicopters, as well as 12 officers from European countries and one EU official joined the French naval mission *Jeanne d'Arc* in 2017, and British ships sailed alongside the French naval group in 2018. In August 2019 at an informal meeting at Helsinki, EU defense ministers agreed to the concept of an EU Coordinated Maritime Presence. The aim is to ensure a coordinated presence at sea, based on a voluntary forces contribution by the EU member states, under national control. The first test is set up in the Strait of Hormuz with the European Maritime Awareness mission in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) mission that started in February 2020. It provides a new flexibility for the EU to show the flag and set up a multinational naval presence outside of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework—thus, evading the necessity to reach consensus of all member states to act.<sup>27</sup> It also affirms European strategic autonomy vis à vis the United States. In the future, such a European Task Group could sail the South China Sea for political signaling, naval diplomacy, and information gathering. As for now, France can take advantage of the EU's already extensive experience in contributing to maritime security by combating piracy in the Horn of Africa and building MDA capabilities in the Western Indian Ocean over the past 12 years. The EU is expanding its cooperation to the Eastern Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia through the Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) II program (2020–2023).<sup>28</sup>

While France was the first EU country to present an Indo-Pacific strategy and although views among EU member states on an Asia policy are still diverse, the Indo-Pacific narrative is gaining momentum in Europe. Distrust toward China has been growing in recent months, following the COVID-19 crisis, the fiasco of the mask diplomacy, the harsh rhetoric of several top Chinese diplomats in Europe, the realization of an excessive economic dependence vis à vis Beijing, and the shocking imposition of the Hong Kong security law. This growing consensus of an increasing caution regarding China came with a realization that Europe

should step up to better defend its interests in Asia too. Indeed, the COVID-19 crisis exemplifies the vulnerabilities of the supply chains as well as the importance of Asia for Europe's security. As a result, we have seen several declarations from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, calling for the EU to diversify its supply chains and build up cooperation with Asian democracies.<sup>29</sup> Germany, once very cautious about not antagonizing China, published its own Indo-Pacific strategy on 1 September 2020.<sup>30</sup> Berlin also announced that it will send a frigate to the Indo-Pacific region soon. The Netherlands is also reportedly discussing cooperation in the region with other EU member states.<sup>31</sup> France has been instrumental in encouraging EU countries to step up their presence and commitments to the region.<sup>32</sup>

Diversification of partners and supply chains will be a key objective of this European approach to the region. A stronger strategic autonomy with regard to industrial and economic policy is indeed a core objective of the post-COVID recovery plan proposed by France and Germany and adopted at the EU level.<sup>33</sup> While Paris is likely to prioritize cooperation with the EU and European partners, this agenda regarding the diversification of value chains is similar to the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative that Japan pushes together with India and Australia and could provide a basis for expanded cooperation among the partners.<sup>34</sup> Another way to find synergies is on health cooperation. France wants to make a vaccine against COVID an international common good. The Coronavirus Global Response event back in May 2020 helped raise funding to achieve this goal. Japan was a co-convenor, along with France and other partners.<sup>35</sup> This kind of initiative could certainly be useful in developing the cooperation with other Quad Plus countries, providing that the next US administration is ready to commit again to multilateralism.

## **Conclusion**

The French approach to the Indo-Pacific is in an ascending phase. The overall objective is to increase France's contribution to build up a stable Indo-Pacific governed by the rule of law and to mitigate the risks of great-power competition in a key area for French interests. Thus, multipolarity and multilateral cooperation should be fostered. To achieve this vision, France relies on its strategic partnerships in the region and strives to build up a network to mutualize capacity and have a greater impact. Minilateral, ad hoc groupings should be privileged to discuss and adopt a shared understanding and common principles to tackle issues, from climate change to governance of the commons (oceans, Internet). Paris will also empower its overseas territories to play as regional actors, as it is still unclear to what extent France will be able to mobilize additional assets to deploy in the

broad area. For now, Paris puts priority on keeping its flexibility and implements concrete initiatives to flesh out its vision.

So far, France has been insisting on maintaining its strategic autonomy in the region, hence pushing back against propositions to associate with the Quad, for example. This said, Paris has also been working to build up a network of partners in the region. Hence, multilateralism and minilateralism are both present in the French approach. The extent to which France can be associated or interested in working with the newly minted Quad Plus will certainly depend on the possibility of maintaining its strategic autonomy and walk a fine line between the United States and China, especially as the Sino–US rivalry worsens. This would not prevent a deepening of the bilateral relations with the members of the Quad Plus and ad hoc coordination on specific issues. 🌐

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# Quad Plus?

## Carving Out Canada's Middle-Power Role

DR. STEPHEN NAGY

### Abstract

The debate on the role and possible expansion of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is growing. Is there a role for middle powers such as Canada in the Quad? This article examines possible Canadian participation in the Quad from the perspective of middle-power diplomacy. Key lines of enquiry include identifying Canadian middle-power interests in the Quad, capabilities that Canada can bring to the Quad, and how to formulate participation. Findings suggest that Canada's potential Quad participation is limited by its capacities and that its middle-power contributions would be capability-focused, including enhancing maritime awareness and consensus building of the consultative process through proactive diplomacy.

### Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (hereafter, the Quad) has its roots in the nontraditional security cooperation that transpired following the joint humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) efforts among Australia, Japan, India, and the United States in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, which killed over 250,000 people throughout the region.<sup>1</sup> This joint operation laid bare the potential opportunities of participating states as to the possibilities that their quadrilateral cooperation could achieve. In May 2007, senior officials from Australia, India, Japan, and the United States arranged an inaugural Quad meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting in Manila, Philippines, to discuss ways to take the four-power relationship forward.<sup>2</sup>

Ryosuke Hanada argues that while

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave birth to the idea of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2007, that was based on incrementally expanded regional cooperation mechanisms, especially the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the development of triangular relations, especially Australia-Japan-US trilateral security cooperation. Both were, in different ways, stimulated by increasing threat perceptions of China based on uncertainties about China's rise. In that sense, the revival of the Quad in 2017 cannot simply be attributed to Shinzo Abe's leadership but also to the fact that four governments carefully and steadily shifted their foreign

policy priorities in broader East Asia or the Asia-Pacific and developed bilateral and trilateral security cooperation mechanism since 2007 in the face of a rising and assertive China. Abe recognized these developments and skillfully helped revive the Quad in 2017 with his conceptualization of the Indo-Pacific regional concept as a pillar of Japanese foreign policy.<sup>3</sup>

The debate on the role and possible expansion of the Quad is growing. Notwithstanding, while much has been written about the Quad, little has been written about the role of middle powers, like Canada, within this evolving institution. Is there a role for middle powers such as Canada in the Quad? If so, what are the parameters by which they should contribute to a Quad Plus arrangement?

This article examines Canadian participation in the Quad from the perspective of middle-power diplomacy. Key lines of enquiry include identifying Canadian middle-power interests in the Quad, capabilities that Canada can bring to the Quad, and how to formulate participation. Findings suggest that Canada's potential Quad participation is limited by its capacities and that its middle-power contributions would be capability-focused, including enhancing maritime awareness and consensus building of the consultative process through proactive diplomacy.

For clarity, this article borrows from my previous work on middle-power cooperation in the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific to define neo-middle-power diplomacy in the following manner:

[N]eo-middle power diplomacy is understood as proactive foreign policy by middle powers that actively aims to shape regional order through aligning collective capabilities and capacities. What distinguishes neo-middle power diplomacy from so-called traditional middle power diplomacy is that neo-middle power diplomacy moves beyond the focus of buttressing existing international institutions and focusing on normative or issue-based advocacy such as human security, human rights or the abolition of land mines, to contributing to regional/global public goods through cooperation, and at times in opposition to, the middle powers' traditional partner, the US. Areas of cooperation [may include]... maritime security, surveillance, HADR, joint transits, amongst others.<sup>4</sup>

This article will be organized into four sections. Section one briefly examines the current Quad members, their characteristics, defense budgets, identities, and the deployment of their military and defense assets. This section serves to highlight the diversity of states that form the Quad as a basis for thinking about which states would be suitable candidates for future inclusion if the Quad evolves toward a Quad Plus. The second section then examines the converging and diverging interests of the current members of the Quad to pinpoint where and how additional members, in this case Canada, could contribute to the Quad. The third

section then looks at Southeast Asia's views of the Quad as a criterion to understand how the region that forms the central locus of the Quad's activities views the Quad and what trajectory they would like to see the Quad evolve toward. The fourth section will then discuss Canada's role in a Quad Plus arrangement based on the analysis in the previous three sections.

### **The Quad's Nuts and Bolts**

By examining the current make-up of the Quad, we can make several observations that contribute to answering the research questions laid out at the onset of this article. First, the Quad currently consists of the United States and three middle powers: Australia, India, and Japan. Among them, Australia is a self-professed middle power that belongs to middle-power groups such as MIKTA, an informal foreign ministry-led partnership between Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia.<sup>5</sup> India is considered a future great power, while Japan, arguably a great power in terms of potential, behaves as a middle power by “maintaining of the international order through coalition-building, by serving as mediators and “go-betweens,” and through international conflict management and resolution activities.”<sup>6</sup>

As outlined in the Lowy Institute's Asian Power Indices between 2018 and 2020,<sup>7</sup> the fluidity of the power, capacities, and capabilities that each of the current Quad members possesses suggests that any institution based on contemporary metrics of each state's capacities may be outdated as the balance of power in the region continues to shift toward China. The fluidity of power and the shift toward China are even more salient in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as China has enhanced its assertive behavior in its periphery, evidenced by the Sino-Indian border violence in May,<sup>8</sup> hyperbole toward Taiwan,<sup>9</sup> enhanced gray-zone and blue-hull naval operations in the South China Sea (SCS) and East China Sea (ECS),<sup>10</sup> and the adoption of the new National Security Law in Hong Kong in June 2020.

Second, in terms of defense spending, the current Quad members bring significant resources to the Indo-Pacific table. In order of defense budgets, the United States brings approximately 750 billion USD, India 61 billion USD, Japan around 49 billion USD, and Australia 26 billion USD to the collective military resources of the Quad.<sup>11</sup> Despite the pandemic-induced global recession, each of the current Quad members continues to increase their defense budgets to reflect the realization that more and more resources will need to be directed at the Indo-Pacific to ensure the region is not shaped by China unilaterally. For instance, the July 2020 Australian *Strategic Defence Update* envisions a region that will demand



more robust maritime, submarine, and strike capabilities to defend itself in the coming decades.<sup>12</sup> In its 2021 defense budget request, Japan plans a record 5.49 trillion Yen, focusing on space, cyber, and the electromagnetic spectrum.<sup>13</sup> These are meant to deal with immediate challenges, such as North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and missile development and the long-term challenge of China's reemergence as the dominant organizing state in the region and determination to reorganize the region to protect Beijing's core interests.<sup>14</sup>

The United States and India have increased their military budgets as well. In the case of the United States, its *Indo-Pacific Strategy*<sup>15</sup> and defense budget proposal<sup>16</sup> demand increased resources be developed and deployed in the region to counter China's revisionist behavior. India continues to increase its military spending to push back against a growing Chinese maritime presence in the Indian Ocean,<sup>17</sup> a military presence along the Indo-China border,<sup>18</sup> and China's support for India's archrival, Pakistan.<sup>19</sup>

Third, if we compared where most of the defense and military assets are deployed, we find that Japan, Australia, and India have deployed most of their assets in their near abroad. For Japan, that means throughout the Japanese archipelago, the ECS, the SCS, and parts of the Indian Ocean.<sup>20</sup> Australia, in contrast, has deployed the majority of its military assets in the Pacific Islands area, SCS, and parts of the Indian Ocean.<sup>21</sup> India deploys most of its assets in the Indian Ocean and along its northern borders with China and Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> Even though the United States has a global deployment of its assets, it started titling its resources to the Asian region, first under the Obama administration's *Rebalancing Strategy*<sup>23</sup> and accelerated under the Trump administration through its *Indo-Pacific Strategy*.<sup>24</sup>

### **Converging and Diverging Interests of Quad Members**

Another important area to examine when thinking about the Quad and attempting to carve out a role for middle powers is to examine the converging and diverging interests of its current members to identify synergies and opportunities to establish a Canadian middle-power role.

For existing Quad members, there are many areas of convergence. The most imminent concerns for them are growing economic interdependence with China and China's track record of using economic coercion as leverage for strategic gains.<sup>25</sup> China's surrogates in Northeast Asia and South Asia, in particular nuclear weapons development in North Korea and Pakistan, also create worries in Japan

and India.<sup>26</sup> China's objection to expanded representation in the United Nations Security Council, despite attempts by Japan and India, represents another shared concern for Quad members.<sup>27</sup> China's expanding maritime claims in ESC, SCS, and Indian Ocean have the potential to disrupt sea lines of communication (SLOC).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Quad members are united in their continued frustration with China's role in fracturing Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) unity.<sup>29</sup> Finally, there is also growing interest among Quad members to use arrangements such as the Quad to enhance partnerships through specific initiatives such as strengthening and diversifying global supply chains.<sup>30</sup>

India sees the Quad as a coalition of states to sustain the US presence in the region. The subtext here is to ensure the Indo-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean are not dominated by China as Beijing seeks to elevate its global reach through the construction of ports and infrastructure through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other arrangements in India's neighboring states of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. For India, Chinese infrastructure projects are strategically located in what India deems its historical sphere of influence and are often called China's string of pearl around India's neck—albeit viewed more as a garrote than a necklace.<sup>31</sup> New Delhi's views of the Quad partially overlap with those of Tokyo and Canberra in this regard, as all three states want to ensure that the United States remains engaged in the region through active institutional arrangements such as the Quad.

While convergences are many, there are important divergences that continue to make deeper institutionalization of the Quad a challenge. For India and Japan, issue linkage over North Korea and Pakistan's nuclear capabilities continues to foster disagreement.<sup>32</sup> Tokyo would like to get India's support for North Korea, and New Delhi seeks Tokyo's support for Pakistan—but neither side is willing to seriously support the other's concerns. Another area of divergences is Tokyo, Washington, and Canberra's comfort with alliances, alignment, and minilaterals, whereas New Delhi continues to wed itself to the Non-aligned Movement. More critically perhaps is the gap between New Delhi and its Quad counterparts in terms of the geographic understanding of the Quad and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Here, India sees the Indian Ocean as the geographic scope of the Quad's activities, whereas the other members of the Quad have much more expansive understandings.<sup>33</sup> Last but not least, each member of the Quad has different degrees of concern regarding the securitization of the Quad or

FOIP. For India, Japan, and Australia, their largest trading partner is China, and that relationship cannot be easily changed.

**Table 1.0 Japan–Australia–India–US and Canada’s converging and diverging interests**

<b>Japan–Australia–India–US and Canada’s converging and diverging interests</b>		
	<b>Japan–Australia–India–US and Canada</b>	<b>Concern</b>
<b>Converging Interests</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Growing economic interdependence with China (Glaser, 2017)</li> <li>2. Chinese surrogates in Northeast Asia and South Asia</li> <li>3. UNSC permanent member status (Mohan, 2013, 283)</li> <li>4. China’s expanding maritime claims in ESC, SCS, and Indian Ocean (Abe, 2015)</li> <li>5. China’s role in fracturing ASEAN unity</li> <li>6. Resilience of Global Supply China (Basu, 2020)</li> <li>7. Infrastructure, connectivity</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economic coercion</li> <li>2. DPRK, Pakistan (missile and nuclear tech)</li> <li>3. Monopolization of representation</li> <li>4. Sea lines of communication</li> <li>5. ASEAN Centrality</li> <li>6. Global supply chain disruption</li> <li>7. Development, integration</li> </ol>
<b>Diverging Interests</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Issue linkage (Panda, 2011, p.8)</li> <li>2. Alliance/alignment/minilaterals</li> <li>3. Competing visions (Roy-Chaudhury and Sullivan de Estrada, 2018)</li> <li>4. Over-securitization of Quad or FOIP</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. North Korea vs Pakistan</li> <li>2. Legacy of Non-aligned Movement, US–Japan Alliance, Transpolar Sea Route</li> <li>3. Indian Ocean vs Indo-Pacific</li> <li>4. Exclusion of China and conflict</li> </ol>

Source: Author’s own compilation.

### **The Quad and Southeast Asia**

From the vantage point of Southeast Asia, the Quad in its current form is unlikely to get regional buy-in from ASEAN or Southeast Asian states. First, there is no dominant view within the region as to how to engage the Quad.<sup>34</sup> Even Vietnam and the Philippines, the two countries with strong anti-Chinese sentiment, would not like to see the Quad evolve into a hard security-focused regional institution, as it would place them in a position in which they need to choose between their security and their economic prosperity.<sup>35</sup> Both would welcome the Quad as a new actor in the region, depending on what the Quad intends to do. For them, the right formulation of the Quad would be another tool to hedge against China.<sup>36</sup>

Other Southeast Asian states do not view the Quad in such utilitarian manner. For many, if the US–China rivalry is the basis for the Quad, it becomes an initiative that ASEAN will be unable to support. That said, for most, the Quad is another tool in the hedging box and a useful means to keep the United States engaged and to bring in other stakeholders to maximize the strategic autonomy that ASEAN carefully guards.<sup>37</sup> If the evolution of the Quad focuses on maritime security, there is more potential to get support from ASEAN.

In the COVID-19 pandemic era, other areas have emerged as potential pillars of cooperation that could be implemented by the Quad countries in their present form or an enlarged Quad Plus format. For instance, COVID-19 demonstrated the vulnerabilities that Southeast Asian states face in terms of supply chains and in particular the vulnerability of their medical supply chains.<sup>38</sup> States like Vietnam and Cambodia, which are deeply dependent on China's supply chains, are increasingly in need of finding ways to diversify their trade and supply-chain portfolio to preserve their strategic autonomy as the US–China strategic competition intensifies.

The Quad represents one of many tools the region can use to meet its needs. To capitalize on this, the Quad needs to be reinvented to focus on the needs of Southeast Asian countries rather than some kind of Indo-Pacific NATO arrangement to contain China. Here, Japan's FOIP and its overlap with aspects of the Quad in terms of membership and several policy agendas may be a template to get support from Southeast Asian countries for not only a more proactive role for the Quad in the Indo-Pacific but importantly, expanded membership to bring in more resources to the region.

Critical to garnering support will be the inclusion of a clear statement supporting ASEAN Centrality, an overt shift toward infrastructure and connectivity, development, and trade as the key pillars of a reinvented Quad. An example the Quad can follow is FOIP's shift away from a more security-focused FOIP 1.0 to what Hosoya Yuichi of Keio University calls FOIP 2.0, a revamped FOIP that is more in line with the needs of the littoral states in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>39</sup>

### **Quad Plus?: Carving Out Canada's Middle-Power Role**

Shifting to the central research puzzle of this article regarding a possible role for middle powers such as Canada in a Quad Plus arrangement, it is useful to first provide a brief overview as to Canada's engagement in the region, followed by a systematic examination of where Canada fits compared to existing Quad members and in an expanded organization.

Canada's hitherto engagement in the region has been through an Asia-Pacific, not an Indo-Pacific framework, focusing on multilateral architecture such as the

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) on the trade side. Canada was a founding member of APEC in 1990 and has been a dialogue partner in the ARF since the forum's formation in 1994. Canada's activities in the region also include international development in the form of support, cooperation, and membership in the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and more recently joined—while not before considerable internal debate—the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2017.

On the political-security side, Canada's engagement has been through the ARF.<sup>40</sup> Traditionally, this is primarily meant to strengthen cooperation among member states within the Asia-Pacific context, and now this is falling increasingly under the umbrella of the Indo-Pacific framing.

Canada has yet to find a way to contribute to the region's security architecture through institutional participation. Nevertheless, Canada actively participates in multilateral defense fora such as the Shangri-la Dialogue, the Tokyo Defense Forum, the United States Pacific Command Chiefs of Defense Conference, the Jakarta International Defense Dialogue, the Multinational Planning and Augmentation Team Program, and the Seoul Defense Dialogue, which bring together senior defense officials at the deputy minister/vice minister level. Canada continues to express its interest in becoming a member of both the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus and the EAS.<sup>41</sup>

Currently, Canada's regular military activities in the Indo-Pacific area include the biennial Rim of the Pacific Exercises (RIMPAC). In 2014, Canada deployed more than 1,000 Canadian Armed Forces personnel; ships, such as the HMCS *Calgary*, HMCS *Nanaimo* and HMCS *Whitehorse*; submarines, such as the HMCS *Victoria*; and several aircraft (eight CF-188 Hornets, one CC-130 Hercules, one CC-150 Polaris, and three CP-140 Auroras).<sup>42</sup> In addition to these multilateral exercises, Canada also participates in the Cobra Gold,<sup>43</sup> one of the largest exercises in the region next to RIMPAC; ARF's disaster relief exercise (DiREx), which is a training opportunity through which ASEAN countries can exercise coordination of civil-military international assistance to strengthen cooperation in HA/DR cooperation; and Ulchi-Freedom Guardian Exercise,<sup>44</sup> which tests the operational control of the combined forces in defense of the Korean Peninsula. Canada's participation has consisted of personnel from the 1st Canadian Division, acting as a Division Headquarters under the the 1st US Corps, among other military training exercises in the region.

Reflecting on Canada's participation in multinational defense fora and its interests in the Quad, there is a convergence on many issues in the Indo-Pacific region—but less so as to the nature of the Quad. In fact, little is written about Canada's perception of the Quad, with some mischaracterizations such as “the

Quad is nowadays contextualized first of all by issues around the militarization of Chinese international behaviour,” an impression of the Quad which resonates with Southeast Asian states and other states as well.<sup>45</sup>

Comparing to the other middle powers within the Quad, Canada spends around 22.5 billion USD per year, a number that is comparable to Australia but well below the other Quad members’ budgets.<sup>46</sup> Ottawa deploys most of its resources toward NATO-related activities and peacekeeping operations. It was only in 2012 when Canada began its “mini-pivot” to the Asia-Pacific in which we saw regularized Canadian ships visits to the region.<sup>47</sup> These activities have continued to expand, with the Canadian navy seeing greater engagement in Asia.<sup>48</sup> Still, a common refrain when advocating for enhanced security-related engagement in the Indo-Pacific is that Canada already is significantly overstretched to manage its security in the Pacific, Atlantic, and now the Arctic Oceans and that it is simply impossible to divert more resources to the Indo-Pacific in any meaningful manner outside the regularized joint exercises listed above.

If that is the case, Canada’s ability to contribute to the Quad’s capacities significantly is limited by the realities of finite resources. Nonetheless, that does not mean that Canada cannot contribute to the Quad in other areas, such as enhancing maritime domain awareness activities, HA/DR operations, international development, infrastructure, and connectivity. As Robert M. Cutler writes, Canada can even assume the role of a stable “producer and exporter of Canadian oil and gas to Canadian allies in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>49</sup>

In this sense, Canada’s potential role within the Quad will depend less on *who* is part of the Quad or Quad Plus formulation but rather on *what* activities the Quad members agree to be the core agenda of the nascent institution. If the Quad evolves toward a security grouping aimed at curbing China’s assertive behavior in the Indo-Pacific, the contributions that Ottawa could practically provide would be limited to enhancing the capacities of the other members through leveraging Canada’s experience and expertise in particular maritime-based activities such as maritime domain awareness. In discussions with Canadian naval personnel, the core competences that Canada could provide in maritime domain awareness is leveraging their intelligence-gathering experience and expertise to bolster the collective capabilities of Quad members. This targeted form of collaboration suggests that there might be scope for other forms of targeted cooperation within the Quad framework as well. These may include multilateral sanctions enforcement in the case of North Korea, capacity building, search-and-rescue operations, and HA/DR activities.

If the Quad evolves in a direction that inculcates the needs of Southeast Asian states such as development, the diversification of global supply chains,

infrastructure and connectivity, and nontraditional security cooperation such as antipiracy, antipoaching, illegal immigration, and food security,<sup>50</sup> Canada will have more latitude in terms of the meaningful contributions it could provide to a revamped Quad. Here, Canada's existing track record in international development could be leveraged alongside Quad members such as Japan, which already has an established, longstanding track record of providing official development assistance (ODA) for regional development. This could be through the ADB, the AIIB, or both, depending on the project and target of developmental aid. In the area of nontraditional security cooperation as well, there is extensive overlap between the maritime domain awareness operations to monitor blue- and white-hull ships of sanction evaders and states attempting to dominate the ECS and SCS and the monitoring of pirates, illegal fishing, and human trafficking.

Contributing to capacity building of states on the frontline of Chinese assertive behavior will be critical. This means providing training and tools such as coast guard vessels, maritime domain awareness technologies, and intelligence so that states in the region can manage their bilateral challenges with China on more even ground. It also means more joint training exercises focusing on HA/DR and search-and-rescue to develop interoperability and experience.

Building on Canada's preexisting bilateral relations with each of the current Quad members, established multilateral cooperation in institutions such as the Five Eyes, and joint training exercises with Australia, Japan, and the United States, Canada is well positioned to contribute directly to current Quad members directly within or outside the Quad framework. Canada has activity courted India to expand cooperation in many areas, including the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPPA) and the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) under former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Harper further expanded cooperation to include foreign direct investment, technology transfers, and trade agreements and leveraged diaspora links toward expanding ties with India.<sup>51</sup>

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau further deepened this engagement with India with the recognition of "the rapid emergence of the global South and Asia and the need to integrate these countries into the world's economic and political system."<sup>52</sup> Ottawa's courting of New Delhi was aimed at inculcating stability into the Asia-Pacific with the rise of China and its assertive behavior in the region. While not explicitly supporting freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the Indo-Pacific and not linking Canada's activities in the Indo-Pacific to Chinese maritime behavior, Ottawa has aimed to both support and enhance Canada's relationships with states like India in the region at the same time it engages with China. Infrastructure, connectivity, and energy remain areas of synergy between

Canada and India. Working through the Blue Dot Network, Ottawa could leverage Canada's preexisting capacities and cooperate with Australia, Japan, and the United States to undertake infrastructure and connectivity projects to help New Delhi develop India's smart cities, diversify global supply chains, and make India and the region more resilient to shocks to supply chains and economic coercion.

Energy is another area that Canada could lend weight to relieve pressure on states with concerns over SLOCs in the SCS being disrupted by intentional or accidental conflicts in the region. By providing a steady flow of energy resources to the region, Canada could assist Quad members and Southeast Asian states to be less dependent on energy flows in the SCS. For Southeast Asian states, this gives them more strategic autonomy by decreasing their reliance on SCS-based SLOCs. For Quad members, guarantees of stable supplies of energy strengthens their resilience against disruptions, allowing their economies to be less affected by conflict, coercion, and endogenous and exogenous shocks.

On the energy front, Canada is already reaching out to India. For instance, at the second India–Canada Ministerial Energy Dialogue, Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan said, “India and Canada share common values and ideals and believe in long term sustained partnerships. Our energy cooperation is steadily growing, but the potential is much higher.”<sup>53</sup> Ketan Metha highlights that

In times of growing pressure from the US to cut oil imports from Iran, Canada could be an alternative energy source for India. Canada can also be a significant source of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) for India; it is estimated that the latter will import 44 billion cubic metres of LNG by 2025.<sup>54</sup>

Aside from India, Canada has also reached out to the other existing Quad members to provide support for cooperation and a growing alignment of the FOIP vision. For instance, on the occasion of Canadian defense minister Harjit Sajjan's visit to Japan in June 2019, both countries agreed to continue to “advance the FOIP.”<sup>55</sup> This declaration came in the wake of the previous years' Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) to strengthen cooperation between the Canadian Armed Forces and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.<sup>56</sup> The agreement “advances cooperation between the two countries in response to humanitarian and disaster crises, peacekeeping initiatives, and allow greater collaboration with third-partners, including the US.”<sup>57</sup>

Cooperation between Canada and Japan is not limited to the bilateral level as highlighted above. Since 2018, Canada has also participated in the Keen Sword trilateral exercises with the United States and Japan. The latest rendition of Keen Sword included one Canadian Destroyer and is meant to provide participants “a



comprehensive scenario designed to exercise the critical capabilities required to support the defense of Japan and respond to a crisis or contingency in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>58</sup> While participation is modest, the regular presence of the Royal Canadian Navy working alongside Japan and the United States sends a strong signal that Canada is committed to working with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific on issues Ottawa deems critical to a rules-based order. This participation outside the Quad framework and without signing on to FONOPS, the latter of which is squarely aimed at deterring Chinese maritime activities, does not speak to Canada’s lack of support for these activities; rather, it illustrates that Ottawa wishes to maximize Canada’s strategic flexibility toward China while demonstrating Canadian support for and ability to contribute to multilateral cooperation in the region.

Maritime monitoring and surveillance is another domain in which Canada has been engaged since 2018, using aircraft based at Kadena Air Base, Japan, and subject to a UN Status of Forces Agreement, to counter illicit maritime activities, including the ship-to-ship transfers of North Korean-flagged vessels that are prohibited by United Nations Security Council resolutions.<sup>59</sup> Here, leveraging the preexisting Five Eyes Network provides a springboard to expand cooperation between current Quad members such as Australia and the United States, while at the same time basing cooperation on the Five Eyes framework excludes two of the current Quad members: Japan and India.

Canada recently held a virtual Five Eyes defense ministers’ meeting on 15–16 October 2020. Building on the June 2020 Five Eyes meeting, participants expanded their talks to focus on China and the Indo-Pacific. This focus may provide a framework where Canada can provide value in the Indo-Pacific. While this maybe be welcome to identify where current and potential Quad members could cooperate, some see a Five Eye framework for Canada to participate in the region a “risk that by diluting an intelligence-sharing and joint collection mechanism into something with an expansive agenda, the core missions of the grouping could be sidelined. Issues-based coalitions work much better than all-purpose ones.”<sup>60</sup>

Last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic and a recent track record of economic coercion clearly illustrated the dangers of global supply chains being over-centralized in one state. In the case of the former, the shutdown of the Chinese economy to control the COVID-19 outbreak severely affected the supply and distribution of products, including medical equipment and personal protective equipment,<sup>61</sup> parts, and products to the world.<sup>62</sup>

In the case of the latter, economic coercion against Australia, Canada, South Korea, and Japan in recent years demonstrates the need to diversify and strengthen supply chains such that countries can be better positioned to deal with shocks to

global supply chains and the weaponization of trade. To do this, Japan's approach has been primarily economic. It is investing in building resilience into the Indo-Pacific economic integration through infrastructure projects, strengthening global supply chains throughout Southeast and South Asia, developmental and technological aid that strengthens economic integration, support for a shared rules-based understanding of trade, and the use of SLOCs.<sup>63</sup> To illustrate, the supplementary budget for fiscal 2020 includes subsidies to promote domestic investment for support of supply chain (220 billion Yen) and for supporting diversification of global supply chains (23.5 billion Yen). These are examples of this investment during the COVID-19 pandemic, but many of the core pillars of the FOIP Vision also illustrate this commitment.

Taking a page from Japan's approach to deal with economic coercion and the possibility of another shock to global supply chains, Canada should work with other Quad members in investing in the diversification and resilience of supply chains. This serves to enhance their collective economic security while providing to Southeast Asian and South Asian states critical infrastructure and connectivity that enhances their development. At the same time, it enhances these states' strategic autonomy to deal with assertive behavior without directly confronting China or creating a security competition with China.

## **Conclusion**

The viability of a Quad Plus arrangement and carving out Canada's middle-power role is dependent on how successful current Quad members are at reinventing the security dialogue such that it focuses on the needs of Southeast and South Asian nations. Canada's contributions will be limited if the arrangement retains its current formulation and orientation that leans toward an informal security partnership chiefly aimed at containing China. In contrast, a reinventing of the Quad such that it embodies the needs of littoral states in the Indo-Pacific opens up doors for Canadian contributions to the region through the Quad. Infrastructure and connectivity, energy cooperation, maritime domain awareness, HADR, and search-and-rescue activities are the primary areas in which Canada can contribute to the current Quad and Quad Plus formulations. For Canada, the question of a middle-power role within the Quad will be informed by how well Ottawa can leverage and expand Canada's existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to add value to the Quad while being in line with Canadian interests in the region. 🌐

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# Brazil in the Quad Plus

## Incongruous or Extended Drawbridge of the Indo-Pacific?

DR. DATTESH D. PARULEKAR

### Abstract

The Indo-Pacific framework has been characterized as “inclusive and across oceans,”<sup>1</sup> suggestive of the expansively envisioned traverse and trajectory of the strategic construct. Hence, it is no surprise, but plausibly curious, that the emergent phraseological rollout of the Quad Plus, an informal collective-in-the-making of very recent vintage, transcends the immediate two-oceans confluence of the Quad grouping of the quartet of vibrant democracies, to extend to the third ocean of human habitation, in incorporating the Atlantic seaboard transcontinental powerhouse of Brazil into its mix. This article endeavors to intimately examine the intriguing case of Brazil’s involvement in the Washington-spurred maiden conference call for coordination, which, given Brasilia’s abject lack of appreciation of the Indo-Pacific framework in its foreign policy calculus and little if any enthusiasm exuded in orienting Brazil to it in any purported grand strategy, makes it an apparently incongruous participant in the exercise. The article illuminates the sashaying trajectory of contemporaneous twenty-first-century Brazilian foreign policy, contextualized to interchange with sovereigns within the once proverbial Asia-Pacific but now the putatively realigned Indo-Pacific, through the epoch of constructive and responsible internationalism under Pres. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s administration (2003–2010); the subsequent phase of recanting isolationism of Pres. Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016); through to the erratic and sometimes reckless fluidity of incumbent Pres. Jair Bolsonaro, in pursuance of ascertaining the scoped prospects, or otherwise, of Latin America’s largest country and its economic involvement with and within the Indo-Pacific going forward. The article further assesses the accosting systemic and sovereign actor pressures that come to bear in chaperoning the dilemmas of Brazil in its logical and legitimate desires for strategic autonomy in foreign policy regarding diversification and pluralization of strategic engagements, which, in the Indo-Pacific context, would entail a curated approach on the part of Itamaraty—one that tactically balances among Brazil’s deep-seated commercialist dependence on Beijing, its progressively bonhomous engagement with Washington, and its role and contribution within the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) construct, where the other four sovereign constituents are geographical and geopolitical Indo-Pacific stakeholders.

## **Introduction**

In times where the constructs and processes of regionalism and regionalization are undergirded by the axis of functional cartography born of delimited geographies endeavoring to produce transcending continuums, it is only in the nature of the terrain, for international statecraft to manifest strange sovereign diplomatic bedfellows from time to time—accentuated, of course, by the pandemic-spurred new normal. However, even by the greatest stretches of imagination, it strains incredulity to observe the invitation to Brazil to partake in the foreign ministers' teleconference of the clique informally billed as the Quad Plus. If Brasilia was tapped only because the brief of the coordinating conference call was ostensibly to sing from the same hymn sheet at the then-impending World Health Assembly plenary meeting of the World Health Organization, then, given Brazil's travails with tending to the pandemic, it is understandable and could be perceived as a one-off invitation to the cause. However, if the invitation is anything but, then, in incorporating an-ocean-and-two-continents-apart nation as far removed as one could possibly be on account of its geopolitical bliss from the Indo-Pacific construct, the gross oddity of such an invitational exercise straddles the gamut of flippancy and the outlandish. And going beyond being the odd nation out from within the BRICS in relation to the Indo-Pacific, Brazil's outlier status is further credentialed by the dint of it being the only country of even the G4 collective with no express or discernible strategic conception or resonance of the Indo-Pacific—this made more stark after Germany's recent formalization of an Indo-Pacific vision,<sup>2</sup> all of which befuddles to no end Brazil's selection to the virtual meeting.

If the solicitation to the virtual schmooze was oozing appreciation for Brazilian congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro joining US president Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's ranks, in picking cudgels with Beijing through typecasting the pandemic strain as the "Chinese virus"<sup>3</sup> but without the Bolsonaro dispensation following through on punitive measures against China either on trade or through technological nix, then, eligibility on considerations of conveniently opportunistic polemics that deflect from Brazil's own ham-handed management of the apocalyptic health crisis construe as facetiously trivial. And even if one were to counsel Brazil's invitation to the Indo-Pacific pertinent confabulation on account of its maritime exertions as part of flagship naval exercise IBSAMAR, commissioned since 2008 under the rubric of the long fledgling India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Trilateral, then, such an argument would constitute clutching at straws. This since only one of six biennial editions of the trilateral arrangement at maritime interoperability has transpired in Indo-Pacific waters, and that too brought on by the logistical convenience of preceding the



marquee International Fleet Review assemblage of multinational navies, hosted by India off Vishakhapatnam in March 2016.<sup>4</sup> From every standpoint, Brazil's presence at the convivial maiden Quad Plus conversation exudes incongruity and is replete with jarring incoherence.

### **Brazil within the Indo-Pacific's Quad Plus: Much Ado about Nothing?**

As a country possessed of gargantuan landmass, hemming in the fifth-largest demographic concentration worldwide and being reposed of natural endowment in terms of strategic natural resources, Brazil has inveterately harbored plausible and legitimate aspirations of exerting a greater influence upon the international system—most certainly so since the turn of the century. However, such comprehensible ambitions have for good measure stood tempered at the multitudinous altar of Brazil's travails with being recognized and coveted as the dominant regional lynchpin by sovereign peers within continental South America and the larger transcontinental Latin American space. Brasilia's penchant to stand strong in support of its national equities and wider regional interests vis-à-vis the United States, a posture that has it often touted in metaphorical profile as being the region's France, and the nation's inability to emerge from the natural conditioning of its distinctly Euro-Atlantic and principally Lusophone-Africa conceptualized worldview have accentuated the disconnect between the regional powerhouse's ambitions to break out of geographical detachment and its underwhelming performance in terms of participation in global value and supply chains. Additionally, its primary mode of industrialization, which, despite creation of niche capabilities in specific sectors, has largely remained commoditized in catering to national demand and regional markets, thereby ending-up shortchanged. Furthermore, the dint of this predominantly agrarian powerhouse with decent production sectors to boot, having remained aloof of multilateral trade and investment compacts, has, unlike Mexico, rendered it short shrift in envisioning a foreign economic policy beyond the transactional interests interchange with specific sovereign commercial partners globally. Hence, during the course of the past three decades of the post-Cold War era, for a once praetorian Brazil now democratizing at home but desirous of diversifying strategic choices overseas, a geopolitically and economically rising Asian continent never caught Brasilia's imagination in a manner any greater than its mercantilist attraction for the specific natural resources-devouring dynamic economies of East Asia, i.e., Japan, South Korea, and more so China, not to mention India of late. The carving out of an Indo-Pacific strategy, anchored in diversified dimensions of trade and investment interchange, could procreate an alternative

cognitive thinking on strategic engagement with the dynamic economic sentinels within a rising Asia, which would productively serve the recasting and reorientation of the Brazilian economy and behold exponential socioeconomic benefits.

It is hard to envision either the logic of identity or salutary role for Brazil amid the intensifying strategic churn of the Indo-Pacific expanse, where primordial considerations of ensuring a rules-based international order, preserving the pluralized nature of maritime waterways as global commons, and establishing and sustaining a dynamic and effective balance of power that counteracts against machinations at singularized hegemony are overriding in the sovereign protagonists' strategic calculus. In contrast, Brazil, which is perched along the Southern Atlantic coast, heralds a coastline of 7,491 kilometers that sits astride virtually halcyon and somnolent stretches of maritime expanse<sup>5</sup> so pristinely insulated from conventional and asymmetrical threats that Brazilian naval and maritime capabilities are more utilitarian in benign beneficence of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) activities, most notably across the Caribbean. However, with its outbound trade-based orientation more incandescent than its inbound integration across the continent, Brazil's prosperity remains inseparably forged in safe and secure maritime shipments across the serene stretches of the Atlantic and the Eastern and Central Pacific, which in themselves are distant from the strategic sea lanes of trade and lines of communications straddling the continuum arc of the Indian Ocean through to the Western Pacific. Adding further grist to the mill of argument that Brazil is yet to and seems lackadaisical to realign its maritime gaze toward the emerging fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific is borne out by the dint of each installment of the Exercise IBSAMAR, which is essentially billed as a Southern Oceans initiative, barring the 2016 edition, having taken place off South Africa's coast, a categorical reflection to date of Brazil's maritime prioritization of the Southern Atlantic over the Western Indian Ocean. If anything, Brazil's conception of vulnerability, to the extent perceived in its security calculus, stems from potential continental-based threats—the upshot of sharing territorial land frontiers with 10 South American nations.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding recent endeavors to transform Brazilian naval capabilities from the coastal territorial functions of a green-water force to the constabulary of a blue-water naval entity, the obsessions of disposing as a Southern Atlantic anchor in terms of a security actor, economic agent, and development exponent leaves maritime orientation and strategic conception obscured from the crosshairs of the arterial waterways of the Indo-Pacific. Even as Brazil grapples with translating its quotient of raw power across the region into substantive influence and meaningful sway, through strengthening its long spearheaded Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) framework, it pursues its intentions to team-up with the Pacific

Alliance trade grouping of sovereign constellations along the western rim of the Americas. It is imperative that such impulses at trade integration and compulsions for maritime maneuver-in-concert on the Pacific flank go beyond a possible Brazilian flip on its two earlier spurns of US invitations in 2016 and 2018 to participate in the biennially convened multinational Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) maritime exercises. The calibrated but marked engagement with navies of resident and littoral Pacific countries, with an ensuing naval posture at the modest threshold of maritime interoperability, would be very much in consonance with Brazil's potential prospective equities across the Indo-Pacific expanse.

What bridges the breach between grand ambition and veritable action is the chiming amalgam of strategic intent and curated content imbued in a nation's higher-order ideational and policy disposition. By this metric, even a fleeting glance at the thought of possible Brazilian orientation toward the Indo-Pacific leaves more questions than answers. Even though the Indo-Pacific construct is a concept of recent currency, the South American giant, famed for its intra-executive policy tussles that often place the institutional establishment of the Ministry of External Relations, known more famously as Itamaraty, at odds with the prioritizing policies of its presidential occupants, has curiously not exhibited any inclination—let alone *mojo*—for formulating an ostensible Indo-Pacific outlook, despite the fact that Brazil's trade ties with Asian countries, most notably the East Asian triumvirate of China, Japan, and South Korea, but also with the Indian Ocean mainstay India, have burgeoned, with the incidence of politico-diplomatic engagements scaled up. Given that there is nothing whatsoever to glean from the foreign affairs dispatch box, echelon's speeches, or defense strategy white papers emanating since 2012, it would be safe to conclude that Brasilia simply has not bought into the pervasive popular parlance of the Indo-Pacific coinage just yet and remains either indifferent, slothful, or merely realistically prudent of the serious limitations and diminishing returns of any politico-diplomatic legwork in strategic conception and action.<sup>7</sup> Amid key Indo-Pacific and extraregional players having undertaken strategic perspectivization and approach formulation with regard to the Indo-Pacific, the conspicuousness of Brazilian blissful ignorance, despite the fact that Brasilia perceives itself as an arch-pillar popular voice of the Global South, reflects a cognitive frame and operative vent as being seriously out of touch and needing a dose of reality.

### **Brazil in a China Juxtaposed Quad Plus**

In what could not be more disparaging to a proud nation, Brazil's economic relationship with China, with which it established a Strategic Partnership way back in 1993 and subsequently elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in

2012,<sup>8</sup> construes a double whammy. Mutual equations evoke dimensions of pronounced export-led dependence upon the world's second-largest economy on the one hand and aggravating susceptibility to the pincer-like consequences of import overreliance and investment benefaction at the Middle Kingdom's hands, on the other. China has been Brazil's most commodious trade partner and the latter's predominant export destination since 2009,<sup>9</sup> besides being the largest investor across the South American nation—a profile that leaves the competitive likes of Japan, with its high-value but circumscribed economy,<sup>10</sup> and India, with its glacially rising economic trajectory, appreciably important but by no means epochal in the current and foreseeable future. As Beijing sources predominant quantum of agricultural commodities to meet the considerations of food-chain and food-security mechanics back home, it also seeks significant quantities of naturally mined minerals, rendering its stranglehold on Brazilian economic fortunes seemingly insurmountably complete, as witnessed in a secular upswing of commercial equations spanning the cognitive regime priorities of four distinct presidencies and notwithstanding the populist rhetoric—seemingly immune even to the ideological fault lines across the Brazilian political spectrum. Yet, it is not all smooth sailing, as the vagaries and vicissitudes within sectors of the Brazilian economy ebb and flow with the economic trajectory posted by China, positioning the latter as predator to the sunrise manufacturing industry of Brazil but viewed as Good Samaritan by the bedrock milieu of Brazilian agro-space stakeholders.

Notwithstanding President Bolsonaro's acerbic rhetoric on the campaign stump back in 2018, when he famously remarked that "China was not buying in Brazil, but buying Brazil,"<sup>11</sup> his ensuing courtship of Taiwan, an overture that is anathema to Beijing, his decrying of communist regimes, and a comparative predilection for the likes of Japan and South Korea, Bolsonaro's subsequent actions vis-à-vis China have diverged from the pouting mouthful of polemics, which continue unabated. With overweening pressure from the agrarian sector that constitutes the president's electoral power base in a proposition that almost mirrors the pressures confronting Trump from his Rustbelt states, Brazilian bilateral trade with China has stayed resoundingly high, verging on 100 billion USD in 2019, a full third greater than Brazil's current trade value with the United States, and clocking a similar rollicking pace during the first eight months of 2020. Notwithstanding, China continues to be the prima donna investor on the South American continent, with Brazil garnering almost one-half of all Chinese investments in the region,<sup>12</sup> the trend exemplified in Brazil's earlier enamor for China to build the expansive 5,600-km-long, 10 billion USD Trans-Amazonian Railroad Project linking the Atlantic and Pacific coasts via the Amazon and the Andes, the endearment for which has since faded in Brazil and across the region—including the western

terminus of Peru.<sup>13</sup> China's overbearing profile in Brazil is further enhanced and leveraged by its burgeoning investments across a slew of sectors, from critical transportation avenues such as port infrastructure to petroleum-based energy storage depots to higher-value manufacturing spaces such as automobiles. Beijing is leveraging this outsized role, through the lever of its financial heft, witnessed in commercial loans largesse advanced to agriculture- and mining-sector entities and the swift mopping-up of many stressed sector assets.

And if this was not enough, China remains a hot favorite with multiple provincial dispensations across Brazil, which have been unabashed in permissibly circumventing federal authority in localized outreach to Beijing, with such phenomenon predating the most notable current case of the Amazonian Consortium collective of state governors (a representative body comprising nine Amazon-inhabiting states of Brazil), who have been unequivocal in their effusive cooperation and collaboration with Beijing, from concerted sourcing of protective medical gear and emancipatory medical equipment during the heat of the pandemic to the sophisticated realm of virus vaccine development.<sup>14</sup> Beijing's recent announcement that its soon to be readily available COVID-19 vaccine would be proffered to countries currently in collaboration with China over Stage-III clinical trials, the triumvirate of which includes Brazil, comes on the back of the Brazilian federal health regulator certifying the ongoing vaccine development partnership between principal developer Sinovac Biotech Ltd. of China and more than century-old São Paulo-based Butantan Institute, with expectations for a vaccine rollout by the year's end.<sup>15</sup>

Despite superficial assessment over the perceived erratic tone and tenor of President Bolsonaro's playbook, closer scrutiny of policy reveals the intent to manage and navigate through the US-China angularities yet stave off any direct juxtaposition with China, which could leave Brazilian interests singed. The Bolsonaro cabinet is torn between Sinophiles and Sinophobes, competing for presidential attention and influence. Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo has been spearheading the Sinophobes, demanding that the president unequivocally cast Brazil's lot with the United States in calling out China on its dystopian actions—including leaning on the president for an early decision to scupper Huawei from the landscape, a high-stakes call that Bolsonaro has deftly deferred until 2021.<sup>16</sup> The Sinophiles, led by the likes of Vice President Hamilton Mourão and Economy Minister Paulo Guedes have cautioned against any and all anti-China postures and attendant measures, characterizing them as self-destructive myopic populism at a time when the Brazilian economy is oscillating between its recession-stricken staple and the enveloping conditions of anemic global demand for commoditized resources, which is only set to aggravate in a post-pandemic schema, and where sustained

Chinese demand on the back of its seemingly V-shaped economic recovery could constitute an even more disproportionate lifeline.

The dint of President Bolsonaro dispatching Vice President Mourão to China just five months into office<sup>17</sup> and himself sojourning there in October 2019, weeks before he was set to play host to the BRICS leaders in November, was manifest of the deep desire to reset ties, even if for purely pragmatic reasons.<sup>18</sup> During his Beijing visit, Bolsonaro tempered his shrill rhetoric, inviting Chinese investments by stating that “a significant part of Brazil needs China, and China needs Brazil too”<sup>19</sup>—a pointer to the enmeshing hue of transactional economic complementarity across trade, investment, and financing, the scope and scale of which cannot be replicated or supplanted by other economies within the Indo-Pacific. All this and more constrains Brazil’s latitude for maneuver in shaping any Indo-Pacific strategy, given that Beijing principally views such a formulation as a US-instigated mutually exclusive containment initiative forged in the Cold War setting of a zero-sum paradigm. At a time when the amorphousness of the Quad Plus concept, in terms of the contours and scope of its membership; the mandate and terms of reference over its portfolio of issues; and a generic consensus on its format, as to whether it is simply to be a coordinating forum over shared interests, a tactical platform for amplifying a certain expedient set of actions, or consolidate into something more crystallized and tangible as a framework, it is perceived as imprudent for Brazil, with no substantive stakes in the wider outcomes of the Indo-Pacific but whose equities in the present and foreseeable future are weighted and wedded to China, to indulge in self-destructive adventurism simply at Washington’s behest. However, an invitation to the Quad Plus deliberation marks a convenient latitude for Brazil to breakout of the vice like commercial grip of Beijing and foster a wider ambit of strategic economic ties.

### **Brazil–US Bonhomie and the Quad Plus**

The unfolding of the Quad Plus coordinating conversations have had a COVID-19 context written large over it, further reinforced by Washington’s own admittance that the forum was onsetting with overriding concerns over “accountability” and “transparency”<sup>20</sup> attributes pertaining to genesis and palliative management of the pandemic, an instructive broadside upon China, even as issues of urgent common concern, such as the imperative for weaning of undue dependence on Beijing through effecting supply-chain relocations, marked albeit, an auxiliary presence. Notwithstanding, the leavening of the Quad quartet of Indo-Pacific mainstay sovereigns, through incorporation of South Korea, a cornerstone security ally of the United States; New Zealand, a prominent member of the US-led higher-ordering intelligence-sharing

consortium of the Five Eyes Network; and Vietnam, a key geopolitical and geo-economic protagonist in the South China Sea, the trinity of additions also made it to the expanded assemblage on account of their dexterous handling of COVID-19, in the main. Even the inclusion of Israel, as intimate a US ally as any can be and a pioneering innovation hub to boot, was understandable, as its COVID-19 management was being lauded at the time. While Washington's lead on the issue is counterintuitive in itself, Brazil's insertion belies logic and betrays an element of muddled thinking at the highest levels within the US government, as Brazil was a frontline state being ravaged by the pandemic, steeped in a dilettante approach that was a mirror image of Washington, and its stewardship of the crisis.

There is no gainsaying that the US–Brazil bilateral relationship, which has largely been marked by a roller-coaster ride since Brazil's return to democracy in the 1990s and through much of this century, has blossomed since the advent of the Bolsonaro administration in January 2019. Presidents Trump and Bolsonaro, united in their mercurial, temperamental leadership styles, have portrayed themselves as ideological soul mates, making common cause on a range of issues from railing against China to characterizing the phenomenon of climate change as a hoax and belittling COVID-19. Yet, despite their mutually expressed affinities, the record on accomplishments spanning these 20-odd months has been checkered. Brazil's candidature for membership of the Western-led Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found earnest US endorsement in early 2020<sup>21</sup> but is queued up in a torturous negotiating process at accession, which seems set to endure, even as Washington's designation of Brazil as a Major Non-NATO Ally has come to fruition, a move liked by the nostalgic former military figure, Bolsonaro.<sup>22</sup> Yet, what these coveted designations signify is an accompanying constant within Brazilian foreign policy concerning its Western institutional orientation in economic and security terms and the prioritization of incorporation into the firmament of the exclusive Western groupings, a temperamental and policy accent that has found pronounced prominence under President Bolsonaro, in contrast with the tenures of Presidents Rousseff and Lula, in particular. Despite hosting the BRICS Summit in late 2019, President Bolsonaro has often expressed skepticism about the rationale and logic of the "Emerging Economies" grouping and on its potential for deliverables, besides not necessarily being skittish about broader issues of sustainable development, multilateralism, and democratization of the global order that segue within the developing world framework. Instead he has expressed his marked predilections for a US-led order and President Trump's deal-making worldview. However, a mutual commitment to double trade by 2025 remains mired in tedious negotiations, even as a mini-trade deal that addresses issues

piecemeal, which cherry-picks low-hanging fruits away from the US Congress's spotlight, is touted by the end of the year. The fact remains that even if the doubling of trade fructifies, it would only constitute a sixth of US–Mexico trade, brought on by the renegotiated United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement, earlier the North America Free Trade Agreement.<sup>23</sup> This serves as a glaring indicator of misplaced Brazilian focus on slim-pickings up North, when the economic center of gravity in terms of consumption-driven markets, logistics supply chains, and investible surpluses are materializing across the swathe of Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Of course, Bolsonaro has not lost sight of the fact that Brazil has emerged as the accidental benefactor of unintended serendipity brought on by the US–China trade skirmishes, with Chinese demand for soybean imports, customarily from the United States, shifting to Brazil, unleashing an unanticipated bonanza at a time of record production in the country.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the cookie could crumble favorably for Brazil, if China–Australia trade relations further sour, making the South American powerhouse's verdant coal deposits a collaterally benefiting alternative for China. It would be advisable for a Bolsonaro-led Brazil to harness its strong cultivation of ties with Washington to fructify its broader ambitions of being a stakeholder in global governance frameworks and witting of a seat at the high table, something which can realistically be realized only through insertion and greater participation in Indo-Pacific initiative platforms.

### **Responsible Pragmatic Turn in Brazil's Foreign Policy: Notional Interface with the Indo-Pacific**

Since the turn of the century, but more so since the advent of President Lula in 2003, a distinct desire to embrace strategic autonomy in appropriating to diversified choices of international engagements has marked Brazilian foreign policy. In what has been christened as Lula's "autonomy through diversification"<sup>25</sup> strategy, contrasted with the "autonomy through participation" philosophy espoused by his predecessor, Pres. Fernando Cardozo, Brasilia made no bones about its intent to not simply expand the remit of its mercantilist economic partners but also to deliver on diversification through disposing as an important player on the international stage and emerging as an influential actor in the firmament of global governance. Notwithstanding diplomatic contretemps with Washington, through opposition to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and torpedoing of the Free Trade Area of the Americas initiative in 2004, the broader US–Brazil relationship was constructively driven, as Lula recognized the need to work with Bretton Woods institutions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to recast Brazil's debtor status into a creditor nation and US–



Brazil ethanol cooperation fostered. However, what was unmistakable was Brazil's alignment of its strategic priorities away from the Western Hemisphere and with the wide swathe of developing countries across the Global South, all of which crystallized in Brazil's participation and meaningful contribution to creation of collectives such as the BRIC, later to be the BRICS; the IBSA Trilateral; and the G4 quartet (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan); not to mention Brazil's autonomous stances on negotiations to the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization, Climate Change Conferences, and within the post-global and economic crisis framework of the G20.<sup>26</sup>

While the optics were gratifying, including the big moment when Brazil joined Turkey in proposing an off-ramp solution to the escalated US–Iran imbroglio over the latter's nuclear program during 2009–2010,<sup>27</sup> the fundamentals of Brazilian economic structures weighed foreign policy priorities down—shown most noticeably in primary commodities and natural resources production and in continuing low levels of export performance to countries of Africa and the Indian Ocean, even as transactional relations with China and to a lesser extent with Japan and South Korea deepened, while Brazil's desire to subsume within the North American manufacturing-driven economic zone remained elusive. President Lula's ties with India did take off from the onset of his two-term presidency, underpinned by cogent cooperation in pharmaceuticals and service-sector trade in particular; however, given the scale and structures of their respective economies, transactional equations were rife but created no more than the occasional splash in quantitative and qualitative terms. Despite the increased politico-diplomatic socialization with geopolitical theaters, nondescript until then, Brazil under Lula had not traversed beyond notional footprint in geometries and geographies identified as the current-day Indo-Pacific. President Rousseff, who succeeded Lula, having been his associate in government, was meant to preserve continuity rather than opt for change. However, her tenure, albeit interrupted by her second-term impeachment in 2016, was marked by the whiff of a distinct turn back to prioritization of relations with the United States, as Brazilian foreign policy relapsed back into the dialectic of deepening commercial relations with the world's two-largest economic spaces, consigning backwater consideration to broadened and deepened engagement with Asian regional powers, whose global relevance is primed for ascent.

## **Conclusion**

There is little gainsaying that the expansive Asian continent and its sovereign constellations are no longer terra incognita for Brazil,<sup>28</sup> but has the strategic conception within the latter's consciousness pivoted enough to construe the continent,

whose maritime expanse conjoining the two arterial oceans and making it the principal arena for competitive power transitions and broader power-shifts, as cynosure of attention? If Brazilian foreign policy is to address its principal permeating objective of elevating from middle-power status to becoming an acclaimed global power, it cannot rest simply on being a powerhouse for primary commodities and agrarian raw materials funneled to Asian states with a view to underwriting their economic growth. The Brazilian economy must transform domestically, but that transformation shall be induced and subsequently leveraged by the mainstreaming of its strategic engagements, which have to be forged across a cavernous canvass. A China-centric mercantilist and economic policy or an alternative that endeavors to find equanimity between the duality of deepened engagements with Washington and Beijing shall not suffice and would merely end up relegating Brazil to the suborn position of a supplicant.

The invitational participation within the Quad Plus conversations must be seen as a starting point for Brazil to build on a pan-Asian regional engagement, identifying important sovereign interlocutors within the Indo-Pacific for mutually beneficial outcomes. With Canada becoming the latest extraterritorial nation to articulate its commitment to an Indo-Pacific strategy, and with the Quad Plus possibly incorporating further additions such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and France going forward, Brazil would be better advised and suitably placed to leverage its curated defense modernization drive with traditional European powers, its budding affinities with Israel after relocation of its embassy to Jerusalem, and the potential of diasporic ties with Japan<sup>29</sup> to expand the spectrum of trade partners and to showcase itself as captive to their technological investments back home. Through a strong sense of enlightened bilateralism and plurilateralism, which the matrix of the Quad Plus portends to offer, the undue dependence upon Beijing can be spread out for comfort and dividends of strategic diversification. With almost all current and prospective constituents within the Quad Plus enjoying lucrative economic ties to Beijing, Brazil would hardly be cut from a different cloth in pursuing dichotomously concurrent options, which geo-economic strategies allow, over securitized geopolitical gambits. It is highly unlikely that the Quad Plus forum would become a security bloc; if anything, it could find traction in coalescing around recrafting supply-chain trajectories, curating data-driven clean technologies, and even formalizing some form of pan-continental regional economic cooperation and trade integration. It is a no-brainer that all these and more would mesh well with Brazilian national priorities and external strategic calculus, helping Brasilia contribute and leverage the benefits brought on by productive interaction with the constellation of these higher-order economic spaces for turbocharging its own socio-economy into qualitatively refined performance.

Hence, Brazil, which needs to carve out its industrial base on a broadsheet of manufacturing competencies and desires to be integrated within emergent supply chains in a post-COVID-19 world order, can hardly afford to sit out this pan-continental initiative and needs to hew integration with industrial and economic partners across Asia, which cannot happen without a fulsome incorporation into the evolving Quad Plus thicket. 🌟

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# Russia and Quad Plus

## Is There a Way Forward?

DR. ANNA KIREEVA  
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### Abstract

Russia's official stance toward both the Quad and the concept of the Indo-Pacific has been largely negative. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeatedly argued against the Quad, accusing the United States of attempts to contain China and draw not only allies Japan and Australia but also India to this goal. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' approach is explained by the fact that the Quad is essentially perceived as an echo of the Cold War alliances as well as NATO-style arrangement that Russia is well-familiar with in Europe. Russia's position is explained by the fact that the Quad is seen as running counter to Russia's interests of building a collective security architecture and undermining Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Centrality as well as by the character of Russia's bilateral relations with ASEAN members. A rift in US–Russia relations seems to preclude any opportunity for cooperation with the Quad or Quad Plus. Moscow deems it impossible to support the Quad due to its anti-Chinese nature, as adopting policies against China is not considered to be in Russia's national interests. Russian officials generally overlook cooperation on nontraditional security by either the Quad or Quad Plus. At the same time, Russia enjoys a privileged strategic partnership with India and other powers that are at odds with China, such as Vietnam, and would rather prefer to remain neutral in the growing US–China strategic competition and retain as much strategic autonomy as possible. Russia has been one of the key players in addressing nontraditional security threats in the Indo-Pacific and, although direct cooperation with the Quad or Quad Plus is out of the question, bilateral cooperation with the group's individual members or under the auspices of regional multilateral institutions like ASEAN Regional Forum or ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting–Plus (ADMM+) is a tangible prospect, including addressing COVID-19 and the pandemic's effects.

### Introduction

Russia's official stance toward both the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as the Quad—composed of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—and the concept of the Indo-Pacific has been largely negative. The Russian

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, repeatedly argued against the Indo-Pacific and the Quad. The first speech where he touched upon the Indo-Pacific in a substantial way took place in Vietnam in February 2019. He started by characterizing the contemporary world order as a polycentric and more democratic one in the making, with a number of economically and politically rising powers. He described the Indo-Pacific as an artificially created region and accused the United States of attempts to contain China and draw not only allies Japan and Australia but also India to this goal via military cooperation.<sup>1</sup> During his speech at the Primakov Readings summit in July 2020, Lavrov named the *US Indo-Pacific Strategy* as aimed at creating confrontational blocs in the region.<sup>2</sup>

One of the prevalent critiques given by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been based on questioning the basic principles of the Indo-Pacific—that it is free and open—and the necessity for formulating a new region. According to Lavrov, the Indo-Pacific seems to be an exclusive rather than an inclusive bloc which clearly does not correspond to the principles of openness. Moreover, on the Russian side questions arise about why a new and very vaguely characterized Indo-Pacific is supplanting an inclusive and multilateral Asia-Pacific structures with large participation, clear and agreed-upon rules, and defined geography. The Quad has been accused of policies aimed at containing China.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, it should be noted that Russia, apart from being a European power, at the same time geographically belongs to the northern Pacific Ocean and, thus, can also be characterized as a Pacific or an Asia-Pacific power.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the post-Soviet space, the European and Asian dimension of Russia's foreign and economic policy can be characterized as strategically important ones, the latter being connected to the need for development of the Russian Far East.<sup>5</sup> In particular, there is an academic tradition among Russians living in the Far East that prefers to refer to this part of the country as Northern Pacific, highlighting its geographic and historic interaction with Asia and North America.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, a question arises why Russia, being a northern Pacific power and positioning itself as a part of the Asia-Pacific, is so negatively predisposed toward both the Indo-Pacific and Quad? Should such a position be taken for granted, or is there a way forward for Russia to cooperate with the Quad or Quad Plus? To answer this set of questions this chapter explains Russia's reaction by analyzing its foreign and security policy toward Asia as well as the set of bilateral relations with Quad members and China, both elements deemed critical for understanding Moscow's official approach. The article starts by examining the transformation of Russia's Asian policy and its approach to regional security agendas. These are followed by the overview of Russia's bilateral relations with Quad member states and the People's Republic of China. The final section explains Russia's approach based on the above

presented analysis together while shedding light on **its position on liberal and rules-based international order**. The conclusion discusses whether there is a way forward for cooperation between Russia and the Quad or Quad Plus.

### **Russia's Asian Policy and Approach to Regional Security**

Russia's interest in the Indo-Pacific region has a long history. For centuries, Russia traded with Persia, China, and India. Russian pioneers and pathfinders fought their way to the East and on to the Pacific Ocean; after the Bolshevik revolution, Soviet leaders showed interest in spreading the ideas of socialism and communism to the countries of the East. In the second half of the twentieth century, Moscow's policy in the Pacific and Indian Oceans was defined through the prism of the Cold War, and both oceans, primarily the Pacific, were viewed as battlefields. The difference between them was that in the Pacific Ocean the Soviet Union had bases in Primorye and Kamchatka, but there were no strong allies, while there were no Soviet bases in the Indian Ocean, but there was a powerful friendly partner: India. The end of the Cold War completely changed the situation. In the last years of the Soviet Union, Pres. Mikhail Gorbachev formulated an initiative to reorganize the regional Pacific order and said that the Soviet Union was ready to participate in this process.<sup>7</sup> **However, the collapse of the USSR and the economic difficulties of the 1990s interrupted this emerging interest in the Pacific Ocean.** The general collapse of the Russian economy, the desire to break with the Soviet legacy, the pro-Western orientation of the new leadership in every sense, and a lack of strategic thinking led to the rejection of any attempts to declare Russia as a powerful Pacific power.

However, as Russia overcame its protracted internal crisis, its leadership grew aware that Moscow should pay more attention to the East, as the twenty-first century would become the "Age of Asia." One of the pioneers of this idea was the head of Russian foreign intelligence, then-Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov.<sup>8</sup> His line was continued by Vladimir Putin, who, after becoming president of Russia, took decisive steps in this direction. Such policy enhanced Russia's relations with Asian states as a strategic course to diversify Moscow's relations in politics, security, economics, and energy since the early 2000s and has been often labeled as a "pivot to Asia" or "turn to the East."<sup>9</sup> At the same time, even taking into consideration growing economic interaction with Asia, Russia has been often considered as an "external player" or an "absent power" due to its small share in regional trade and investment as well as lack of participation in production networks. Russia's involvement in regional institutions is also facing a number of limitations.<sup>10</sup>

A crisis in Russia's relations with the West in 2014 prompted Russia to accelerate its pivot to Asia, as it had become apparent that only on the basis of greater cooperation with Asian states would it become possible for Moscow to realize its key goal of establishing a center of power in Eurasia.<sup>11</sup> For a long time, Russia's policy in the region remained **multivectored: while strengthening relations with China, Moscow at the same time sought to maintain close ties with India, improve economic and political ties with Japan, actively promote the resolution of the Korean problem, maintain the central role of ASEAN, and not spoil relations with the United States.** However, as events have played out over the past several years, **Russia has seemingly grown closer to China, and pressure from the United States is literally pushing Moscow into the arms of Beijing.** Attempts by Washington's regional partners, primarily Japan and India, to avoid such a development have proven unsuccessful, with American pressure proving so strong that Tokyo and New Delhi's efforts are in vain.

As far as Russia's approach to regional security<sup>12</sup> has been concerned, since 2010 it has been consistently advocating for creating an "inclusive, open, transparent and equitable collective security and cooperation architecture in Asia-Pacific,"<sup>13</sup> echoing the same approach for establishing a common security architecture from Lisbon to Vladivostok. In principle, such a concept does not mean that bilateral security alliances that the United States has with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and others should be disbanded but rather incorporated into the joint security architecture based on multilateral mechanisms and institutions. Russian leadership maintains that the American "hub-and-spokes" system of bilateral military-political alliances with Asian states is obsolete and no longer adequate for the contemporary era, as it ensures security of one state at the expense of others. ASEAN-centric institutions are believed to be most fit to serve as the basis for regional collective security architecture.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Russia's approach lacks conceptual clarity as to how such joint architecture should be established. Moreover, the approach has not been substantially updated following rising strategic confrontation and mounting tensions between the United States and China since 2018–2019. As a result, **Russian officials keep criticizing Indo-Pacific strategies and the concept itself.** Moreover, **the rift in US–Russia relations in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis caused considerable damage to Russia's relations with American allies in Asia, especially with the ones that imposed sanctions targeting Russia, such as Japan and Australia.** In particular, as far as Russia–Japan relations are concerned, it appeared to be one of the obstacles to finding an effective solution to a long-standing issue of concluding a peace treaty and settling a territorial dispute. To illustrate, Foreign Minister Lavrov, after his talks with his Japanese counterpart in November 2019,



stated that the US–Japan alliance is an obstacle for Russia–Japan relations reaching a new quality, something that Russian president Vladimir Putin has repeatedly stated is a necessary prerequisite for achieving a compromise on a peace treaty. Moscow has many concerns regarding the military build-up of the US–Japan alliance, such as the deployment of Aegis Ashore, which was recently unexpectedly scrapped by the Japanese government. **The core motivation is explained by the fact that the United States publicly announces that Russia and China constitute key military threats and all security alliances, including the ones with Japan, Australia, and South Korea, will be managed according to these challenges.** In the eyes of Russia’s leadership, these considerations apparently take precedence over Japan’s statements that the US–Japan alliance is not targeted against Russia.<sup>15</sup>

## **Russia’s Bilateral Relations with Quad Plus States and China**

### ***United States***

Relations between the United States and Russia are going through hard times. Russia, having gone through economic decline in the 1990s and lost its position in the world, seeks to restore its prosperity and prominence. The United States sees these moves by Moscow as revisionist and Russia itself as a country trying to disrupt the post–Cold War order in which the United States is the hegemon. As a result, from the Russian perspective, the United States is trying to put pressure on Russia, attempting to force Moscow to admit defeat, and striving to keep Russia in the position of a secondary player—thus, maintaining Washington’s perception of the status quo.

Russia views such American pressure as unacceptable. Moscow’s main goal is to restore Russia’s position as one of the great powers, with its own interests and sphere of influence. Washington’s accusations that Moscow is seeking to destroy the liberal world order are perplexing and viewed by the Kremlin as a cynical attempt to maintain American dominance. The pressure from the United States is enough to complicate the Russian economic situation but insufficient to bring down the Russian economy, due to the relatively small trade between the two countries and the lack of critical dependence of Russian industry on American technologies. In fact, Washington’s actions serves as a constant annoyance, forcing Moscow to develop economic autarky and move closer to any opponents of the United States, including Iran and China. The more Washington tries to get Moscow to agree to its demands, the faster Russia drifts toward Beijing.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, America's radical Indo-Pacific strategy creates new challenges for Russia in Asia.<sup>17</sup> The very wording "rules-based order," actively promoted by Washington, puzzles Moscow. Russia believes that the existing order is already based on rules, primarily on the norms of international law and on the UN Charter. Moscow rejects attempts to introduce any other rules, demonstrating institutional conservatism.<sup>18</sup>

### *Japan*

From a strategic perspective, Russia and Japan have increasingly regarded each other as strategic regional players of great significance in Northeast Asia, broader East Asia, and the Asia-Pacific. On Japan's side, in particular, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, during his term (2012–2020), undertook great efforts to elevate Russia–Japan strategic, political, and security dialogues, reflecting on the value of engaging Russia as an important global and regional player.<sup>19</sup> At least part of Japan's efforts can be attributed to the goal of preventing a unified Sino–Russian front against Japan, an issue of outstanding importance due to the challenge that China's strategy, especially in the East China Sea, presents to Tokyo. Russia's closer alignment with China, following a deep crisis in relations with the United States and Europe after 2014, prompted Japanese leadership to put greater emphasis on improving relations with Russia.<sup>20</sup> President Putin, on the Russian side, has been an advocate of improving relations with Japan, aiming to reach a new stage in bilateral relations characterized by comprehensive cooperation in all spheres.<sup>21</sup>

Russia–Japan relations, however, have historically been far from cordial and have been mired in the territorial dispute and the issue of the absence of a peace treaty since the end of World War II. These lingering questions have spoiled the political relationship between Moscow and Tokyo for more than 70 years. Despite a robust political dialogue and significant personal political capital inserted by Abe into resolving these issues in 2016–2019, the conditions put forward by the Russian side and the obstacles cited by Foreign Minister Lavrov in January 2019 proved to be too overwhelming to reach this goal. In addition, as demonstrated above, Russian foreign policy officials have been critical of US–Japan alliance military build-up and generally regard Japan as an actor not fully independent from the United States—and thus, vulnerable to Washington's pressure.<sup>22</sup> Despite these obstacles, Japan has traditionally been one of Russia's major economic partners in East Asia, surpassed only by China.

## ***India***

Russian–Indian ties have a long history, and their main feature is that Russia and India initially treated each other with friendliness and warmth. Their relationship was sometimes close to being allies and has never been hostile. The Soviet Union supported the Non-Aligned Movement and numerous foreign policy initiatives of India, providing New Delhi with military and development assistance. However, most importantly, during the Cold War, Moscow and New Delhi were interested in curbing China’s ambitions. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has been able to resolve its differences with China, while India has not. As a result, Russian and Indian positions on the Chinese issue are now radically different, and Moscow is watching with dismay as its two strategic partners are quarreling over mutual distrust and unwillingness to make concessions.

At the same time, Russia views India as a strategic partner, and their relations do not depend on Russian or Indian relations with China. Russia plans to continue cooperating with India on a wide range of issues, perceiving it as a great power and one of the pillars of the future polycentric world.<sup>23</sup> Moscow is interested in Eurasia and the surrounding maritime space becoming a zone of peace and stability, since any instability in this region will impede the development of Russia, deprive Moscow of the possibility of foreign policy maneuver, and force Russia to divert its already limited forces and resources to counter a possible threat. Therefore, Russia does not enthusiastically accept any steps aimed at rapprochement between India and the United States, since Moscow believes Washington is ready to destabilize the situation in Asia, in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, if it helps to stop the growth of China’s power and removes the threat to the role of the United States as a world hegemon.<sup>24</sup>

## ***Australia***

Australia is a relatively insignificant partner for Russia due to Moscow’s lack of interests in the South Pacific. In addition, certain stereotypes regarding Australia prevail in Moscow—it is assumed, in particular, that Canberra is a reliable American ally and will take the side of the United States in any conflict with Moscow or Beijing. Russia–Australia relations suffered in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, and, furthermore, Australia’s preference for the Indo-Pacific and Quad meets little if any apprehension from the Russian side. At the same time, Russia sees Australia as a partner it should take into consideration while working in international organizations such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation or the East Asia Summit (EAS).<sup>25</sup>

### ***Russia and Quad Plus Powers***

As far as the states that joined Quad Plus are concerned, the picture is not much different. As a small power, New Zealand plays an absolutely marginal role in Russia's policy toward the Asia-Pacific. Russia has never had much interaction with Wellington, and in most cases, relations are no different than those with Australia. However, economic relations between the two countries are quite developed (in the 1980s, the Soviet Union was an important trading partner of New Zealand, in some years accounting for as much as 5 percent of New Zealand's exports), and Moscow and Wellington cooperate on a number of areas of the international agenda: i.e., environmental protection and conservation of the living resources of Antarctica.<sup>26</sup> Still, in a political sense, the role of New Zealand in Russian regional politics is negligible. Russia has no interests in the South Pacific; as a result, Moscow is not interested in New Zealand as a political partner at the moment. The possible entry of New Zealand into the Quad or cooperation with this format is perceived in Moscow completely indifferently.

Russia regards South Korea (ROK) as a neighbor and an important partner on the Korean Peninsula that needs to be a part of any regional solution. Regionally, South Korea, together with China and Japan, has been one of Russia's key economic partners. The political climate in Russia–South Korea relations depends greatly on whether the representatives of the progressive or conservative camps are in power in Seoul at the moment, with the former enjoying much warmer relations with Russia due to their willingness to engage in negotiations with North Korea, as illustrated by President Moon Jae-in.<sup>27</sup> Moscow and Seoul started searching for a new impetus for bilateral and trilateral economic projects after President Moon launched his New Northern Policy in 2017 and proposed to build nine bridges of economic cooperation.<sup>28</sup> However, in practice, cooperation is visible only on the bilateral level, as trilateral projects have proved impossible to realize under the UN Security Council's sanctions regime targeting the North Korea. A political dialogue between Russia and Seoul is heavily concentrated on the situation on the Korean Peninsula because other topics are hardly considered as important. South Korea's willingness to commit to the US Indo-Pacific strategy was met with apprehension in Russian policy making circles. At the same time, much like Japan, the relationship also suffers from Russia's criticism of the US–ROK alliance and its role in exacerbating tensions on the Korean Peninsula, with President Putin even directly referring to South Korea as having a sovereignty deficiency.<sup>29</sup> Hence, the ROK's participation in Quad Plus is unlikely to lead to any changes in Russia's position.

Vietnam has been regarded as Russia's key strategic partner in Southeast Asia, and bilateral relations have always been cordial. Apart from being a buyer of Russia's military equipment, Hanoi has historically enjoyed military and economic cooperation with Moscow. Russia and Vietnam have robust security ties and exchanges and conduct an annual security dialogue. As a mark of bilateral cooperation, since 2014, the Russian navy regularly makes port calls at the naval base in Cam Ranh, where a Soviet naval base used to be positioned. This bilateral political relationship is characterized by a high level of trust. Moreover, a consensus has been established that development of security cooperation between Moscow and Hanoi fully corresponds to the long-term national interests of the two states.<sup>30</sup> Russia's relations with Vietnam have been an important factor in formulating Moscow's stance on the South China Sea dispute and Russia advocating a solution based on international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).<sup>31</sup> However, Vietnam's recent policy of upgrading its cooperation with the United States has been a point of concern for Moscow, quite similar to concerns of India. Moscow remains wary of Vietnam's possible inclusion in the Quad and views such as a destructive policy by the United States threatening Russia's own strategic partnerships.

Russia has a difficult history of relations with Israel. At one time, the Soviet Union supported the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine, but after the start of the Cold War, relations between the two countries deteriorated: Israel became an ally of the United States, and Moscow supported the Arab countries. Now the relationship between Russia and Israel is relatively good, largely thanks to people-to-people contacts and the large Russian-speaking diaspora in Israel. At the same time, Russia and Israel are well aware that it is necessary to separate profitable trade projects and sympathy at the level of the population from considerations of geopolitics.<sup>32</sup> In world politics, Russia and Israel rarely support each other. Moscow is accustomed to the fact that Israel is Washington's main ally in the Middle East, so the possible accession of Israel to the Quad will be perceived in Russia as a natural step and will not lead to any changes in the Russian position.

Russian relations with Brazil, on the other hand, appear to be the exact opposite of relations between Russia and Israel. Personal contacts and trade are relatively few; however, Moscow views Brasilia as a potential major player in the future world order. Similar to India, Brazil is considered an important global partner for Russia as a participant of the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) grouping. Brazil's participation in the Quad Plus format will be perceived in Moscow, most likely, with bewilderment and generally negativity, but it will not affect Russia's position. Brazil and Israel can hardly be considered important players in

the Indo-Pacific by any means, and regional Latin Americans and Middle Eastern dynamics have primarily driven Russia's relations with the other two states.

## *China*

Throughout the four centuries of historical bilateral interactions, Russia–China relations have seen ups and downs, with such forms as alliances and military conflicts being an exception. Maintaining stability on a shared more-than-four-thousand-kilometers border has been one of the key priorities of Russian and Chinese leadership, while instability would pose a significant challenge for security to each partner. This border also means that the two countries cannot be fully geopolitically encircled and helps create a more solid foundation in relations with the West. Final border resolution in 2004 was an important milestone in consolidating bilateral cooperation.<sup>33</sup> Contemporary Russia–China relations, starting with the end of the Cold War era, can be characterized as a deep alignment in the form of strategic partnership. Cooperation has been based around a number of shared goals and principles, including but not limited to the aim of building a multipolar or a polycentric world order, opposition to the American hegemony and interventionism, support for the principles of respect for sovereignty and noninterference in domestic affairs, and reformation of global governance to better represent non-Western powers.<sup>34</sup>

Russia–China relations have seen a deeper alignment, starting with a crisis in Russia's relations with the West in 2014, as the Russian government viewed improving relations with China as a major safeguard from the damage dealt by Western economic sanctions. A new stage has been characterized by robust political relations underpinned by Putin and Xi's personal bond, increasing security cooperation and new economic deals and projects, mostly large-scale ones implemented by state-owned enterprises. Moreover, amid exacerbating strategic competition between the United States and China and a deep crisis in US–Russia relations, Moscow and Beijing took steps in 2018 and 2019 to heighten military cooperation, improve interoperability, and broaden cooperation in the strategic sphere. American policy has been effectively pushing Moscow deeper into Beijing's embrace, giving rise to a long-term challenge of Russia's greater economic dependence on China if the current trend persists. Imbalances in the complex power of the two partners are also hardly invisible. At the same time, Russia and China are not ready to enter a full-fledged alliance with security guarantees, as it will hamper their autonomous decision making.<sup>35</sup> Russia does not deem it necessary to comply with China's policies in Asia, retaining strategic neutrality in China's territorial disputes (i.e., in South China Sea) and enjoying partnerships with states with which China has disputes, i.e., India, Vietnam, and Japan.<sup>36</sup>

Russia–China relations are most accurately described by the formula “not always together, but never against each other.”<sup>37</sup>

Some have suggested that if Pres. Donald Trump invites Russia to rejoin the G7, thereby transforming it into the G8, Russia’s position on China may change. However, Russia’s potential invitation to the G7 will most likely be rejected. Russia used to be a member of the G8 but was actually expelled from grouping. This move demonstrated to Moscow the unreliability of cooperation in such a format. If Russia returns to the G7, members could again expel Moscow at any time, as soon as Russia tries to pursue its own interests, at odds with the policy of the United States and its allies. Moscow will gain nothing by joining this format, but it would lose China’s trust, since such a step will be unambiguously perceived in Beijing as anti-Chinese. Russia will not trade the real benefits of cooperation with China for an ephemeral sense of pride from participating in a club of great powers whose might is declining. Participation in the G8 could be acceptable to Russia either if the activities of the G8 are institutionalized and the rights of the participants are clearly spelled out or if more developing countries, friendly to Moscow and pursuing a policy independent of the United States, enter the grouping. Since this is unlikely to happen in the near future, Russia is focusing on cooperation in the G20 format, which Moscow believes is better suited to address global challenges, as it includes major emerging non-Western powers.

### **Russia’s Negative Attitude toward the Indo-Pacific and Quad**

So, how can Russia’s official negative stance toward the Indo-Pacific and Quad be explained? First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ approach is explained by the fact that the Quad is essentially perceived as an echo of the Cold War alliances as well as a NATO-style arrangement that Russia is well-familiar with in the European region.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Moscow views as negative the Indo-Pacific strategies of the United States and its allies, which are predominantly perceived as a US-centric project. Russian officials tend to overstate the significance of the Quad, which has not evolved much from multilateral consultations, and generally overlook cooperation on nontraditional security by either the Quad or Quad Plus. There has been no indication whatsoever that Russia’s approach to Quad Plus is different by any means.

The roots of this attitude lie in a completely different vision for the regional architecture. Russia has been supportive of ASEAN-centric regional architecture and inclusive regional visions as expressed by ASEAN and India. During his February 2019 speech in Vietnam, Foreign Minister Lavrov expressed strong support for ASEAN as a solid foundation for security and cooperation architecture with a number of security, diplomatic, and economic mechanisms such as the

East Asian Summit, ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting–Plus (ADMM+), and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) dealing with security issues. The Indo-Pacific was characterized as competing with ASEAN Centrality,<sup>39</sup> moving away from consensus-seeking mechanisms based on ASEAN to divisive ones, and thus not welcomed by Russia. What is more, as stated by Lavrov at the Raisina Dialogue in January 2020 in New Delhi, Russia's own concept of the Greater Eurasian Partnership envisions forming a cooperative Eurasian space with the participation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), ASEAN, and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states as well as all states situated on the huge Eurasian landmass, including members of the European Union. In Lavrov's view, the concept of the Indo-Pacific, which is divisive in nature, opposes rather than complements Russia's vision of harmonizing integration projects of different countries and uniting a huge continent. The international organizations that Russia participates in such as BRICS and SCO are highlighted as an example of unifying institutions that are not directed against third parties. Moreover, Lavrov has repeatedly stressed that it is not clear how the Indo-Pacific is geographically different from the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>40</sup> **Russia fears that the Quad could supplant ASEAN-centric institutions and lead to a further marginalization of Russia's regional standing.**<sup>41</sup>

Second, Russia has been a proponent of a polycentric and more democratic world order, where the voices of not only Western but also of other global and regional powers can be heard. A polycentric world order has been regarded as a result of the emergence of new centers of power and erosion of the US-dominated unipolar world, with the United States no longer being a hegemon capable of imposing its will on the global scale.<sup>42</sup> **Accordingly, Russia supports multilateral institutions that could ensure participation of key developing powers in global governance such as the G20.** In addition, Moscow has been advocating adherence to the international law as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations, including principles of respect for sovereignty, noninterference into internal affairs, peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts through dialogue, and so forth. Consequently, there has been a continuous discomfort on the Russian side with the so-called rules-based order promoted by the United States, Western states, and some US allies and endorsed by the Quad. According to Lavrov, it is unclear what these rules are, who agrees on them, what is wrong with the international law, and why it is not the international law but some other set of rules that are being promoted.<sup>43</sup>

In a similar fashion, Russia has been questioning the concept of the liberal world order promoted by the United States and other Western states. The key problem is what exactly is meant by a *liberal world order*. If the key to its definition is the dominance of Western states and Western models, then Russia is categorically



opposed to such a world order, and Moscow argues for a polycentric world in which Russia can realize its ambitions without asking permission from Washington. If by *liberal world order*, we mean a world of open borders, responsible development, and mutually beneficial globalization, then Russia is quite ready to integrate into it. It is important for Moscow that the global order should be dynamic, reflecting changes in the power balance and enabling absolutely all states to realize their interests, which implies the reform of global governance institutions to enhance the role of non-Western actors. However, the behavior of Western countries, which change the rules of the game when the Eastern ones have to adapt to them (for example, measures to oust China from Western markets based on security considerations), causes Moscow to suspect that the liberal world order is aimed at maintaining Western dominance. Moscow, of course, opposes this, since Russia is not interested in seeing its position as a defeated power in the Cold War be consolidated forever and that it be barred from resolving major world issues.

Third, a closer look into Russia's relations with Quad members and China helps to explain Moscow's official attitude toward this grouping. The Quad is originally an anti-Chinese format, and no one disputes this thesis. As a result, under current conditions, when Washington is literally pushing Russia into the arms of China, Russia cannot approve of either the Quad in its current or in an expanded format until the grouping's anti-Chinese foundation is transformed into something more acceptable—for example, until it transforms into an inclusive security format, which can include both Russia and China. It can be argued that it is impossible for the Russian government to express its support of the Quad, as taking any anti-Chinese measures does not correspond to Russia's national interests.

The problem with the Quad casts a shadow on the perception of the Indo-Pacific. Since the problem of relations with the United States is acute for Russia, the Russian Foreign Ministry perceives the Indo-Pacific through the prism of the Quad as an anti-Chinese format—not always making a distinction between the Indo-Pacific in the American and Indian interpretations. A number of political structures, think tanks, and independent researchers are taking a more nuanced approach.<sup>44</sup> The Indian embassy in Moscow plays an important role in this, seeking to clarify New Delhi's policy and the entire range of halftones.<sup>45</sup>

President Putin's speech at the Valdai Discussion Club session in October 2019 exemplified a more nuanced approach. He stated that Russia is against creating blocs and bloc divisions in Asia and believes that Asian countries are unwilling to make choices and join blocs aimed against other states. Additionally, he claimed that containing China is an unrealistic goal in itself and those who are pursuing to do so will ultimately fail. At the same time, he supported creating a network of

institutions that could include different organizations from Asia and ensure cooperative interaction: i.e., it could be based on ASEAN-centric platforms. In addition, he stated that Russia would welcome multilateral economic partnership in Asia and Eurasia.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, it is instructive to note that although Russia speaks against the Quad, it does not mean that cooperation with specific member states of the grouping becomes impossible. Quite to the contrary, Russia still enjoys a privileged strategic partnership with India and strategic partnership relations other powers, such as Vietnam, that are at odds with China. Security dialogue with Tokyo is also highly valued as a means to engage in discussions with one of the key regional stakeholders and address each other's security concerns. Similarly, Russia takes no interest in a China-dominated Asia and would like the region to be polycentric, with Russia as one of the centers of power and one of the key stakeholders in settling regional conflicts, such as the one on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>47</sup>

Although Russia and China are closely aligned, Moscow would rather prefer to remain neutral in the growing US–China strategic competition and retain as much strategic autonomy as possible, while working to ease regional polarization.<sup>48</sup> Prime Minister Abe's proposal to connect the free and open Indian Ocean concept and Asia with the Russian strategy for the development of the Russian Far East and the Arctic, with the help of Japan and energy projects, together with Indian prime minister Narendra Modi's idea to make the Russian Far East the focal point for linking the Eurasian Economic Union and an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific by establishing new routes in trade and logistics, were articulated at the Eastern Economic Forum in September 2019.<sup>49</sup> If accepted by Russia, such proposals could create a foundation for Russia's cooperation with the states and organization that advocate, or at least possess, Indo-Pacific strategies, such as Japan, India, and ASEAN.<sup>50</sup> What is more, one of important areas of cooperation among Russia and Japan, India, and ASEAN has been nontraditional security—a major focus of the Quad Plus.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that Russia's official negative stance toward the Indo-Pacific and Quad has been predominantly expressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moscow seems not to be paying any attention to the Pacific part of Russia's identity and to be reluctant to formulate its own version of the Indo-Pacific, sticking to its traditional regional policy regardless of the changes in regional dynamics. Russia's stance stems from its historic negative experience with US-led alliances, the contradictions of new formats with Russia's view of the regional security evolution trajectory, and the character of Russia's bilateral

relations with Quad members and China. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs sees the Indo-Pacific and Quad as running counter to Russia's interests of building a collective security architecture and chooses to constantly criticize them rather than adapt or search for compromises. Additionally, being a weaker major power in East Asia, Russia sees the Quad as a threat potentially capable of undermining ASEAN Centrality and marginalizing Russia's regional positions.

Another reason for Moscow's criticism of the Quad lies in the character of Russia's relations with Quad members. The main problem is relations between Russia and the United States, which have deteriorated dramatically in recent years, and there are no prospects for their improvement in the near future. With Japan, Russia has a long-standing territorial problem; Australia is perceived in Moscow as a loyal ally of the United States. India remains Russia's only real friend in the Quad, but this is not enough for Russia to seriously think about joining the grouping. Russian leadership deems it impossible to support the Quad, due to the grouping's anti-Chinese nature, highlighted by the adoption of policies against China that are not considered to be in Russia's national interests. A rift in US–Russia relations seems to preclude any opportunity for cooperation with the Quad or Quad Plus. Furthermore, Russia does not seem to take any notice of cooperation in the sphere of nontraditional security in the Quad and Quad Plus and in general seems not to be paying any attention to the Quad Plus. Russia's reaction to possible drawing of its traditional regional partner Vietnam into cooperation with the Quad is unlikely to be positive by any means. New Zealand is a regional player of little significance in the eyes of Russian policy makers, and political relations with South Korea are also complicated by the presence of Seoul's military alliance with the United States. Israel is perceived as a staunch ally of the United States in the Middle East, while Brazil is an important partner in creating a polycentric world order as a member of BRICS. As a consequence, it is highly unlikely that Moscow's position on the Quad Plus will be different from the one toward the Quad.

Although Russia's direct cooperation with the Quad or Quad Plus is out of the question, Moscow may be much more enthusiastic to engage in broader regional cooperation. It would also like to sustain existing bilateral ties, taking into consideration Russia's friendly relations with India, ASEAN, and Vietnam, and zero interest in supporting a China-dominated Asia. As stated by President Putin in October 2019, Russia would welcome a network of institutions that could provide a ground for cooperative engagement. The main potential of Russia's cooperation with the Quad Plus states lies in cooperating on the areas that are considered unequivocally aimed at the common public good. In practice Russia has been one of the key players in addressing nontraditional security threats in

the Indo-Pacific through bilateral and multilateral channels. Moreover, Russia and Japan have recently stepped up cooperation in combating nontraditional security threats, exemplified by their first naval antipiracy exercise in the Arabian Sea in January 2020. Additionally, Russia and ASEAN are looking for the ways to jointly cooperate in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitating regional capacity building in that area.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, Russia's bilateral cooperation with the same countries that constitute the Quad and Quad Plus or under the auspices of regional multilateral institutions like ARF, ADMM+, or EAS is a tangible prospect, including addressing COVID-19 and its effects. 🌐

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# Indian Ocean Island States and the Quad Plus

NILANTHI SAMARANAYAKE

## Abstract

This article examines the potential implications of the Quad Plus concept for Indian Ocean island states. Led by the United States, diplomats from India, Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam have coordinated responses to the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. More recently, the dialogue has expanded to include diplomats from countries farther from the Indo-Pacific: Brazil and Israel. To date, six of the nine Quad Plus countries have Pacific Ocean borders, whereas only India is situated entirely in the Indian Ocean. Expanding the geographic aperture, what are the chances for smaller Indian Ocean island states to become part of this grouping? This article will consider the potential for states from Sri Lanka to Seychelles, Maldives to Mauritius, as well as French and British territories in the Indian Ocean, to play a role in the Quad Plus. Conversely, the article will also consider the potential conceptual and operational limitations for the Quad Plus to be a force across the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean during a pandemic. This study will identify key issues and drivers among small states in the Indian Ocean that will be relevant to the future of the Indo-Pacific concept.

## Introduction

This article examines the potential for the Indian Ocean island states to play both a supporting and supported role in the Quad Plus. In March 2020, the US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun began an initiative to coordinate with diplomats from India, Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam about responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The US coordination with its close Indo-Pacific allies and partners on a crisis recalls the international response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. In the Tsunami Core Group (TCG), diplomats from the United States, India, Australia, and Japan coordinated with their militaries to provide disaster relief to Indian Ocean countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Maldives.

However, the Quad Plus is more expansive than the TCG. It also takes place in the context of rising threats and uncertainty posed by China in the Indo-Pacific region and as a result, a renewed focus on the Quad. This grouping, comprising



the United States, India, Australia, and Japan, emerged as an informal strategic partnership out of the success of their operational coordination after the 2004 tsunami. After being disbanded a decade earlier, the Quad has gained momentum since 2017. In the months since the Quad Plus concept was introduced, it has expanded to include diplomats from countries farther from the Indo-Pacific: Brazil and Israel. More importantly, the grouping has been raised from the deputy minister to the ministerial level, with the US secretary of state now coordinating with counterparts from India, Australia, Brazil, Israel, Japan, and South Korea on COVID-19 response.

What are the chances for Indian Ocean island states to become part of the Quad Plus? Would these states even want to be part of the grouping? For example, Sri Lanka and Maldives were identified as partners in the US Department of State's 2019 report *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*.<sup>1</sup> News reporting from Sri Lanka has suggested the possibility of deepening ties following the June 2020 call between Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Sri Lankan minister of foreign relations Dinesh Gunawardane.<sup>2</sup> Washington concluded a defense framework agreement with Maldives in September 2020 and has discussed a forthcoming bilateral security dialogue. At this point, the Quad Plus is only a virtual, operationally focused conference and should not be overstated as a forum. Still, given ongoing questions about the direction of the Quad Plus concept and the renewed focus on the future for the Quad, it is worth considering both the possibilities and limitations of expanding the Quad Plus to include the Indian Ocean island states.

### **Context of Indian Ocean Island States**

Before considering the outlook of the Quad Plus concept for Indian Ocean island states, it will be helpful to review their geography and identities. Some of the territories in the Indian Ocean are sovereign countries, whereas others are colonial possessions. Beginning in South Asia, Sri Lanka and Maldives are sovereign countries. As a near neighbor, India has wielded much influence—cultural, ethnic, political, economic, military—throughout their histories. As a result, both Maldives and Sri Lanka have a range of interactions—both positive and negative from their perspectives—with their dominant neighbor to the north.<sup>3</sup>

Farther west in the Indian Ocean are colonial-era territories held by the United Kingdom and France. The former claims sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory. However, Mauritius disputes Britain's claim to the Chagos Archipelago and is increasingly scoring victories in international fora. As of 2020, this archipelago is represented on the 2020 United Nations map as belonging to Mauritius and contains the key military base on Diego Garcia, which will be examined later.

Meanwhile, France also has overseas nationals and territories in the Indian Ocean, such as Réunion and Mayotte. Both islands contain military facilities as well. Finally, the western Indian Ocean features multiple sovereign island countries off the east coast of Africa: Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, and Comoros.

All these Indian Ocean island states have similarities and differences in terms of traits. For example, while Maldives and Sri Lanka are part of South Asian institutions such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, and Comoros claim an African identity and are part of regional institutions such as the African Union. Second, these Indian Ocean island states are at varying stages of economic development. Seychelles and Mauritius are high-income economies, according to the World Bank, whereas Comoros, Sri Lanka, and Maldives are middle income and Madagascar is low income.

Despite their geographic, economic, and institutional differences, these states share a common region and maritime identity, which has fostered centuries of people-to-people ties.<sup>4</sup> Given these historical connections and the development ambitions of the island states, there is increasing attention on regional institutions that can serve to unite Indian Ocean stakeholders. One is the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), an international organization whose secretariat is based in Mauritius. As of 2020, the aforementioned island countries are members. While IORA focuses on economic and sustainable growth, another regional institution links Indian Ocean countries: the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). Founded by India, IONS focuses on maritime security and assembles meetings of regional naval and coast guard leaders. Understanding the shared and distinct identities and interests of small states in the Indian Ocean will be relevant to the future of the Quad Plus.

An emerging field of international relations theory highlights the traditional inattention to small states—many of which are found in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>5</sup> The United States and China are clear examples of large powers, while countries such as Australia and India—both Indian Ocean stakeholders—are often discussed as “middle powers” with their significant, but not global might.<sup>6</sup> Yet, attempts to understand small states are often limited to identifying metrics such as population size or land area.<sup>7</sup>

Theorists of small states are moving toward a more relational understanding of the drivers of these states’ international decisions. This is in recognition that small states around the world have long understood their fundamentally asymmetric relationships with large countries due to their smaller size and capabilities.<sup>8</sup> Each has needed to carefully navigate larger countries—from India to the United States, the United Kingdom, or France. Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel note

that “small states are legally sovereign, but their actual autonomy may vary.”<sup>9</sup> As a result, small states such as Sri Lanka called for an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace during the Cold War, while the Treaty of Pelindaba was signed more recently to ensure a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa. In the Indian Ocean, Comoros, Madagascar, and Mauritius are signatories to the treaty. In addition to understanding their geographic, social, and economic traits, theoretical knowledge about small states will be important for policy makers and academicians if they wish to develop the Quad Plus as a conceptual and operational force across the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific.

### **Unifying Themes in Indian Ocean Island States**

The previous section has emphasized the diversity of Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, Comoros, and Madagascar as Asian and African island nations, as well as the French and UK territories, despite their shared traits as small Indian Ocean islands. Nevertheless, this diverse constellation has three broadly unifying aspects that are worth considering when exploring the Quad Plus concept. First, they have common needs such as building capacity for their maritime security services. Second, island states share common concerns, such as over sovereignty when challenged by large powers. Third, despite their smaller size, they possess strengths such as their strategic locations.<sup>10</sup>

First, these countries have common needs for economic development and capacity challenges as small states. Recently, India played a critical role in providing relief for populations in these countries, including Comoros, in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. After the Indian Ocean tsunami, the TCG countries provided relief to the small states of Maldives and Sri Lanka. Beyond disaster relief, India has played a strong role in building capacity for the maritime security services in Indian Ocean island states. While these small island countries are currently facing challenges to their health systems and economies from COVID-19, their maritime forces are also facing cutbacks to the maintenance of ships as well as operations.<sup>11</sup>

Second, Indian Ocean island states also share common threats. They face challenges such as rising sea levels due to climate change. They are also alert to potential oil spills that can damage their ecology and have economic effects, such as on tourism. For example, the maritime forces of Maldives and Sri Lanka fear the threat of oil spills and must prepare for the possibility of such a disaster. In fact, a tanker fire off Sri Lanka’s east coast was contained in September 2020 before it resulted in a major environmental disaster. Unfortunately, in the preceding months, Mauritius confronted the damage of an oil spill after a Japanese tanker ran aground. In addition to Japan providing assistance after Mauritius declared a

state of environmental emergency, India sent a navy ship and a coast guard team and France deployed naval aircraft and advisers from nearby Réunion.

Moreover, small island states have had to confront large countries to maintain their sovereignty or craft independent foreign policies. For example, India faced protests in Seychelles when reports emerged about a potential military base on Assumption Island.<sup>12</sup> In the past several years, the United States has faced controversy and eventual rejection of proposed status of forces agreements (SOFA) with Maldives and Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, as discussed earlier, Mauritius disputes British sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago and has waged a successful campaign against the United Kingdom for several years in the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the International Court of Justice, and the UN General Assembly. The fact that Mauritius has relied on international diplomatic and legal institutions should be no surprise. Small states need the “shelter” and capability that these institutions provide given the limitations of size and capacity faced by small states.<sup>13</sup>

Third, the Indian Ocean island states have surprising strengths given their small size. Small island developing states, which include most of the countries examined in this study, are thought leaders on addressing global challenges such as climate security due to the threat of rising sea levels. Maldives, for example, recently chaired the Alliance of Small Island States and was one of the first countries to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Meanwhile, the locations of these small states provide them with strategic and commercial advantages.<sup>14</sup> For example, Sri Lanka operates the busiest container port in South Asia at Colombo, and Maldives is a leader among the luxury tourism industry. Related to location is the use of islands for military basing in strategic positions. Seychelles has permitted the United States to base the MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles in support of counterpiracy and counterterrorism missions. The United Kingdom established the British Indian Ocean Territory largely due to the desire to host a base, with US air and naval presence, on Diego Garcia. This base has been critical to US military operations—including combat—over the past 30 years.

### **Future of the Quad Plus among Indian Ocean Island States**

Having analyzed the context in which Indian Ocean island states find themselves and the unifying themes they share as small states, I will consider the Quad Plus concept and the potential implications for this group of states. Essentially, how can these states be involved in the Quad Plus? This section will consider both the possibilities and the limitations of this concept for Indian Ocean island states.

### ***Possibilities: Supporting vs. Supported Framework***

To consider the prospects of Indian Ocean island states under the Quad Plus, it is useful to employ a framework where these states can be considered to play supporting vs. supported roles. First, a *supporting* role for these states in the Quad Plus derives from their strengths. Location was discussed as a strength of small states. This is certainly the case for the Indian Ocean islands. Close to the main East–West sea lanes, Sri Lanka already permits both merchant and military ships to refuel at Colombo port. Such visits could play an important role in relief efforts as the COVID-19 situation deteriorates in the developing world.

Another geographic strength of these small island states is the access they offer for military basing across the vast Indian Ocean. In Mauritius, India has been able to proceed with plans for base construction in the Agaléga Islands in the form of a jetty and landing strip for use by Mauritius' coast guard.<sup>15</sup> This activity received less protest than similar efforts in Seychelles due to India's close bilateral ties with Mauritius. Basing here, as well as in the British and French colonial territories of Diego Garcia and Réunion and Mayotte, respectively, presents another opportunity for small Indian Ocean islands to play a supporting role in the Quad Plus construct. These island territories and basing access in the Indian Ocean suggest logical invitations to France and Britain by current participants.

Alternatively, a *supported* role for Indian Ocean island states derives from their needs. The fact that China has been supporting these countries not only with health assistance but also financial relief, provides an additional imperative for support from the Quad Plus construct. These states are likely to continue requiring health assistance. Two of these Indian Ocean countries—Sri Lanka and Maldives—received relief in operations coordinated by the TCG after the 2004 natural disaster.<sup>16</sup> More recently, India provided significant amounts of relief to neighboring countries in response to COVID-19.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the Indian Navy deployed to small island states in South Asia and Africa. For example, in May and June, INS *Kesari* steamed for roughly 7,500 nautical miles to deliver COVID-19 relief to Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros, and Seychelles. Meanwhile, French naval forces deployed to Réunion and Mayotte to provide relief to these overseas departments.

Beyond health assistance, the COVID-19 era has already harmed Indian Ocean island countries' economies and future development prospects. Maritime traffic and trade have been adversely affected. Lockdowns and travel restrictions have undermined tourism, which constitutes a significant source of national income. For example, roughly two-thirds of Maldives' economy is fueled by tourism, while one-quarter of Seychelles' economy comes from tourism. Meanwhile, the Indian Ocean

island states have also seen diminished remittances from overseas nationals, which is another important source of revenue. The combined effect of decreased export revenue, tourism income, and remittances has resulted in fewer foreign exchange reserves for these countries—some of which already had deficient reserves before the COVID-19 crisis began. As a result, they have relied on international financial institutions and multilateral development banks—as well as China—for assistance. Maldives and Sri Lanka have also requested currency swaps from India. This clear need from Indian Ocean island states suggests an opportunity for Quad Plus countries to provide financial support to these developing economies.

### ***Limitations: Diplomatic, Operational, and Conceptual***

While the previous section considers the possibilities for Indian Ocean island states to participate in the Quad Plus through supporting and supported roles, potential obstacles also exist to their participation. Some of these limitations derive from the concerns of small states discussed above. First, island states may be wary of the potential use of their territory. This diplomatic issue can have operational effects. When China's increasing ties with Sri Lanka or Maldives are mentioned, both Colombo<sup>18</sup> and Malé repeat a desire to avoid upsetting India's security interests such as by permitting foreign military bases on their territory. Indian Ocean island states would likely refuse to participate in the Quad Plus if it were to assume a military appearance, especially one seen as being anti-China. How the Quad Plus framework navigates its relationship to the Quad consultations—including the forthcoming Malabar naval exercise—will thus be important going forward with regard to Indian Ocean island states.

A second limitation is conceptual with regard to the Indian Ocean region and US blind spots. Since the origins of the Quad Plus in March 2020, the United States has sought to keep the dialogue focused on the Indo-Pacific, with an emphasis on countries bordering Pacific waters. Close US allies such as France and the United Kingdom are not even involved, despite their possession of territories in the Indian Ocean region. Expanding the Quad Plus's attention to the Indian Ocean may not be a priority now for Washington, beyond press releases and photo opportunities. China's ongoing expansion of its ties with Indian Ocean island states could be a catalyst that increases US attention to the region. It is not clear, however, that India would welcome greater US defense engagement with neighbors such as Maldives. Although India did not object to a loose defense framework agreement between the United States and Maldives in 2020, New Delhi had previously discouraged Malé from pursuing a more intensive defense agreement (i.e., a SOFA) in 2013–2014.

Another potential conceptual challenge is that Quad countries prioritize different parts of the Indian Ocean. This raises questions whether all island states can participate in the Quad Plus. As discussed earlier, the origins of the Quad date back to 2004, when the United States, India, Japan, and Australia coordinated to provide disaster relief through the TCG. While this group disbanded in 2005, the strategic rationale for these four Quad countries to work together persisted, culminating in the September 2007 Malabar exercise. A decade later, the grouping has reemerged, largely due to increased assertiveness by China in the South and East China Seas.

Despite the nominal shift in Washington's previously declared "Asia-Pacific" priorities to the new "Indo-Pacific" strategy, the Quad remains focused on the Pacific in practice. Much of the "Indo" focus in the US concept of the Indo-Pacific is concentrated on India in particular rather than the Indian Ocean more broadly. More recently, however, White House officials (while in India) discussed an extension of the Indo-Pacific definition to extend to Africa. Whereas US officials had described the Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility as extending "from Hollywood to Bollywood,"<sup>19</sup> this area was characterized in January 2020 as extending "from California to Kilimanjaro."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, this talking point has not yet translated into any changes to the Unified Command Plan for this theater. Likewise, the Indo-Pacific remains a fundamentally Asian concept for Australia. In the recent *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, Canberra prioritizes the eastern Indian Ocean through the use of maps and text mentions.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, islands in the western Indian Ocean do not receive significant attention from the United States or Australia.<sup>22</sup> For example, the African countries of Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros are not mentioned in the US *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* report.<sup>23</sup> Even territories held by close US allies—Britain and France—are not mentioned.

On the other hand, India is centrally located in the Indian Ocean and policy makers are increasingly focused on westward equities for their country—more so than the United States and Australia. India's *2015 Maritime Security Strategy* resulted in the extension of the country's primary area of interest to encompass the entire western Indian Ocean, including the islands in the southwestern corner.<sup>24</sup> This strategy has been operationalized through the Indian Navy's mission-based deployments across the entire region. Japan shares this expansive vision for the Indian Ocean and has partnered with India on the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, although this initiative has not yet produced notable results.<sup>25</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This article has analyzed Indian Ocean island states and their potential to participate in the Quad Plus in both supporting and supported roles. An examination of their traits shows that these states are unified by common needs and concerns and possess surprising strengths. Basing access for the provision of relief is a clear example of the supporting role the Indian Ocean island states can play in the Quad Plus. On the other hand, during the COVID-19 pandemic, these states have been supported through health and financial assistance.

Despite these opportunities, the Quad Plus construct may pose some limitations for Indian Ocean island states' participation. Diplomatic leadership of the Quad Plus will need to ensure it does not assume a discourse that is negative to China. Such messaging could result in reduced operational access by Indian Ocean island states to their territories. The mostly Asian and Pacific focus of the Quad Plus is a conceptual limitation of the current format, with less appreciation of the entire Indian Ocean region across which island states reside. While the Quad Plus can provide health and financial benefit to these states, they are unlikely to engage with US and Quad partners on any strategic cooperation that bears an anti-China tone.

Moreover, the absence of US allies France and the United Kingdom from the Quad Plus is a missed opportunity.<sup>26</sup> Involving these countries, and by extension their island territories, would widen the geographic scope of the grouping to include all Indian Ocean islands.

During the past decade, the United States' thinking about the Indian Ocean has evolved significantly and appears likely to continue to do so over the next decade. Regardless of which political party is in the White House in 2021, Washington can be expected to emphasize the buildup of capabilities to address rising threat perceptions from China. To this end, the United States should continue to deepen its alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, including in the Indian Ocean region and its small island states. 🌟

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# Connectivity and the Quad Powers

## Revisiting History and Thought

DR. LAVANYA VEMSANI

### Abstract

International relations rest on cooperation in the fields of economy and military, two major aspects of foreign policy. In addition, intellectual policy priorities noted in political, social, and cultural spheres form an undercurrent of foreign policy that is noted in historical and cultural relations, currently referred to as *soft power diplomacy*. Therefore, states prioritize alliances of like-minded states. Historically international relations took advantage of similarities in cultural, political, and economic life in addition to geopolitical strategy. Consequently, this article investigates the historical connectivity and maritime relations in the Indian Ocean region, extending into the Pacific Ocean, among the Quad countries—India, Australia, Japan, and the United States—applying classical Indian theories of statecraft. Premodern maritime relations between India to Japan in the Indian ocean zone span millennia and are preserved in intangible and tangible heritage, including textual and archaeological sources. Civilizational connections spread from India to Japan, then on to the United States and Australia, forming a strong bond among the Quad nations.

### Introduction

The world is approaching an inflection point due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in numerous challenges in medical, economic, and political areas that currently plague the world. It is possible that the next five years might see tremendous changes in the global economic, political, and social systems. A nation that utilizes this transition period prudently to implement a systematic reorganization not only in internal affairs but also in external affairs, with focus on the areas of economic, social, and political systems, may herald a brighter future in the new millennium. This type of opportunity avails itself very infrequently. India's foreign relations contributed to the formation of the Indian Ocean trading system in the first millennium, leading to the peace and prosperity of the Indian Ocean zone during the first millennium CE until the turn of the second millennium CE.<sup>1</sup> However, the second millennium CE brought numerous changes to the world, with mercantilist, colonialist, and imperialist phases leading up to the modern global world as we know it today.<sup>2</sup> The second millennium expanded the world

beyond the Pacific rim of the known world. Relations between the Old World and the New World led to numerous changes in the world of international policy and networks. India seized upon such a global opportunity during the first millennium to emerge as a global leader, and although India faced pushback during the second millennium, there seems to be a great opportunity for India to re-emerge as a thought leader and economic powerhouse in the new millennium. It is for India to prepare and step-up to this challenge.<sup>3</sup>

As New Delhi is preparing to play a major role in international strategy and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, it is crucial to take a long and deep look at India's historical relations with its neighbors in the region. This article is divided into five sections discussing crucial aspects of the Indo-Pacific relations of India. In addition to this introduction and the conclusion, the first section discusses classical Indian statecraft based on the principles of the *Arthasāstra*, while the second section applies classical Indian thought to understand continuing historical and cultural relations between India and other Asian nations, and the third and final section discusses the potential for an alliance of like-minded democratic nations with strong defense and economic ties among India, the United States, Australia, Japan, and many other nations.

Due to India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and its geographical, political, and cultural ties to several nations in Asia, India brings depth to the Quad powers as New Delhi emerges as *the* strategic partner in this newly minted relationship.

### **The Indian Way: Theoretical Overview from Ancient India**

The Indian Way emphasized the value of deeper human relations for internal and external happiness of subject peoples rather than focusing on material gains. Internal and external alliances are fostered with a view to increase happiness of the peoples. The major historical relations of India with numerous nations were built on human aspirations of the interconnectedness of culture and sharing of knowledge established through like-minded cultures finding common ground. In fact, India's earliest historical relations outside of the subcontinent can be traced to the Mauryan era, which relied not only on exchanging gifts and material goods but also on sharing thought and culture. Chandragupta, the first Mauryan emperor, negotiated a treaty with the Greek general cum emperor Seleucus I Nicator, who founded the Seleucid kingdom centered in modern Syria and Iran.<sup>4</sup> This treaty involved not only clear clauses on defense and economic exchanges but also cultural exchanges and the recognition of people-to-people relations between Indians and Greeks.<sup>5</sup> These international relations based on people-to-people relations and cultural exchanges survived longer than the Indian empire that established them and led to peace

and prosperity between India and its western neighbors. Therefore, India needs to revitalize and nurture relations based on such historical experience rather than relying on the present circumstances. Nevertheless, there have been several debacles in the area of international relations in the past two centuries, inherited from centuries-long colonial rule. Hence, for New Delhi to reformulate its international relations, it is imperative that India must move beyond colonial constraints and past networks. In this effort, a classical understanding of statecraft would provide India the necessary direction. While I understand that paradigms laid out in ancient classical texts might not be sufficient to formulate state policy in the modern era, I definitely believe that the aspects of state in internal and external conduct discussed in this article provide the basic frameworks to begin laying a stronger outlook for India.

India's international relations should not rest solely on the present but also should draw upon a combination of the nation's ancient past and changing present circumstances to be effective for a prosperous and peaceful future. Therefore, India must adopt a three-pronged strategy for escaping the colonial legacy while simultaneously strengthening internal statehood and bolstering foreign relations. The three necessary steps for this are (1) dismantling/withdrawing from colonial organizations to which India is currently a member, (2) fostering people-to-people relations with friendly neighbors that share historic ties and cultural relations with India; and (3) forming a treaty alliance with like-minded democracies in the Indo-Pacific. The first step is long overdue and must be undertaken by the government of India even though it might entail a tedious process. The perils and pitfalls of colonial and continuing postcolonial membership in some regional organizations is a topic for another article, hence I will limit my analysis here to two central points of discussion in this article: (1) fostering closer alliances drawing upon historical and cultural relations of India with its neighbors in the Indo-Pacific region, and (2) establishing strong international relations with like-minded democracies in the Indo-Pacific, while also fostering stronger economic, political, and defense relationships. While discussing these two important aspects of international relations from an Indian perspective, I will utilize theoretical concepts derived from the *Arthasāstra*. In order to efficiently perform these three basic steps noted above, India must first develop internal and external frameworks to govern its policy of international relations. Therefore, this article focuses on examining the classical theoretical frameworks of Indian statecraft to analyze India's external relations.

## Exploring Ancient Indian Texts for a “New” Foundation in Foreign Policy

It is only natural that Kauṭilya (also known as Chānakya), the prime minister and mentor of Chandragupta Maurya the founder of the first largest Empire of India, is the composer of the *Arthaśāstra*,<sup>6</sup> the first Indian compendium on statecraft.<sup>7</sup> History places the lives of both Kauṭilya and Chandragupta on an unusual path to power and leadership. Chandragupta grew up in the remote forests of the Magadha region, where Kauṭilya discovered and mentored him. Kauṭilya was the disenfranchised former chief minister and councilor of Mahāpadmānanda, the last emperor of the Nanda Empire. Kauṭilya had left his high position with the Nanda emperor due to differences and began roaming in the forests, eventually finding the charming young child, Chandragupta. He nurtured the boy to be the future founder of an empire and an ideal ruler of India, thus laying the foundation for the first state based on the ideal combination of the joint efforts of the philosopher and the emperor, extolling the strength of mind and body. It is only natural that the earliest information on state alliances and the proper conduct of states comes from the *Arthaśāstra*. Emperor Priyadarśi, better known as Aśoka the Great, grandson of Chandragupta, emulated these strengths and spread the values throughout the Mauryan Empire.<sup>8</sup> Kauṭilya composed his magnum opus *Arthaśāstra*, derived from received tradition as well as his own experience in statecraft through building a strong and successful empire.

In the *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya discusses the strengths and weaknesses of enemy kingdoms and methods to foster alliances between states with prospective friendly states. Books 6 and 7 of the *Arthaśāstra* discuss salient features of kingship and international relations.<sup>9</sup> Book 6 contains two chapters: “The Elements of Sovereignty” and “Concerning Peace and Exertion.” Book 7 is dedicated to the “Circle of Kings” (*rājamandala*), best rendered in the modern sense as “Circle of States.”<sup>10</sup> Another principle framework for the formation of alliances involves the sixfold policy (*Arthaśāstra*, Book 7, Chapter 1, 263, Page 293): peace (*sandhi*), war (*vigraha*), neutrality (*āsana*), marching (*yāna*), alliance (*samsraya*), and balancing equal powers (*dvaidhībhāva*, peace with one and waging war against the other). Since a state would like to maintain its balance and harmony in relation to its rival and friendly nations, it is important to consider features of sixfold policy (peace, war, alliance, balancing, marching, and dual policy of war and peace) as important features informing the nature of international relations. Books 6 and 7 deserve close examination for clear policy purposes on this aspect of interstate relations. Even though the *Arthaśāstra* is an ancient text, it preserves the systematic strategic thought of India’s statecraft. Knowing the basic foundations that guided the

Indian state before colonization should serve as guidance for New Delhi to devise its own India-centric foreign policy in the light of modern prerequisites.

In Book 6 Chapter 2 (*Arthaśāstra*, Book 6, Chapter 2, 261, Page 293), Kauṭilya defines the strength of the state in three aspects, stressing that “strength is power, and happiness is the end.” The three aspects of strength are power of deliberation (intellectual strength), prosperous treasury (economic strength), and martial power (physical/military strength). When these three are properly cultivated, happiness naturally results. New Delhi must focus on developing these three aspects of India’s foreign relations to ensure the nation of a strong international position. To do so, the *Arthaśāstra* declares that policy makers’ power of deliberation comes from cultivating relations with nations that are most similar in culture and polity. Next, the prosperous treasury comes from favorable trade relations, and Kauṭilya states that economics is of the utmost importance among the allied nations. Additionally, internal and external security is important for stable relations, and hence alliances should also share and execute closer defense ties. Hence, in the modern sense, it is important for democratic nations to foster people-to-people relations as a first step toward establishing lasting international relations in the areas of economic and defense cooperation. Currently referred to as *soft power diplomacy*, cultural and political similarities and relations are of extreme importance to nurturing strong international relations between nations. Once firm relations are established through the power of deliberation between nations of similar polity, the next steps building on economic and defense relation will follow with certainty.

In this article I will apply the most important concepts of the *Arthaśāstra*, namely, the sixfold policy and the circle of states, to the formation of alliances with India as the locus of activity for the derivative alliances, which may also benefit the Quad alliance. While the Circe of States policy is based on location and history and culture, the sixfold policy prioritizes alliances based on war and peace.

### **Alliances of Location and Culture: History and Continuity**

Alliances based on geographical closeness and cultural affinity are not new to Asia, especially in the Indian Ocean zone. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are the modern equivalents of similar alliances based on geographical and cultural closeness. These alliances are fostered to provide fruitful trade relations and provide a certain measure of peace, as many nations sharing borders also possess concerns that might sometimes lead to battles. Fostering relations and providing normalized opportunities to meet at regular intervals might provide a platform to negotiate regional issues between the neighboring nations.

Over the past decade, India has been closely monitoring and strongly entrenching itself in the Indo-Pacific paradigm, instituting the Look East policy and cultivating relations with nations throughout the region with a view to taking advantage of existing historical relations.<sup>11</sup> India, like many other democratic nations in the Indo-Pacific, continues to cherish its historical culture. Hence, for New Delhi, nurturing economic and defense relations with like-minded nations in the Indo-Pacific would help bolster India's role in the world, especially in the region. I will discuss below the relations between India and other regional nations, beginning by applying the *Arthaśāstra* paradigm on external policy.

Relations on the northwestern borders of India are precarious and increasingly volatile. Pakistan, previously part of India, is a border state, but the past 75 years have separated India and Pakistan, with the bilateral relationships seemingly consistently deteriorating.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, on its northwestern borders, India is compelled to consider cultivating relations further afield, with nations such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia along with Afghanistan, rather than competing for relationships and resources with Pakistan, which has cordial international relations with the other major geopolitical power in the region: China. This further complicates New Delhi's geopolitical concerns along India's northeastern borders. India's relations with Himalayan states—including Bhutan, Tibet, and Nepal—are very close and remain strategically important for India.<sup>13</sup> These relations are even more important because Pakistan occupies a strategic portion of Kashmir (Gilgit-Baltistan) and China<sup>14</sup> occupies another portion (Aksai Chin) and seems intent on expanding its territory at India's expense. To balance these northern border concerns, India must develop other strategic relationships in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, India's Indo-Pacific strategy acquires vital strategic magnitude—not only for India but also for the entire region.

India maintained close relations with Southeast Asian states during the first millennium, which brought immense prosperity to the region.<sup>15</sup> I will examine below relations of India in the Indian Ocean region, applying the *Arthaśāstra* policies of the circle of states and sixfold policy as a backdrop for the emerging Indo-Pacific alliance, the Quad, and how this may affect the region in the light of classical Indian thought on statecraft.

On India's southeastern borders, New Delhi maintains cordial relations with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. In addition, India should also focus on cultivating better relations with Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia, extending throughout the region of Southeast Asia. International relations with these eastern states are closer to the heart for India, given the long-standing historical networks and cultural contacts among these nations and India. Beginning with Aśoka, maritime trade routes from India's east coast extended throughout the Indian Ocean and



into the Pacific. Malaysia and Indonesia may have changed their culture over the past two centuries; however, many cultural and historical connections with India remain, and it is in the best interests of New Delhi to cultivate and foster closer relations with these states as well as those of the many Pacific Islander nations.

In Chapter 6 of the *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya declares that a state should divide its neighbors into four categories: (1) the conqueror's circle of states, (2) the enemy's circle of states, (3) the *madhyama* (median) king's circle of states, and (4) the neutral king's circle of states, based on the nature of the state and the power of its army and economy (*Arthaśāstra*, Book 6, Chapter 2, Verse 261, Pages 292–93). Additionally, one must also take note of the strategic location of the neighboring states with regards to shared borders. Kauṭilya declares those sharing borders must automatically be considered as enemy states (Book 6, Chapter 2, Verse 260, Page 292).<sup>16</sup> However, Mauryan India expanded beyond its original borders within a few decades of the composition of the *Arthaśāstra*, with Emperor Aśoka sending “Missions of Friendship” to states located much farther from his empire. This vision led to India's lead in maritime trade in the classical world. This shows that India understood the strategic importance of cultivating relations with nations further afield. This aspect seems equally important in the modern world, particularly given that India finds hostile states along much of its borders.

The *Arthaśāstra* provides frameworks to classify friendly nations and enemy nations into categories. Since, our focus in this article is on the friendly nations, I will focus on classifying those. If we were to apply this rule of classifying nations based on its relations, it would result in a three-layered compendium of states that could lean in favor of India within the Indian Ocean region, which may also help establish lasting peace within the region. As such New Delhi's responsibility to maintain peace in the region is oversized, as is the role of its alliances in the region. Thus, this is an important aspect of India's external relations. To maintain peace, any state needs to know its position relative to its neighboring states and to be able to classify them into the three categories according to the *Arthaśāstra*: enemy, median state, and neutral (*Arthaśāstra*, Book 6, Chapter 2, Verse 261). If New Delhi were to take note of the circles of states in its near vicinity in the light of emerging aggression of China in the Indo-Pacific region, India might also help devise future strategies of deterrence to maintain the overall stability of the region.

The first category defined by the *Arthaśāstra* is a state's own circle of friendly states. The *Arthaśāstra* (Book 6, Chapter 2, Verse 261) notes further that historical alliance derived from ancestors as well as alliances of a state situated in the immediate vicinity of the enemy is a natural friend.<sup>17</sup> This immediately places Sri Lanka, the Philippines,<sup>18</sup> Singapore,<sup>19</sup> and Vietnam<sup>20</sup> as natural friends for India, due to their location close to China and their ongoing disputes

with China concerning marine and land borders and resources, in addition to India's historically solid relations with these countries. The Philippines has recently seen South China Sea disputes with China, which pushed Manila away from its previous alliances moving ever closer to the United States and Japan. Other island nations with similar considerations are Japan<sup>21</sup> and Australia,<sup>22</sup> which are already members of the Quad. Along with these nations, which are allied with the United States,<sup>23</sup> the Quad represents an alliance of like-minded nations, a close circle of states, which the *Arthasāstra* terms as a state's own circle of friends. India's circle of friends in the Indian Ocean zone with continuing historical ties are undoubtedly the island nations surrounding India, i.e., Sri Lanka<sup>24</sup> and Indonesia.<sup>25</sup> India maintains close cultural, trade, and social ties with these nations through trade and travel agreements.

The second category of states noted in the *Arthasāstra* is the median state, which is defined as having a territory close to the first country and its adversary and is thus capable of helping either state in war or peace or resisting either of them individually.<sup>26</sup> Although none of the states located between China and India are nuclear powers and hence not strong enough to defend against these nations individually, they do participate in alliances with both nations to maintain the balance of power. Some of the states that may qualify to be added to this list are Malaysia and Laos. Bangladesh could be added to this category for its shifting allegiances in recent years. Bangladesh is participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and is moving closer to China in doing so, while India opposes the BRI. India maintains cordial relations with Bangladesh as a counterweight to Indo-Pakistan relations.<sup>27</sup> At this juncture India's relations with Myanmar may also take a new turn, as relations with Bangladesh acquire a new, deeper geopolitical significance.

The third category of state noted in the *Arthasāstra* is the neutral state, which is defined as a nation situated beyond the territory of the opposing states, is very powerful, and is capable of helping either of the opposing states and the median states, either together or individually.<sup>28</sup> Considering the efforts of these states to maintain neutrality as well as their location within the Indo-China region, these following Southeast Asian states include Myanmar,<sup>29</sup> Thailand,<sup>30</sup> and Cambodia.<sup>31</sup> At best, each of the states has played a limited role in the region in contemporary developments, especially in relation to India.

As discussed above, the three categories of alliances of nations based on location and historical relations provide a clear vision to evolve further policy. However, the *Arthasāstra* also discusses the sixfold policy to precisely know the disposition of each state in relation to one's own state in times of peace and war. Satisfying four of the aspects (two positive aspects and two neutral aspects) of the sixfold policy

may lead to conditions of peace/harmony, while satisfying four of the aspects including negative aspects of the sixfold policy may lead to war/disturbance.

The sixfold policy, as envisioned by Kauṭilya, involves “the agreement with pledges is *peace*; offensive operation is *war*, indifference is *neutrality*; making preparations is *marching*; seeking protection of another is *alliance*; making peace with one and waging war with another is termed *dual policy*” (emphasis added). Application of sixfold policy may slightly change the relationship equations between the nations discussed in the preceding pages. All the nations that have agreements of peace and abide by rules of peace are in first relationship bound by peace treaties. India’s allies across the world fall into this first category. The second is the relationship of offensive or war, which denotes the nations that are in offensive relationships and currently waging wars, which quickly brings Pakistan and China to mind—both of which are currently waging wars with India, even though not openly. The third is indifference noted by neutrality. This relationship is maintained with noninvolvement, and hence any nations that do not have treaties of peace or war fall into this category. Most of the nations in Southeast Asia may fall into this category. However, this also indicates that the neutral nations can be approached to conclude peace treaties if deemed necessary. The fourth relationship denoted by making preparations, called *marching*, which means that a nation is preparing to go to war. This may only involve provocative alliances with enemy nations but with no direct actions. This brings into focus nations that are recently conducting joint defense exercises or alliances with nations negatively disposed toward India. This brings into focus some nations that are joining forces and forming alliances with Pakistan and China. The fifth is seeking protection of another, called *alliance*. The nations that are seeking protection while geographically located in proximity with India are friendly nations of India in the region, noted in the first circle of states above. However, India should take note of any nations seeking alliances with opposing nations in the region. The last and sixth relationship of a nation is *maintaining balance*, which is waging war with one while maintaining peace with another is considered dual policy. Currently, many nations sharing borders with India are maintaining balance through dual policy. For example, Pakistan wages war with India, while maintaining peace with other neighbors. Similarly, Bangladesh maintains peace with India, while dealing with its cross-border issues with Myanmar. Other nations—including Vietnam and the Philippines—also follow a dual policy in their international relations.

Due to these historical relations and cultural connectivity, India’s solid relations with Southeast Asian nations could form the bedrock of any Indo-Pacific alliance. India’s established international relations with Southeast Asian nations as well as other Central Asian nations places India in an immensely crucial strategic position.

Therefore, as New Delhi develops external relations with like-minded democratic nations of the modern world—such as the United States, Australia, and Japan—India brings much to the Quad in terms of soft power and economic relations. These are attributes lacking in the other members of the grouping due to colonial and wartime legacies associated with their history and relations to Asia.

The goal of this section is to establish the historical connectivity and robust activity of India in connection within the Indian Ocean region due to its historical and geographical connectivity. As a nation with such deep connectivity and alliances, India is poised to contribute to the Quad immensely as well as influence regional policy within the Indian Ocean region.

Once the nature of alliances with other nations is established based on the principles of the *Arthasāstra*—namely, the circle of states and sixfold policy—the state should exert itself to apply and derive the three aspects of strength (intellectual, economic, and military/defense) noted in the *Arthasāstra* (Book 6, Chapter 2, Verse 261),<sup>32</sup> which results in the greater good of the subjects and increasing their happiness. First, the state should strive to establish fruitful intellectual relations with other nations through clear channels of communication along with people-to-people relations promoting educational and cultural exchanges. Second, the state should bolster the economy by fostering strong trade and commercial treaties that facilitate brisk trade in goods and products among the allies. Third, the state should form strong military alliances with allied nations promoting defense and security of all the involved nations. Defense is the most important aspect of strength and should include treaties on arms, training, and sharing of security risks. Strengthening of these three aspects should ensure internal and external strength of one's own state as well as those of the allies simultaneously.

International relations can be inconsistent and unpredictable. However, applying frameworks such as the principle of circle of states and sixfold policy could help alleviate some of the uncertainty if stronger international relations and human bonds could be nurtured leading to long-lasting relations. Relations derived from circle of states and sixfold policy must inform future policy formulations guiding like-minded alliances propelled by overarching values shared by all members of an alliance. In the light of the grim prospects for world peace in recent years, this policy framework acquires enormous significance in the twenty-first century. Consequently, clear policy paradigms need to be laid down for nations forming alliances to be impactful in the future.

### **Alliance of Like-minded Nations**

Previously, India has been a member of several regional and international organizations, some of which were plagued by the trappings of colonialism and/or

proved inadequate to serve the interests of India.<sup>33</sup> Any association dictated by geographic proximity and colonial inheritance rather than political, social, and economic ideals is bound to fail in the face of crisis. For example, this is aptly demonstrated in the recent failure of the SAARC.<sup>34</sup> This is to be expected. As noted in the *Arthaśāstra*, nations sharing physical borders are automatically deemed enemies (Book 6, Chapter 2, Verse 260, Page 292). Plagued by multiple internal and external terror threats and border disputes, SAARC cannot progress beyond basic economic cooperation among members. Half the member nations of this group are linked solely by geographical proximity and continue to struggle with internal terrorist organizations, while some are still struggling to establish democratic states in the face of military interference. Under these precarious circumstances, it is imperative that India develop an alternative geopolitical strategic alliance. India is the largest democracy in this group of nations, and hence requires secure defense and economic ties with other powerful nations that will help stabilize the Indo-Pacific.

As a member of the Quad, India should consider evolving its sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean region to balance the conundrum of the northern borders, with conciliatory alliances on the southern borders. New Delhi, if it plans to be a member of an association for economic and defense cooperation, should look toward the Indian Ocean and beyond. India should take the lead in developing an international treaty alliance that includes East African nations and other states in the Indian Ocean economic zone with the nations located closer to India in the eastern Indian Ocean, western Pacific Ocean, and Oceania. Asia needs a powerful regional association of cooperation, and India is the only large, successful democracy of the region that could spearhead such an effort. This organization of like-minded nations should cooperate not only in trade but also in military and defense strategy, jointly developing techniques to counter terrorist and military threats in the Indo-Pacific. Outside the region, New Delhi should take advantage of the changing international strategic balance of power in foreign relations by building more trustworthy relations far beyond India's physical borders. This would serve the dual purpose of balancing regional strategy and establishing India's position in international fora.

According to Kautilya, the circle of states is established following consideration of several factors such as a state's political, cultural, economic, and defense capabilities in addition to its natural location. If New Delhi can find nations that are analogous to India in political, cultural, economic, and defense capabilities, it would be an asset for the resulting circle of states (perhaps the Quad) to become a truly influential force in world affairs. History has established that the alliances between like-minded states remain the most influential in international cooperation. Alliances formed due to

like-mindedness in economic and political nature have longevity; therefore, India should seek support among the democratic nations of Asia and beyond. Hence, the current Quad alliance of nations emerging in the Indo-Pacific and encircling the globe will have phenomenal influence in shaping the world.

### **Emerging Quad: Strategic Alliance of Democracies in the Indo-Pacific**

Japan is an economic, and potentially military, powerhouse in the Pacific. Australia straddles the Indian and Pacific Oceans and possesses significant political, military, and economic wealth. The United States—by virtue of its western border, its territories in the Pacific Ocean, and its bases throughout the region—is an Indo-Pacific nation. These democratic nations possess flourishing economies, robust militaries, and significant diplomatic relations with India and throughout the Indo-Pacific. It is in the interest of the four nations to cultivate closer economic and defense relations.

The Quad represents the democratic values of free and open societies held by the four member nations. The frameworks of alliances outlined and discussed in section 1 of this article—that of the political, cultural similarity, and closer alliance in economic and defense affairs to bring world peace—are at the core of the Quad initiative. The articles in this issue discuss the role of the Quad alliance with other international organizations and nations across the world. My focus in this article has been to analyze the strength of each of the participant nations within the framework of the circle of states (*Arthasāstra*, Book 6, Chapter 2, Verse 261, Paged 292–293) and the sixfold policy of the *Arthasāstra* (Book 7, Chapter 1, Verse 263, Page. 295). The sixfold policy, as envisioned by Kauṭilya, involves “the agreement with pledges is peace; offensive operation is war, indifference is neutrality; making preparations is marching; seeking protection of another is alliance; making peace with one and waging war with another is termed dual policy.” These six policies form part of any alliance. However, in a large alliance of nations, at least four of the six elements must be satisfied. A quick examination of the Quad alliance and other major nations reveals that these six elements are satisfied, which provides hope that this alliance might help the peaceful prospects of the future world. For the Quad nations, peace, neutrality, marching, and alliance are naturally met, as the Quad by nature of its alliance is charged with maintaining the four aspects of the sixfold policy. However, due to the nature of the geopolitical issues facing Indo-Pacific region, the Quad is also faced with war and the dual policy of making peace with one and waging war with another as a precursor to maintaining geopolitical balance, so that the conditions might not deteriorate further.

The Quad Plus posits positive prospects for member nations, meeting the majority of the elements of the sixfold policy, and, hence, the alliance purports a strong bond for peace through balance of powers. Other articles in this issue examine the relation of Quad nations with other unallied nations and groupings, including, the ASEAN, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Israel, France, Russia, Middle Eastern nations, and others, gauging their reactions to the development of the Quad and assessing the likelihood of these nations joining and expanded Quad Plus construct. It is important that prospective members in the Quad Plus be capable of satisfying at least four or five elements of the sixfold policy in their relations with at least one of the members of the Quad. Theoretically, this helps secure peace and stability in the world according to the classical frameworks of Kauṭilya's circle of states as outlined in this article.

### **Conclusions and Prospects: From India to the Americas, and Everything in Between**

This article discussed three important aspects of India's international relations—the historical antecedents and theoretical views, classical Indian international relations, and modern international alliances—and the way forward. First, it discussed the foundational thought of Indian international relations and national defense based on one of the world's earliest texts on statecraft. Second, the article delved into classical Indian relations established since the third century BCE, their current status, and their continued influence on regional relations and communication. Third, the article addressed the theoretical perspectives from ancient India on the necessity of building alliances with like-minded nations in the fields of diplomacy, economy, and defense and the impact such a perspective offers in understanding the emerging Quad alliance in the Indo-Pacific.

An examination of classical theories, cultural connections, and historical alliances helps us analyze the future prospective alliances of the region. Based on the theoretical perspective provided in the *Arthaśāstra*, which highlights the importance of natural location; cultural, economic, and defense perspectives; and the practice of international relations as essential elements of successful alliances between nations, the goals of such alliances are lasting peace and prosperity—bringing happiness to the people of the allied nations. The Quad initiative is extensive, spanning much of the globe, embracing constituent nations that are modern democracies, and representing a large percentage of the world's population. Hence, the success of the Quad would bring hope to the region for lasting peace. ❁

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Notes

1. Referred to as *Southernization*, the first millennial development and movement of goods and population is well-noted in world history. See Lynda Shaffer, “Southernization,” *Journal of World History* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 1–21.
2. Referred to as *Westernization*, this heralds the next major change in the world, leading up to the global world. See Serge Latouche, *Western Civilization: Significance, Scope, and Limits of the Drive Towards Uniformity* (Paris: Polity, 1996).
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4. William Woodthorpe Tarn, *Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
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6. Patrick Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Thomas Trautman, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra: A Statistical Investigation of the Authorship and Evolution of the Text* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1971).
7. Rosalind Lefebvre, “The Minister Chanakya from Parisishtaparvan of Hemachandra,” in *The Clever Adulteress and Other Stories: A Treasury of Jaina Literature*, ed. Phyllis Granoff (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1993): 201–15
8. Radha Kumud Mookerji, *Ashoka* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1962); and Romila Thapar, *Ashoka and the Decline of Mauryas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).



9. R. Shama Shastri, *Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra*, 8th ed. (Mysore: Mysore Printing and Publishing House, 1967). Kauṭilya is also known by two other names: Chanakya and Vishnugupta. All references in this article are to this volume of the *Arthaśāstra* unless otherwise specified.

10. I use the word *state* in this paper to refer to the nation/king of the *Arthaśāstra*, since this article is primarily concerned with statecraft in the twenty-first century dealing with nation-states and not with kings or kingdoms.

11. Atul Sarma and Saswati Choudhury. *Mainstreaming the Northeast in India's Look and Act East Policy*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

12. Abhinav Pandya, "The Future of Indo-Pak Relations after the Pulwama Attack," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 2 (2019): 65–68; and Zahid Yousuf, Haroon Elahi, and Malik Adnan, "War and Peace Framing: The Contextual Analysis of Indo-Pak Relations," *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2018): 128–44.

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# Realistic Expectations

## The China Factor in the Australia–US Perspective on the Indo-Pacific

DR. AMIT GUPTA

### Abstract

Over the past two decades, Australia has developed a strong economic relationship with China which has led to an unprecedented economic growth and prosperity in Australia. Australia believed it could balance between its economic relationship with China and its political-military relationship with the United States but with the escalation of the conflict of interests between the United States and China such a strategy of hedging may no longer be possible. Further, Australia can ill-afford a reduction in its economic ties with China and, despite the rhetoric from Canberra, this will constrain Australian behavior. This article discusses how, given the economic constraint, Australia and the United States can shape a new perspective on the Indo-Pacific.

### Introduction

The United States views Australia as one of its most important allies in the Indo-Pacific and Canberra is part of both the Five Eyes intelligence sharing arrangement as well as one of the nations in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Australian analysts also point out that Australia has been a staunch ally that has regularly gone to war alongside the United States, and, since World War II, Canberra has seen Washington as the principal guarantor of its security. This article argues that Australia's economic dependency on China makes it difficult for Canberra to remain the type of ally it was to the United States during the Cold War. Instead, Australian official statements have spoken of China as the country's primary economic partner and the United States as Australia's primary strategic partner, suggesting that Canberra can navigate successfully between the two relationships. Based on this approach, Australia has sought to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, in which China is the dominant economic partner, even while Canberra, under its current prime minister, Scott Morrison, is taking a hard stand on China's lack of transparency on COVID-19, Beijing's quashing of individual liberties in Hong Kong, and on freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. This article argues that this growing economic dependency, and an Australian aversion to casualties, are leading to a fundamental change in

the security relationship. Given this transformation, the article focuses on how the US–Australia relationship should be configured to develop a new and coordinated approach to deal with China and the Indo-Pacific.

### **The US–Australia Relationship**

Following the Japanese invasion of Singapore in 1942, Australia went through a transformation in its security relationship as it was forced to move away from a dependency on Britain as its security guarantor to a reliance on the United States. With the onset of the Cold War, Australia strengthened its defense relationship with the United States through a series of formal agreements ranging from the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS)—a non-binding collective security arrangement between Australia and New Zealand and separately Australia and the United States—as well as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Additionally, Australia was grandfathered into an intelligence-sharing agreement, the Five Eyes, along with other Anglo-Saxon nations—Britain, Canada, and New Zealand. Australia also sent troops to the Vietnam conflict and suffered 521 casualties.<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, Australia was able to provide the “real estate” for the United States to build space and intelligence-gathering assets in the country like the Pine Gap facility.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2000s, Australia reacted to the attacks of September 2001 by invoking ANZUS and sending troops to Afghanistan. Later, Australian forces were part of coalition forces in Iraq. Iraq and Afghanistan were popular wars in Australia, since the casualty rates were low (two deaths in Iraq and 41 in Afghanistan<sup>3</sup>) and it affirmed that Australia was a loyal ally and, as the then Australian prime minister, John Howard, liked to bill the country, America’s Deputy Sheriff.

Yet, by the early 2000s, there was a happy confluence of events that worked to the advantage of the Australian economy—and that was the rise of China and the economic boom it brought to Indo-Pacific region. As China’s economy started to grow, it developed a hunger for natural resources. Australia became a ready provider and profited from a significant boost to its commodity prices.<sup>4</sup> Since the early 2000s, the economic relationship between the two countries has grown dramatically—to the point where the expression now goes that, if China becomes poor, Australia is beggared.

Australia’s major exports to China are commodities, education, tourism, agriculture, and services, and four of these revenue earners depend on a continued and thriving economic relationship with Beijing. Australia sells large amounts of copper and iron ore to China, and it was this sale of minerals that sparked a boom in the Australian economy from around 2010, which continued until this year when COVID-19 stalled the global economy and pushed Australia into a recession.

China imports 63 billion AUD of iron ore, 16 billion dollars of natural gas, and 14.6 billion dollars of coal from Australia.<sup>5</sup> Many Chinese students study at Australian universities, while Chinese tourists are vital to the Australian tourist industry. Australian data reveals that the country hosts 8.5 million visitors annually, and 1.4 million of those are Chinese.<sup>6</sup> Further, Australia makes 43.9 billion AUD from tourism and 12 billion of that comes from Chinese tourists—over 25 percent of the revenues earned from tourism are from Chinese visitors.<sup>7</sup> Australia now sells about 12 billion dollars of agricultural products to China, which is about a quarter of Australia's total agricultural exports. Australia has sought to reduce its dependency on the China market and to woo India to raise trade between the two countries to 45 billion AUD. However, to put things in perspective, such trade with India would be an insufficient amount, given that Australia, in 2019, exported 160 billion AUD worth of goods to China.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, this has led to a debate in Australian policy and business circles as to how to deal with the economic fallout if China decides to play hardball with Canberra?

The Australian government has, therefore, despite the rhetoric of the current prime minister and the expectations of Washington, sought to toe a fine line between being a strong US ally and not killing the Chinese goose that lays the economic golden egg. As Australian foreign minister Marise Payne stated in a joint press conference with US secretaries of state and defense, Mike Pompeo and Mark Esper, "As my Prime Minister put it recently, the relationship that we have with China is important, and we have no intention of injuring it, but nor do we intend to do things that are contrary to our interests, and that is the premise from which we begin."<sup>9</sup>

The differences that Foreign Minister Payne talks about range from the freedom of navigation in the South China Seas to a lack of transparency on the part of China regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the draconian security law that Beijing has rammed down the throats of the citizens of Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup> These have been consistent Australian policies and reflect the commonality of values that Canberra shares with Washington on the norms and structure of regional order in the Indo-Pacific. While the United States and Australia may have shared common values and in the past, when Canberra was a loyal ally that joined American military expeditions, the future, particularly when it comes to confronting China, may not lead to such a clear response from Australia.

### **Military Matters and the Quad**

Those who want a containment of China in the Indo-Pacific salivate at the idea of a fully operational Quadrilateral Alliance among the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. Initial talk to operationalize the Quad did not go beyond

military exercises which were geared toward modest goals—especially in the case of India—of getting militaries to talk to one another and become familiar with each other’s weaponry. The Indians carried out joint naval exercises with the United States and Japanese navies but had been recalcitrant regarding Australian participation in the Malabar exercises or accepting invitations to exercise with the Australian Navy.<sup>11</sup> The Indians kept the Australians out because they did not want to further invoke the ire of China, which was unhappy with the exercises in general.

The Quad was revived in 2017 as the four participants began to recognize that Chinese military and political forays had begun to worry policy makers in Washington, Delhi, Canberra, and Tokyo, and this year, after the clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley in the Himalayas, the Australians participated in the 2020 version of Malabar.<sup>12</sup> Australian analysts point out that so far the weak link in the Quad has been India, but it is worth asking what precisely is the military role of Australia in an energized Quad?<sup>13</sup>

### Australian Constraints

Australia, as discussed above, has a major interdependence on trade with China, but there is talk of diversifying trade and being willing to bear the pain of disengaging with China. In an article in *The Guardian*, Peter Jennings, the director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, wrote, “with coal and iron ore we can be confident that we have products that China wants. They would find it painful to switch long-term suppliers. Chinese consumers also like Australia’s clean green produce, notwithstanding party flimflam about hurt feelings. All the same we should be working as hard as we can to reduce economic dependence and diversify, diversify, diversify. Business should stop whining about how hard that is and understand that protecting the national interest is key to their own long-term survival.”<sup>14</sup> Lavina Lee makes an even more optimistic argument that, “Australia’s resources are largely traded on world markets and are fungible products for which there are markets elsewhere. Restricting iron ore imports from Australia is also likely to be an act of self-harm for Beijing.”<sup>15</sup> Such arguments tend to simplify the international trade process, supply chains, and the strength a very large and reliable market like China has to play economic hardball.

The Chinese do not have to start with the nuclear option of cutting Australian iron ore exports; Beijing can hit other sectors of the Australian economy that are critical to the well-being of the middle class. As mentioned earlier, Chinese tourists account for over a quarter of Australian tourism revenues, and Canberra cannot encourage other countries to make up the shortfall caused by a Chinese boycott. If Chinese students seek friendlier academic pastures in Europe and

North America, then the Australian academic economy takes a huge hit, as 152,591 students stop paying tuition to Australian universities, especially since the Chinese make up 38.3 percent of the international student body.<sup>16</sup> Further, countries are always willing to take the economic hit to score political points—after all, Australia has rejected Huawei’s 5G for security concerns, but this means buying an alternative network that is more expensive and less capable. This economic dependence, therefore, does limit what can be done in the military sphere.

As one analyst has argued, there are four common interests for the members of the Quad, but not all can be met by a military build-up or by military confrontations. Some of these interests cannot be addressed without significant cooperation from Beijing—and that is unlikely to happen if the Chinese feel they are being coerced by the Quad nations. Lee argues that these four common interests are maintaining a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region; deterring the use of force or coercive measures to resolve territorial disputes; ensuring freedom of navigation, since maritime trade is based on this principle; and maintaining a rules-based economic order in the region.<sup>17</sup>

To take the last objective first, Australia is a member of Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Chinese-initiated Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The CPTPP was meant to be a Western counter to Chinese economic dominance in the region, but with the United States refusing to join the treaty, the effort lost its teeth as an economic counter to China. Therefore, Australia hoped to address concerns over Chinese unwillingness to adhere to a rules-based economic order before inking the RCEP, and this will have little to do with any form of military measures taken by the Quad. Australia signed the RCEP agreement on 15 November 2020.

Similarly, the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes can only come through the creation of universal treaties that the Chinese agree with and that will require robust diplomatic negotiations that include all the countries in the region. Regarding the South China Sea disputes, for instance, the countries of the region have suggested that the Chinese go with the India–Bangladesh maritime settlement as a template for resolving the dispute over the islands in the South China Sea. Such measures are likely to lead to more fruitful discussions than expecting a military show of force to reshape maritime boundaries.<sup>18</sup>

Maintaining the balance of power in the region does and will continue to require a military build-up, and while Canberra is willing to add teeth to its military capabilities, what it is willing to do in the military realm will be constrained by its economic links with China and its recognition that a US–China military confrontation would be disastrous for the economic future of the region. In terms of building up its military capabilities, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)



will be getting a complement of F-35s, and the Australians have an impressive heavy-lift and extraregional capability that can be used to support American operations. The RAAF has eight C-17s, which gives it a significant heavy-lift capability across long distances, and its Airbus tankers will allow it to support American aircraft if called upon. Yet, one needs to ask what is Australia's strategic perimeter, and does it extend to the South and East China Seas?

The Australian defense perimeter is primarily focused on the immediate region of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific and in those subregions the Australians would be able to effectively counter threats to their own security. As the recent Australian *Strategic Update of 2020* suggests, "The Government has decided that under this new framework, defence planning will focus on our immediate region: ranging from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland South East Asia to Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific. This new framework will provide a tight focus for defence planning and alignment with broader initiatives such as the Pacific Step-up."<sup>19</sup>

The *Strategic Update* paints a realistic picture when it defines the area of responsibility of the Australian armed forces in the near to medium term. The areas it covers are on Australia's immediate periphery and instability in these areas could lead to blowback in the Australian continent in terms of refugee flows or terrorism. What this discussion of the immediate area does not talk about is China or a military confrontation in the South China Sea. Instead, it talks of providing support to American forces in North Asia, although it is not clear how that support would be defined and what its scope would be in the event of an actual US-China conflict.

The Australian strategic defense update talks of using its capabilities to deter a power from attacking Australia rather than waging an offensive war in the neighborhood of China. The *Strategic Update* does discuss using Australian troops to make contributions in extraregional efforts and names the Middle East and North Asia as two such regions of interest. However, the update goes on to caution that any such contributions to coalition efforts would be based primarily on the country's national interest: "But any such wider contributions must be based on specific national interests. Consideration of making wider military contributions should not be an equally-important determinant for force structure compared to ensuring we have credible capability to respond to any challenge in our immediate region."<sup>20</sup>

This discussion would seem to suggest that while Australia would likely participate in an action against China, such support should not be taken for granted, since it would have to be weighed against the national interest. Further, the term *support* is vague, since it could mean providing diplomatic support, basing, and

perhaps support logistics as opposed to actual combat forces. The latter is quite possible if the Australia–China relationship does not deteriorate and, instead, thanks to the growth of RCEP, Australia is brought into greater interdependency with the Chinese economy.

Secondly, there is the question about how high a number of casualties the Australian public would be willing to take in the event of actual combat operations. The perception that Australia is willing to wage long and bloody wars with high casualty levels comes from Australian involvement in World War I and World War II, in which the country took more 60,000 and 39,000, respectively, which was impressive for a country with a small population.<sup>21</sup> In the Vietnam War, the Australian commitment was much smaller, as the Australian government, in its Cold War strategy for the deployment of troops, became more cautious about sending troops abroad. At the peak of its involvement in Vietnam, Australia had around 7,700 troops in that country, and the ultimate death toll from the war was 521, a figure much smaller than the sacrifices of the two world wars.<sup>22</sup>

The logic for offering and deploying troops changed in the Cold War and continues to drive Australian military commitments, as Peter Edwards has written:

. . . the determination of the Menzies government to do all it could to retain British and American power in the region didn't mean that military contributions were easily volunteered. More commonly, they were used as bargaining chips—conceded reluctantly, in response to considerable pressure, on the understanding that their military significance was less important than their diplomatic value. While the critics of Australian foreign policy for the past hundred years have alleged that Australia has been only too willing to commit forces to “other people's wars”, the view from London and Washington, since 1945, has often been that Australians “talk a good war”: the strength of the political and diplomatic support for our allies hasn't always been matched by the number of boots on the ground.<sup>23</sup>

The reluctance to take casualties makes complete sense, since while in any country the citizenry is willing to defend the homeland against attack, it is less willing to shed blood and treasure for expeditionary operations in countries thousands of miles away. The Iraq War was very popular in Australia, in part because the country suffered only two casualties but was able to show its commitment to the Western alliance. Yet, this popularity had to be put in context. In an interview with this author, the former vice-chief of the Australian Army, General Peter Abigail, felt that 8–10 body bags at any one time could have led to a demand from the Australian public for a troop withdrawal.<sup>24</sup>

In Afghanistan, as of 2019, Australia has about 300 troops whose duties range from coordinating administration, communications and logistics support for all

defense force members deployed to Afghanistan and working as “embeds” to fulfill certain specialist missions. Additionally, there are small special forces groups that assist NATO troops and the Afghan police special forces. As of 2019, the Australians had lost 41 troops (10 in one helicopter crash) and had 261 troops wounded. The cost to the Australian exchequer by 2019 was 10 billion Australian dollars.<sup>25</sup> A much larger commitment with corresponding casualty levels would, most likely have met with opposition from Australian public opinion.

Thirdly, the composition of Australian forces is likely to create problems in the future, for while Australia is an immigrant nation, its forces remain overwhelmingly white. One out of every four Australians is born abroad, and nearly one out of two had a parent who was born abroad, making the country a nation with very strong immigrant roots. Yet, this demographic diversity is not reflected in the composition of the Australian military.

In a visit to the Australian Special Forces group, this author asked the question why, despite being such a multiethnic nation, Australia’s armed forces were so overwhelmingly white? The answer given was that while the Australian military had made the effort to recruit from minority groups, they had faced little or no success.<sup>26</sup> Yet, Australia is a country with both a large Lebanese and Asian population, which should give it a large pool of multiethnic talent to draw upon. In contrast, New Zealand has been successful in drawing on its indigenous Māori population as well as immigrants of color to serve in its armed forces—particularly the army.

Australia published the *Defence, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2012–2017*, which talked of the need to get more women, indigenous people, and cultural and linguistic minorities to join the military. However, the strategy has borne little fruit. While indigenous people constitute 2.97 percent of the population, the RAAF, for instance, only has 1.2 percent of its force constituting of indigenous people, while 5 percent of the force is of Asian heritage.<sup>27</sup> The problem is that as Australia’s white population ages and shrinks, there will be a reluctance on the part of white families to send their children into conflict, as has been the case with European nations where the populations are both aging and shrinking. The situation will worsen if people of color do not join the military in significant numbers, for then the Australian military will face serious manpower issues.<sup>28</sup> Yet, both trends are likely to shape Australia’s force structure and willingness to commit forces abroad—especially in the medium to long term.

Fourthly, the entire logic of the Quad is flawed, since it is not a classical collective security arrangement as described in the United Nations Charter of 1945. If militarized, a country like Australia, which faces no existential threats from China,

would have to agree to come to India's or Japan's assistance in the event of a conflict between either of those nations and China. Indian strategic analysts are not engaging in wishful thinking and believing that if their current tensions with Beijing flare up into a full-blown border war Canberra, Tokyo, or Washington would offer much more than diplomatic support and express a desire that both nations cease hostilities. In the case of Japan, Australia's foremost strategic analyst, Hugh White, warned at the time the Australian Defense Force was considering buying a new submarine, that while Japanese submarines were of high-quality, "We must be quite clear about this. Tokyo expects that in return for its help to build our submarines, it would receive not just many of billions of dollars, but clear understandings that Australia will support Japan politically, strategically and even militarily against China." White argues that such an alliance would fail, since Australia is unlikely to sacrifice its national interest to support Japan against China.<sup>29</sup> If the basis for the Quad is so flimsy, the expectation that a cohesive military alliance will emerge from it is unduly optimistic. Given that these factors will complicate the Australian response, what should the United States realistically expect from Australia as an ally in the short to medium term?

### **Realistic Expectations**

The first thing Washington needs to do is to start reducing the hype in the Australia–United States relationship and understand what the Australians cannot do militarily. Canberra will not get involved in a long drawn-out war that leads to high casualty rates. Instead, Australia will continue to be, as Des Ball once put it, "a valuable piece of real estate" on which to base American intelligence and surveillance assets. In the Indo-Pacific region, unless India has a radical change of heart and commits to a formal alliance with the United States,<sup>30</sup> Australia will remain the most reliable ally for hosting critical intelligence-gathering assets. It will also provide secure basing for troops to be used to launch operations into Asia.

Australian forces will also provide very good assets in the support role for the United States because of the heavy-lift and aerial-refueling capabilities of the RAAF and the Australian build-up of an impressive naval capability with Air Warfare Destroyers (AWD) and conventional submarines. Australia intends to manufacture 12 conventional submarines, which would give it sufficient deterrent capability in the region that it currently views as its area of responsibility. There is talk, however, of acquiring a force of up to 12 nuclear submarines so as to have a more modern fighting force that can operate far from Australian waters and have considerable operational autonomy because the boats will stay submerged for long periods of time.<sup>31</sup> Such a proposal is both ambitious and likely to set off alarms in

the corridors of Australian power, because it would convey a change in strategic attitude that would not only alarm nearby neighbors but also make Beijing re-evaluate its perception of the lack of a military threat posed by Australia. What is more likely, therefore, is to retain a collection of conventional boats that will give a deterrent capability, while Australia's surface vessels can support friendly regional and extraregional powers.

Three AWDs were built in Australia and have integrated the advanced Aegis system, allowing the Australian Navy to deal independently with aerial threats rather than depending on the US Navy for cover. However, the Australians are unlikely to send such expensive assets to the South China Sea unless faced with a serious global conflagration. The Australian government turned down a US request that the Australian Navy participate in freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea since that was seen as potentially inflaming tensions with China.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Canberra would readily send the AWDs for coalition operations in the Middle East or for similar measures in Southeast Asia. If Washington is expecting Canberra to provide a support role in the crucial Indo-Pacific region, where do Australia's strengths lie as a long-term ally in a new security environment?

If Washington accepts that the Australians cannot cut the economic umbilical cord with China, then that necessarily shapes the nature of cooperation. Australian diplomatic support for a political and economic rules-based international order will continue regardless of the ebbs and flows in the Australia-China trade relationship—and one should not expect either country to dramatically cut or severely reduce these ties. Australian diplomacy has been excellent in the Indo-Pacific region for creating common platforms on issues that impact the rules-based order. These issues range from trade and human rights to the broad-based agreement for the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes. The latter being especially important given the prevailing tensions in the East and South China Seas.

Further, Australia's considerable soft power is an asset, as witnessed by the high ranking of its universities and the large number of international students in the country. Australia, according to the Shanghai ranking of world universities, has 34 universities in the top 1,000, which is more than those of France.<sup>33</sup> Australian government data states that in 2018 there were 398,563 international students in the country, and the top five countries of origin were China (152,591), India (71,857), Nepal (28,333), Vietnam (15,719), and Malaysia (13,988). This inflow of students earned the Australian economy 32.4 billion AUD.<sup>34</sup>

These students are educated in technical and social scientific fields and go back to their countries, taking liberal-democratic values as well as connections to the West's globalized scientific and economic networks (although the counter argument is also

made that this has allowed Chinese students to gain access to sensitive technologies). In the long run, such knowledge-based networks are of greater importance than the Australian ability to put a battalion in a low-threat environment.

Lastly, if one looks at the neighborhood that Canberra sees as critical to Australia's security—the northeastern Indian Ocean, through Southeast Asia to the southwest Pacific—Canberra's economic and technical assistance has played a positive role in stabilizing the economies and politics of these countries. When the typhoon devastated Fiji in 2017, it was the Australians who led the relief efforts to help the stricken islands—much as they came to the assistance of neighboring countries when the tsunamis of 2004 and 2007 struck the region.

When one puts all these elements together, what emerges is an ally who is useful in navigating the complexities of a globalized world, where power politics is not the sole determinant of the value of partners. It is time that American policy makers respected Australia's constraints and valued the advantages of its economic, educational, and military-support capabilities. 🌟

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# The Middle East and the Quad Plus

DR. BRENDON J. CANNON

## Abstract

This article explores the actions and reactions of Middle East states to the Quad Plus, a currently US-led effort to strengthen engagement with counterpart states under the strategic ambit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue grouping. Because the Middle East is a large and highly diverse region, the article will focus on three important states—the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Iran—as illustrative case studies. A qualitative methodology is employed comparing interview results, media articles, and government statements to test a hypothesis: the Quad Plus is viewed with suspicion or disinterest in the Middle East because it is US-led and therefore construed as an anti-China proposition. The findings demonstrate that Iran has no wish to see the power of its primary economic and security partner, China, curtailed by the Quad Plus. For Turkey, the Quad Plus is a US-led initiative directed against China and is geographically irrelevant given Ankara’s current capabilities and national security interests. The United Arab Emirates, contrariwise, relies on the United States for its security, has good relations with the Quad states as well as Israel, and views Iran and Turkey as security threats. Invitations to join Quad Plus initiatives like supply-chain resilience or pandemic response will therefore likely meet a warm reception in Abu Dhabi. No such invitations from Quad capitals will likely be forthcoming to either Turkey or Iran.

## Introduction

The Middle East is too diverse economically, politically, and socially to safely make sweeping statements about policy directions or region-wide interests.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, this article will focus on Turkey, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to explore the interests, actions, and reactions of three important and highly influential Middle Eastern states to Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) states and their overtures via the Quad Plus.<sup>2</sup> This exploration of the Middle East–Quad Plus nexus will analyze the alignment and enduring national security interests of these three states to test the article’s primary hypothesis: the Quad Plus is viewed with suspicion or disinterest because it is US-led and is therefore construed as an anti-China proposition. Using a qualitative and comparative methodology, the article uses interviews and examines media articles and government statements to extrapolate the emerging positions of Middle Eastern states to the



increasingly confrontational stances taken by China, on the one hand, and the Quad on the other.

### **Distributions of Power and the Quad Plus**

The Quad Plus, led by the United States but supported strongly by Japan, Australia, and India, certainly has some resonance in the Middle East in a way that the Quad itself does not. The latter, while not officially so, is largely a military-security mechanism to stymie China's pursuance of national security interests—many of them alarming to neighboring states such as Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam—in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The Quad Plus, on the other hand, seems to be a more informal and inclusive mechanism that holds out the possibility of international cooperation between the Quad and other states and includes security but moves far beyond this to cover contingencies such as pandemic responses and supply chains.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars of international relations (IR) generally subscribe to the theory that the world is an anarchical system of states with finite amounts of power on hand. At the very least, scholars agree there is no global policeman to enforce rules and laws. While much separates realists from liberal institutionalists, the control of power and its largely zero-sum nature remain the bedrock of IR theories. In this anarchical global system, significant changes to distributions of power—shifting from one state to another state or grouping of states—over a relatively short period create greater uncertainty; thus, making the global state system even more anarchical.

Multiple IR theories have attempted to grapple with these questions of rising and falling state power and the uncertainty that accompanies shifts in distributions of power. Power transition theory, for example, predicts that shifts in the balance of economic and military power are often a sufficient trigger for a rivalry where previously none had existed.<sup>4</sup> Today's rising powers such as China and India, or Germany in the late nineteenth century, compete for power and influence to impose their will on the global order. When this rivalry occurs between a hegemon and the rising power, the ensuing competition exhibits a gravitation pull that drags other states in—willingly or not.

If power transition theory broadly explains the rise of Germany in Europe and the resulting two world wars, it also offers a great deal in relation to the even more meteoric rise of China in the late twentieth century. However, key differences separate Germany's rise from that of China. First, while the United Kingdom ruled the waves and possessed a global colonial empire, Germany was only one of the multiple European states, including the United Kingdom, that vied for economic and political dominance on the continent as well as overseas.

To the contrary, the rise of China has occurred largely during an age of US dominance. While certainly not a unipolar world, the fact remains that the United States is currently China's only strategic competitor in terms of size and power capabilities. This is not to say that China's rise has not spurred other would-be major powers such as India or global economic powers such as Japan to take actions to safeguard their national security interests. Tokyo's and New Delhi's shifting stances toward China demonstrate the conundrums faced by many states as they attempt to grapple with what is increasingly perceived as a "China threat," on the one hand, and the "peaceful rise of China" on the other.<sup>5</sup> That is, China is both a welcome partner offering development, financing, and expertise and an unwelcome actor as its increasing share of power, bellicose rhetoric, and military capabilities coincide to fundamentally threaten the foundations of a post-World War II US-led world order. Beijing's demands for disputed territories or its dismissal of international court rulings may rankle states such as Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam, but it is China's actions such as hostile takeovers of port operations in Sri Lanka to island-building in the disputed South China Sea to its massive military build-up, including a powerful blue-water navy, that reinforce the dangerous array of threats posed by Beijing.

One of the results of these shifts in global power from West to East and the uncertainty accompanying them is the Quad and, subsequently, the Quad Plus: a broad coalition of states willing to question not only China's controversial actions but act against it. Like-minded states have proliferated, with Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia not only voicing their serious concerns about China and Chinese actions but drawing closer to the United States and its Quad partners for security. This newfound resolve, however, is tempered by the fact that China remains the largest trading power for not only three of the four Quad states but also for the Southeast Asian states. The Quad also wishes to avoid being simply an anti-China bloc. Its leaders, while criticizing singular Chinese actions such as freedom of navigation issues in the Taiwan Strait, continue to soothe China by arguing for inclusion rather than exclusion, making it abundantly clear that New Delhi, Canberra, and Tokyo would prefer a friendly China in the room rather than an aggressive China outside it.

### **The Quad Plus–Middle East Nexus**

The Quad Plus is analyzed and described in greater detail elsewhere in this issue. The author therefore focuses less on what the Quad Plus will or will not do and instead explore interests, actions, and reactions of the three Middle East states to the Quad states and their overtures via the Quad Plus. In terms of the Middle East, the Quad Plus and related efforts such as the Blue Dot Network (BDN)

seem to hold relevance for states on the periphery of the Indo-Pacific, like the Middle East, rather than the Quad states themselves or China's Southeast Asian neighbors. This means that the Quad Plus may offer substantive alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or more localized efforts in alleviating the serious infrastructural and developmental deficits that bedevil many parts of the Middle East.

It may take some time and convincing to bring Middle East states around to the Quad Plus. This is because China's BRI, whatever else it may be, is certainly clear, present, and tactile in nature. It produces railroads, ports, pipelines, and other forms of infrastructural, economic, and, naturally, political connectedness to Beijing. To its credit, the Quad Plus proposition makes it clear that the Quad states understand this and have begun to actively engage regions like the Middle East using some of China's strategies while eschewing some of Beijing's more alarming tactics. A statement made by India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, perhaps summed up the Quad Plus best when he noted it is "for something" rather than "against someone." However, capital investment on a scale at least approaching China's billions invested in its BRI and related Maritime Silk Road not only need to be pledged by like-minded states but need to result in finished projects. Nonetheless, the Quad Plus and BDN are perhaps the beginning of an alternative to China and its BRI on the developmental and economic fronts. Whether alternatives are being sought or even thought about in the Middle East depends on the state's interests as informed by security burdens and geopolitics.

The Middle East is well-acquainted with China's BRI, not the novel Quad Plus. Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt all have extensive and ongoing BRI projects, funded by loans from Chinese state-backed or owned banks. Iran is integral to both China's maritime "belt" and terrestrial "road." The gravitational pull of China felt in the Middle East through its increasing economic and political influence via the BRI is, nevertheless, beginning to be resisted, albeit unevenly. The UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia rely on the United States, China's strategic competitor, for their security. This US security architecture, particularly in the Persian Gulf, has been perceived as being under threat for two primary reasons. First, Washington's pivot to Asia, begun by Pres. Barack Obama and continued by Pres. Donald Trump, redeployed US military forces in increasing numbers toward the western Pacific, albeit not from the Middle East. Second, the tone-deaf approach of the Obama administration to the security concerns of the Arab Gulf states about Iran encapsulated with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), followed by the Trump administration's haphazard and uneven engagement, resulted in exacerbating the rift within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This is a two-way street, however, and

Washington has its own highly public misgivings about the deals made by Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, and Cairo with China for everything from 5G to nuclear power to military hardware such as drones. On the periphery of the Middle East, and unlike Iran and the UAE, Turkey has largely remained immune to the BRI's appeal. As its economic health and relations with the United States and Europe continue to decline, nonetheless, Ankara has muffled its criticisms of Beijing over its treatment of its Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang and looked to China for much-needed loans.<sup>6</sup>

### **Security Burdens and Interests**

A state's extant and enduring security burdens often, but not always, define its strategic choices. Security burdens are often divided into two tiers: first-tier security burdens can be understood as those coming from states possessing the extant and enduring capability and intent to cause catastrophic harm to the national security of the state in question. Second-tier security burdens may be defined as those emanating from states possessing the possible capability and intent to cause enduring, extant, and serious harm to the national security of a country.<sup>7</sup>

Middle East states are no different than the states of Southeast Asia or South America: the leaders and policy makers of those states define and make strategic choices that are necessarily limited depending on the amount, proximity, and tiered nature of their security burdens. This includes not just "hard" security matters, such as those involving the military and other security services, but economic and social matters as well. States engage in relations with other states to hedge and counter these security burdens, which are necessarily impacted by a state's geographic location and history as well as population.

All states can be said to have national security interests that influence the government's or leadership's policies vis-à-vis internal and external threats, regardless of their genesis. States in the Middle East such as Turkey, Iran, and the UAE are therefore primarily interested in propositions and alignments such as the Quad Plus or China's BRI to further these national security interests.

#### ***Iran***

Iran's national security interests are tightly bound up in its relationship with the United States. Three factors have generated Iran's national security priorities: the 1979 revolution, Iranian foreign policy against Israel, and the attacks of 9/11. These have led the United States to adopt increasingly intransigent and harsh policies in relation to Iran, including sanctions that have significantly curtailed Iran's economic and military growth. Not only is the United States a seemingly omnipresent

adversary with a significant military presence in Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf, but it also has over-the-horizon missile and nuclear capabilities that leave Iran's leaders even less secure.

Iran also faces a host of regional threats from medium to small states. In a nearly 20-year-old testimony that remains highly relevant today, Dr. Nasser Hadian informed the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

Iran's "anarchical" regional environment has all the ingredients of an strategic nightmare: Too many neighbors with hostile, unfriendly or at best opportunistic attitudes, no great power alliance, a 25 years face-off with [the] greatest super-power in history, living in a war infested region (5 major wars in less than 25 years), a region ripe with ethno-territorial disputes on its borders (Iran has been a major regional refugee hub), and with a dominant Wahabi trans-regional movement which theologically and politically despises Iran, and finally a region with nuclear powers; Pakistan, Israel, and India. Iran is located at the center of the "uncontrollable center" of post-Cold war and post-9/11 world politics.<sup>8</sup>

Iran has adopted a "self-help" approach to foreign policy and looked for strategic alignments wherever it can get them. This has meant Tehran has actively engaged states with adversarial relations with Washington to lessen the enduring security burdens heaped upon it by the United States. The "golden ring" axis of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and China may be one such proposition. While short on details, it could eventually form a significant anti-US bloc across Eurasia and, in the process, strengthen Iran strategically, militarily, politically, and economically.<sup>9</sup> Iran, however, has longstanding divergent interests with all these states except China, but China is by far the most relevant and useful to Tehran, not least because China sees Iran as its most important trade partner and hydrocarbons source in the Middle East. For Beijing, Iran represents a way out of what China is increasingly convinced is a US policy of containment. Accordingly, China relies on Iran to diversify its energy supply. Doing so helps China's oil imports avoid passing through the Strait of Malacca, which is controlled by US allies in Southeast Asia. China plans to overcome this strategic predicament by ensuring Iran's gas flow is connected to the pipelines stretching from Gwadar Port (part of the BRI-related China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC]) in Pakistan to China. This, in turn, explains China's readiness to invest in the development of Chabahar, the southeastern Iranian port currently under construction, from which Beijing can also access Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Russia. For Iran, "the BRI represents an opportunity at a time when Western powers are withholding much-needed investment and advanced technology to develop its oil and gas infrastructure and transportation capacity."<sup>10</sup>

Beijing may be wary of getting pulled into festering and complicated regional conflicts, but its interests do align with Tehran on one level: it sees much utility in building stronger relations with Iran to thumb its nose at Washington. Indicative of this is the 25-year Strategic Partnership signed between Iran and China in mid-2020 that emphasizes security and underscores Beijing's long-term weapons transfer programs with Iran, such as the development of long-range antiship missiles and the reported purchase of Chengdu J-10 fighter jets.

Iran also has a choice of additional partners, including traditionally nonaligned states such as India. New Delhi has historically warm relations with Iran and, until recently, remained a significant investment partner along with other states aligned with the United States such as France, Germany, and Japan. The departure of the United States from the JCPOA and the subsequent financial and economic sanctions made it clear that the Trump administration considered Iran near the top of threats to the United States and its allies. US sanctions coupled with US financial clout on a global scale meant that investments by Indian, French, and Japanese companies were no longer viable given the threat of US retaliation, and Iran became even further isolated.

## *Turkey*

Turkey's enduring security burdens, like Iran's, are wrapped up in its history and geography. The fall of the Ottoman Empire and its attempted dismemberment by secret treaties between European powers and Russia have led to a collective, long-running and almost paranoid emphasis on Turkey's territorial integrity. Russia, in particular, continues to pose the largest and most powerful threat to Turkey's existence. This threat drove the newly minted secular republic to seek an alliance with the West, particularly the United States, after World War II. However, Turkey was always an uncomfortable partner for the West, and Ankara—while useful from a strategic and tactical standpoint to the United States and its NATO partners—never fully trusted its allies. Appearances were kept up because the threat of Soviet (Russian) domination during the Cold War was so great. The serious differences that did flare up between Turkey and the West—from Cyprus in 1974 to the military coups d'état that overthrew three civilian Turkish governments—were papered over.

The decrease in tensions accompanying the end of the Cold War led to an opening up of Turkey's political, economic, and social spaces that witnessed the rise of mildly Islamist politicians and their eventual democratic election to power in 2002. Led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) has been reelected to power several times and has ruled Turkey since then. Turkey's transition to democracy and the rise of Erdoğan, however, resulted in cooler

rather than warmer relations with the United States and Europe. The reasons for this are legion, but a primary cause was the advent of a more powerful Turkey with a more muscular foreign policy, sometimes delivered in coarse, undiplomatic language by Erdoğan. As Turkey failed to gain support from Europe first on EU membership and then with issues of migration, market access, and Kurdish separatism, Turkey's JDP government also became more authoritarian, escalating dramatically in the aftermath of the attempted military coup in July 2016.

Turkey's relations with the United States similarly soured, based on almost willful misunderstandings on both sides, vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis, Kurdish separatism, and arms sales/transfers. Fraying relations with the West, however, only increase Turkey's isolation and security burdens. Turkey remains wary of Russia, for example, even though relations have warmed considerably. Tacit cooperation with Moscow in Syria and Ankara's purchase of a Russian missile system cannot hide the fact that its security interests are incongruent with Russia's in Libya, the Caucasus, and Syria. Indeed, while relations with the West remain abysmal, Ankara's interests remain more congruent with those of the United States than either Europe or Russia.

What of Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors? Largely ignored by the republic until the early 2000s, Turkey's Islamists see efficacy in currying favor with the Arab Street and strongly support the Palestinian cause and Hamas. However, mistrust and bigotry on both sides—dating back to Ottoman times—as well as competition for the mantle “leader of the Arab World,” stymie Erdoğan's efforts. Iran, a revolutionary Shi'a state, holds even less appeal as a partner for Turkey's Sunni Islamists. But very much like Iran, Turkey's security burdens are suffocating. Turkey often feels threatened by states surrounding it, though this is offset some by the presence of seas surrounding Turkey and offering a watery buffer. Turkey also relies on self-help and follows the adage that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” (in Turkish, *düşmanımın düşmanı dostumdur*). The problem faced by Ankara is that neither Russia nor the United States, adversarial as they may be to one another, can be considered Turkey's strategic partner for long.

The clear choice for some alleviation of Turkey's security burdens is China: far enough away to not be an overt threat, close and powerful enough to be of assistance. However, Turkey's relations with China remain tepid, largely for reasons of politics. Turkey's current regime sees itself as the defender of Muslims ala the Ottoman sultans, and China's treatment of the Uighur—ethnic Turks, no less—negatively affects relations. Additionally, Turkey's historical, strategic and ethnoreligious interests in the states of Central Asia—also largely populated by ethnic Turks—are now complicated by China as well as Russia. As such, Turkey has been slow to warm to China's BRI. Instead, Ankara has rolled out its own

vision of economic and transport connectivity, the Middle Corridor (in Turkish, *Orta Koridor*). Essentially a rail link stretching between China (Xian) and Turkey (İzmit-Köseköy), the idea is to bind Turkey ever closer to the hydrocarbons, minerals, and markets of Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>11</sup>

### ***United Arab Emirates***

The security of the UAE and that of its regime are reliant to a large degree on its ability to export its significant share of hydrocarbons, mainly oil. Given the UAE's geographic position as well as its reliance on the export of oil, maritime shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea must remain open. For the UAE, throughout its first four decades of existence, this has meant the Strait of Hormuz has been the primary security concern.<sup>12</sup> However, with natural changes in leadership after the death of the UAE's founder, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan in 2004, coupled with a steady increase in wealth, the UAE's leaders have placed increasing emphasis on its extraregional and international standing as a small-to-medium power.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, the UAE's leadership has overseen an extensive overhaul of the country's armed forces and intensified its weapons acquisition programs. The UAE joined Saudi Arabia in Yemen, for example, to roll back the territorial gains and power of the Houthi, Zaydi Shiites hailing from the north and northwest of the country and supported by Iran.

The UAE's current foreign adventurism is made possible because of the security umbrella provided by the United States in the Persian Gulf and Washington's strategic alignment with the UAE that dates back to the Cold War. This close relationship has ensured the UAE's survival in the face of threats from larger neighbors such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran. In turn, the UAE's emphasis on developing a highly tolerant society, a stable economy, a capable military, and close relations with other US allies, including (in mid-2020) Israel, have meant the UAE is even more secure as Washington's partner.

The UAE's reliance on the United States, however, comes at the price of insecurity should America ever choose to leave the region. Abu Dhabi has recently turned to the East, establishing warm relations with China. As a partner in China's BRI, the UAE signed a Strategic Partnership with China in 2018 and 3.4 billion USD in deals with Beijing in 2019. However, the UAE's leadership remains wary of China's ultimate aims in the region.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, Abu Dhabi continues to look to the United States for its security, eschewing the vast array of weaponry on offer from China except for drones, rockets, and rifles. These were reportedly only purchased on account of speed of delivery and cost as well as political roadblocks in Washington for US drones.<sup>15</sup>



Beyond regime security and stability for the country via the sale of hydrocarbons, the UAE's leadership worries deeply about the threat of militant Islam. The breakdown in the regional order following the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings led the UAE to adopt a more assertive and interventionist foreign policy ranging from Libya to Egypt to Yemen to counter what it perceived as Islamist threats to its security. It culminated in the severance of relations with Qatar, a fellow GCC member, by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain in 2017. The UAE accused Qatar of supporting Muslim Brotherhood (MB) causes linked to political violence in places ranging from Somalia to Egypt to Palestine. When Turkey, led by Islamists with strong MB ties, strengthened its relations with Qatar by stationing more troops in the country and expanding its military facility there, the UAE's leadership quickly perceived the threats facing the country to now be double-barreled, pitting the Arab World led by the UAE and Saudi Arabia against the Turks and the Iranians.

## **Results**

The promises of the Quad Plus, and its expansion to like-minded states concerned about China, certainly hold potential for the Middle East. For reasons of geopolitics as well as security burdens and national interests, however, the Quad Plus may be viewed with disinterest or outright hostility in certain quarters. The Quad Plus, for example, is problematic on two fronts for Iran: it is a US-led initiative and therefore is automatically construed as an anti-China proposition. Likewise, Turkey is currently mistrustful, even antagonistic toward the United States and therefore US-led initiatives. Of the three states, the initiative may resonate most with the UAE given its potential to deepen its security relations not only with the United States and India but also the Plus member states of the Quad, like Israel.

### ***Iran***

Iran has little desire to see China's power curtailed. Because Iran relies on China and expects little but confrontation from the United States, the Quad Plus—even given its promise of integrating supply chains between non-Quad states such as South Korea and Vietnam—holds little interest for Iran. The Quad Plus proposition, for example, would likely not result in assistance to Iran for COVID-19 or a future pandemic given Washington's intransigent stance. Iran, however, readily accepted assistance from China for test kits and other medical equipment.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the Quad Plus would not be used as an informal or-

ganizational platform by the United States in any future negotiations with Iran, with Washington preferring a go-it-alone approach or the P5+1.<sup>17</sup>

Iranian commentary—not surprisingly—has been dismissive of the Quad, the Quad Plus, and the broader Indo-Pacific visions, viewing them as US Trojan horses to further bolster US power across the globe and curb those of states such as Iran and China. The word “containment,” for example, is used most often in Iranian commentary about the Indo-Pacific and the Quad Plus. The concept is viewed as American-led, designed, and operated, thus making it antithetical to Iran’s strategic goals. According to one Iranian analysis of the emerging geopolitical alignment, “[US President] Trump is working on getting India more involved in regional initiatives by reviving [former US President] George W. Bush’s plan for closer cooperation between Japan, Australia and India as a four-member Quad. In this way, by bringing India into power equilibrium equations against China, it [the US] will work with regional coalitions to contain this emerging superpower.”<sup>18</sup> Reporting about the Quad Plus by Iran’s official media organization accused it of being an overreaction by the Quad states to China’s actions in the South Pacific and of playing copycat to Beijing’s BRI, albeit on a smaller scale and without offering anything new.<sup>19</sup>

## ***Turkey***

Turkey’s security situation is as grave as it has ever been since the founding of the republic almost 100 year ago. Domestic and international actions taken by Turkey not only pit Ankara against its former allies but have added to Turkey’s long list of extant and enduring security burdens. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these tensions; it is the second hardest hit Middle Eastern states after Iran. Instead of receiving help from its Western allies, however, Turkey received over 350,000 rapid detection kits from China.<sup>20</sup>

What does this mean in relation to Turkey’s potential interest in the Quad Plus? First, there is the issue of geopolitics. Turkey, as a G20 member with the fifth-largest diplomatic representation, is an international actor. Yet, for all its strides on the global stage over the past two decades, Turkey’s interests and capabilities mean it remains focused on its near abroad. In contrast, the Quad Plus, indeed the Indo-Pacific Partnership itself, remains a concept that is wedded—by nomenclature as much as interests—to the Indian and Pacific worlds. Turkey is not yet an active actor in either region. It is simply too far away.

When asked about Turkey’s interest in the Quad Plus, for example, a senior Turkish official drily noted, “We are here [in the Mediterranean/Middle East]; the Indo-Pacific is way over there. Why would we be interested?”<sup>21</sup> Adding to this, the official noted that Turkey perceives the Quad as a US-led effort against

China, with the Quad Plus simply being more of the same with a new name. “Turkey doesn’t want to be part of an anti-China front,” declaimed the official.<sup>22</sup> Arguing for robust Turkish sovereignty and freedom of action—domestically and internationally—the official opined that the Quad Plus may limit Turkey’s sphere of outreach to other states such as China, adding that Ankara did not see any use in joining the Quad Plus simply because it makes the United States feel “more secure.”<sup>23</sup>

Searching for other evidence about Ankara’s position or potential role in the Quad Plus, the author conducted a search of Turkish media outlets for stories on the Quad, the Quad Plus, or the Indo-Pacific (in Turkish, *Hint-Pasifik*). These yielded only descriptive articles and no editorials arguing for or against such a proposition. On the contrary, a search of China’s One Belt, One Road/Belt and Road Initiative (in Turkish, *Bir Kuşak, Bir Yol* or *Kuşak-Yol Projesi* or *Kuşak ve Yol Sanayi ve Ticaret Birliği*) showed it is an intensely well-known and controversial topic in the Turkish press. These searches, therefore, seem a good indicator that Turkish officials either have yet to take notice of the Quad Plus, have no interest in it, or both.

### ***United Arab Emirates***

Contrary to the positions of Turkey and Iran, both of which the UAE considers as political and strategic adversaries, Abu Dhabi may take a neutral-to-positive position vis-à-vis the Quad Plus. While requests for interviews with UAE officials regarding the Quad Plus went unanswered, the author’s searches of UAE media outlets seemed to support the somewhat ambiguous-to-positive stance the UAE may take vis-à-vis the Quad Plus. Articles revolving around the topics of the Quad, Quad Plus, and the Indo-Pacific, for example, contained reporting largely reprinted from other news sources of events, such as joint military exercises in the Indian Ocean or ministerial meetings in Australia. When editorials did surface, they were written by outsiders from one of the Quad states.<sup>24</sup> An article in the official news agency of the UAE, however, quoted the Washington-based Hudson Institute’s report that placed the UAE as an example of state-to-state cooperation. It argued that Washington’s Indo-Pacific strategy be patterned on the UAE’s recent efforts at cooperation with India.<sup>25</sup> These may indicate that the UAE’s leadership has either not taken notice or has not made decisions yet regarding a likely invitation to participate in the Quad Plus.

The BDN’s supply chain initiatives as related to manufacturing and military security as well as discussions on environmental security in the Indian Ocean basin certainly should interest the UAE. Abu Dhabi, for example, is already involved a 3 billion USD strategic investment fund for emerging markets and technologies es-

tablished by the UAE, Israel, and the United States.<sup>26</sup> In addition, defense-related propositions are likely of particular interest to the country's leaders, and the Quad states offer much that is desirable to the UAE in this field. This is because the UAE has been diligently attempting to become an arms manufacturer and exporter and taken steps similar to Japan and India (as well as its political and ideological adversary, Turkey).<sup>27</sup> To do so, it has relied largely on a robust offsets program that has funneled money and expertise into the country, building infrastructure for weapons parts and products in the process. The lion's share of this has been performed by US defense companies, and the UAE has consistently been one of the top buyers of US defense equipment in the world.

The UAE remains assiduous in courting Beijing's investments and partnerships in everything from education to oil extraction to ports construction and operations. It will also continue selling its oil and participating in Chinese ventures ranging from 5G to COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>28</sup> This does not mean Abu Dhabi will forge stronger security relations with Beijing.<sup>29</sup> China's close relationship with Iran naturally complicates matters for Abu Dhabi. Equally important is Beijing's own reticence to take an active security role in the region. This is because, firstly, China can continue to act as a freeloader on US security guarantees and, secondly, because China does not wish to be dragged into a Middle Eastern conflict where it would need to choose sides. In other words, an invitation to the Quad Plus—and with it the possibility of drawing closer to the United States and Israel without angering China—would likely be received favorably in Abu Dhabi.

## **Conclusion**

The Quad Plus is supposed to be about something more than China and certainly more than the current Quad of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. Washington sees China's problematic response to the COVID-19 pandemic as something of an opening, a reset. It is therefore meant to address not only China's BRI but also the very serious economic, political, and security threats posed by China, particularly to its close neighbors. Additionally, for states further afield, such as Brazil and Israel, the Quad Plus opens doors to cooperation on projects that address concerns about Chinese products such as Huawei and 5G networks but also offers collaborative prospects to develop something even better. In the Middle East, however, two large and powerful states, Iran and Turkey, view the Indo-Pacific initiative and related initiatives as almost entirely US-led.

Iran has no wish to see the power of its primary economic and security partner, China, curtailed by a proposition like the Quad Plus. It is therefore concerned about the web of closer relations being spun between the Quad states. Viewing Australia as a US lackey, for example, Iranian analysis views Washington's closer

engagement with Japan with unease. However, it is Washington's steadily growing friendship with India that worries Tehran's clerical, civilian, and military leaders the most. Even India's and Japan's working—even warm relations with Iran—will be unlikely to result in Tehran being engaged vis-à-vis the Quad Plus. This makes Tehran's involvement in the Quad Plus proposition a nonstarter from both the Iranian and Quad sides.

For Turkey, the Quad Plus, indeed the Indo-Pacific Partnership itself, remains a concept that is wrapped up with the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Turkey is not active in either region; it is also geographically too distant to affect outcomes. These contingencies seem to mean that even if Turkey were interested in the Quad Plus, a combination of Turkey's limited capabilities and geopolitical location, coupled with its highly adversarial relations with the United States and its increasingly warm relations with Pakistan, mean that the Quad Plus will not come calling on Ankara anytime soon.

A second potential issue bedeviling the Quad Plus in the Middle East is that of corresponding interest from Washington, Tokyo, New Delhi, or Canberra. States like Israel and Brazil, for example, have been earmarked as potential Quad Plus participants. These states are of interest for highly political reasons that have much to do with currently warm relations between the United States and Brazil as well as Israel. This is decidedly not the case with either Turkey or Iran. It takes two to tango, and it seems both parties—Iran and Turkey on the one hand and the Quad states on the other—are not interested in dancing together.

In contrast to Iran and Turkey, the UAE's importance and good reputation in Washington means that Abu Dhabi will likely be on the shortlist of potential Quad Plus participants. The UAE occupies a strategic location on both the Persian Gulf and the western Indian Ocean, exports huge amounts of oil to not just China but also India and Japan, and maintains good relations with New Delhi, Tokyo, and Canberra. Its recent diplomatic recognition of Israel makes it even more likely that an invitation to the Quad Plus will be forthcoming. Given these contingencies, the UAE will likely chart a course that takes advantage of more apolitical offerings from the Quad Plus. There are limits, however, to what the UAE's leadership would be willing to sign up for vis-à-vis the Quad Plus. Any policies or partnerships that appear to be anti-China may be a bridge too far for the UAE's leaders. ★

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### **Notes**

1. For reasons of expedience and in attempt to dodge rather than end the debate, the Middle East referenced in this article includes Egypt (the only Middle East state in Africa), the Arabian Peninsula states, the Levant, Iran, and Turkey.

2. Iran, Turkey, and the UAE are used, in part, because they can be said to be representative of the three primary ethnolinguistic and religious groupings of the Middle East: Turkish (Sunni Muslim), Persian (Shi'a Muslim), and Arab (majority Sunni Muslim), thus providing potentially rich case studies with which to test this article's hypotheses and answer its research questions.

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# Pakistan–Afghanistan–Iran Triangularity and the Quad Plus

## Countering China’s Growing Influence

KENTA AOKI

### Abstract

Little has been discussed about the role of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran in the context of the Quad Plus’s possible areas of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. This matters greatly to the Quad Plus because the area holds the Strait of Hormuz, which features as one of the world’s most strategic chokepoints. To fill this gap, this article discusses impact of the Trump administration’s “America First” on Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, and argues that the policy led these nations to look toward China and Russia. After closely looking at each case, this article proposes that engaging Iran—rejoining Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and keeping Chabahar port development open—and supporting the Afghan peace process are the way forward to bring greater peace and stability not only in this region but also in the whole world in the long term. Uncertainty remains as the United States and Iran lost trust in one other. Thus, the United States and Iran must use a limited window of opportunity before the next Iranian presidential election in June 2021.

### Introduction

In recent years, competition for influence within the Indo-Pacific theater has been gaining wider attention in strategic circles. This is partly because the basic principles of rules-based order have waned, as “unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion” began to be seen in several parts of the world, as exemplified by China’s aggressive behavior in the South China Sea and Russia’s annexation of Crimea.<sup>1</sup> This trend has become more visible after the COVID-19 pandemic, as the United States and Europe realized the perils of China’s “wolf warrior” diplomacy.<sup>2</sup> Under such circumstances, ways to improve connectivity are becoming increasingly important political, diplomatic, and economic tools that promote stability and prosperity. Currently, the Quad Plus, originally composed of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States and later joined by South Korea, Vietnam, New Zealand, Israel, and Brazil,<sup>3</sup> works hand-in-hand toward enhancing connectivity, expanding its scope from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific.



Previous studies primarily focused on Southeast Asia under the motto of “ASEAN’s centrality and unity,” due to China’s expansionism in East China and South China Seas.<sup>4</sup> Thus, little has been discussed about the role of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran in the context of the Quad Plus’s possible areas of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. This matters greatly to the Quad Plus because the area holds the Strait of Hormuz, which features as one of the world’s most strategic chokepoints. It hosts oil flow of 17 million barrel/day, representing 30 percent of all seaborne-traded crude oil during 2015.<sup>5</sup> In short, maintaining energy security and freedom of navigation in the area are one of the top priorities for the Quad Plus.

To fill this gap, this article argues that the Trump administration’s “America First” policy led Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran to look toward China and Russia for succor, which eventually incurred considerable diplomatic loss to the members of the Quad Plus. This article consists of four sections. The first three sections examine Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, respectively. Then, section four discusses pros and cons of the research thesis. This article proposes that engaging Iran and supporting the Afghan peace process are the way forward to bring greater peace and stability not only in this region but globally as well. The methodology adopted in this article is based on literature review and a field survey in Chabahar, Iran, and Karachi, Pakistan, in February 2018 and March 2019, respectively.

## **Iran: The Point of Contention**

### ***The Trump Administration’s Maximum Pressure Campaign***

Since the inauguration of US president Donald Trump in January 2017, his administration has pursued a hardline stance against Iran, labeling it as the main sponsor of global terrorism. The US–Iran standoff has led Iran to approach China, which is damaging the interests of members of the Quad Plus. For this reason, this section will scrutinize US policy toward Iran during the Trump administration.

Trump’s mistrust of Iran is deeply rooted, as he continuously criticized Iran’s destabilizing activities in the Middle East throughout the 2016 election cycle and into his term as president.<sup>6</sup> On 8 May 2018, Trump eventually announced that the United States would unilaterally withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA),<sup>7</sup> which had been seen as one of the most important legacies of the Obama administration. On 21 May 2018, shortly after Trump’s announcement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pledged to commence “the strongest sanctions in history” and outlined 12 conditions required of Iran before any new deal would be made with the country.<sup>8</sup> These demands encompassed various issues,

such as abandoning nuclear programs, including plutonium processing and development of ballistic missiles; suspending support for Shia militias in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere; and the cessation of threats toward Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. These demands were designed to curtail Iran’s strategic intent and ultimately minimize Tehran’s options, which is considered to be a huge blow to the Iranian regime.

Under the maximum pressure campaign, Iran has faced one of the most serious financial crises in history. Washington’s harsh policy toward Iran took a phased approach. The biggest step against the Iranian regime was to end sanction waivers for Iranian crude oil imports for eight countries: India, China, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. This meant that few governments were allowed to import crude oil from Iran, which was the country’s main source of revenue. Despite the fact that Iran needed India’s continued support for buying fuel, India had to stop purchasing Iranian crude oil. Hence, it was not a coincidence when Iran excluded India from a railway project between Chabahar and Zahedan.<sup>9</sup>

With a mixture of many other financial sanctions on Iranian companies and individuals locked out of the international money transfer network, the country’s financial situation got worse daily, which consequently led Tehran to request 5 billion USD in emergency funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in March 2020.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the COVID-19 outbreak hit Iran in February 2020, exacerbating the financial situation and rendering it more difficult for Iranian citizens to lead normal lives. Due to the closure of borders with neighboring countries and the decrease of inbound tourists, revenue generation from trade of non-oil products and tourism, two potential alternative industries, also became limited. In short, Iran is faced with a double issue: US sanctions and COVID-19.

In addition to such economic statecraft, tensions between the United States and Iran centered on the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and other places, soared dramatically. The turning point was a US drone strike on IRGC Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani near the Baghdad International Airport on 3 January 2020, which further sparked tensions between Washington and Tehran. In response, the IRGC launched more than a dozen missiles at al-Asad Air Base in Iraq’s Anbar province, which hosts US troops, on 8 January 2020.<sup>11</sup> Although many expected the United States to exact revenge against Iran, the Trump did not approve further actions, expressing the view that Iran avoided causing human casualties and eventually stood down. In addition, debates surrounding the arms embargo on Iran and attacks on nuclear facilities in Natanz are still ongoing.

This status, as well as any action for Israel and against Iran, was maintained by President Trump, aimed at winning a second term in November 2020. However,

as former Vice Pres. Joe Biden won the election, there could be a significant shift in American policy, as he has officially expressed his wish to rejoin JCPOA if Iran returns to strict compliance with the deal.<sup>12</sup> Iran has gradually reduced its commitment under JCPOA by exceeding the threshold (3.67 percent) of uranium enrichment since May 2019. As of June 2020, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) estimates that Iran's stock of low-enriched uranium grew to 2,323.9 kilograms, all enriched below 5 percent, and breakout timelines are 3.5 months.<sup>13</sup> It is true that Iran is engaged in destabilizing behavior across the Middle East, crushes internal protesters in brutal fashion, and poses a threat to the interests of the Quad Plus. Nevertheless, it is also certain that the JCPOA provided a platform where the UN Security Council's five permanent members and Germany (referred to as the P5+1) were able to have a dialogue with Iran. In this sense, it must be said that the United States eventually pushed Iran to reactivate its nuclear development programs. Israel, a member of the Quad Plus, would surely oppose any cooperation with Iran, so cautious measures must be taken to reduce tensions between the United States and Iran.

### ***Chabahar Port Development***

Although what the members of the Quad Plus can offer to Iran seems limited, or nearly nonexistent, it is notable that the Chabahar port is exempted from US sanctions. According to the US Department of State, the United States granted an exception to Chabahar because it is vital for the ongoing support of Afghanistan's growth and humanitarian relief.<sup>14</sup> Washington also might have taken its friendly diplomatic relations with India into consideration. Hence, Chabahar port development, an India-led initiative, is likely to be a future strategic option for the Quad Plus members.

The Chabahar port is a deep-sea port located in Sistan and Baluchestan province, in southeastern Iran (see map below). The port faces the Gulf of Oman and is a strategically important port connecting the Middle East and South Asia. It is just 160 km west of Gwadar port in Pakistan, which is being developed as a gateway to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (see section two for more details). Most of the inhabitants in the Sistan and Baluchestan province are Balochis, whose mother tongue is not Persian but Balochi, and the area has been underdeveloped compared to other Iranian provinces. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Chabahar port was in the subterritory of the Omani Empire, like the Gwadar and Bandar-e Abbas ports.<sup>15</sup> During the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), the port played an important role in export and import of cargos because it is located outside of the Strait of Hormuz,<sup>16</sup> but the port's development itself was not promoted. On 23 May 2016, Afghanistan, India, and Iran

signed a tripartite agreement for the development of the Chabahar port. India announced its financial assistance to the Chabahar port, as well as its surroundings and relevant facilities, which cost a total of 500 million USD. Furthermore, in February 2018, the operational rights of the Shahid Beheshti port, one of two seaports at Chabahar, were awarded to India Ports Global Limited.<sup>17</sup>



(Source: Google map)

### **Figure 1. Chabahar port and Makran Coast**

New Delhi is committed to developing the Chabahar port as a means of containing China and Pakistan in the Indo-Pacific, promoting connectivity with Central Asia, and supporting reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. First, India is believed to have begun supporting Chabahar port development to counter China, as the two countries have an antagonistic relationship at the regional level. Due to the port’s unique geographical location, Chabahar is a conjunction point between the “free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific” vision proposed by Narendra Modi and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Although India’s Indo-Pacific strategy officially represents an inclusive and open vision, not aimed at countering a specific nation’s initiative, China’s increasing influence is certainly unfavorable for New Delhi and India’s allies.

Secondly, India focuses on connecting with the Central Asian Republics (CAR), which possess vast natural resources and are potential energy suppliers for India. India advocates the Connect Central Asia Policy, which aims to deepen India’s relations and connectivity with CAR in the areas of politics, security, economy, culture, and so forth. India has also been promoting the International North-South Transport Corridor initiative, attempting to establish a trade route

with Central Asia and the Caucasus region via sea, land, and air routes. When India eyes Central Asia, the roles of Iran and Afghanistan naturally become important because India must bypass Pakistan, which does not allow the transit of Indian goods. Finally, supporting reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan is thought to be one of the main reasons India supports Chabahar. Afghanistan is a landlocked country surrounded by six other nations, and access to the ocean has always been a matter of concern. For New Delhi, stabilizing war-torn Afghanistan is in India's own national interest because of issues related to security, counternarcotics, and more. Taking geostrategic importance into account, it would be accurate to state that Chabahar port may well be a fault line in the Quad Plus infrastructure cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Iran's Look East Policy***

The abovementioned argument can be evidenced through China's increasing presence in Iran, as well as Iran's approach toward China in recent years. To put it simply, this represents a potential threat to the Quad Plus and considerable gains for China. First proposed by China's leader Xi Jinping during a visit to Iran in 2016, Iran is preparing to sign a 25-year Iran–China comprehensive cooperation program soon. The program is designed for China to purchase Iranian oil over the next 25 years. On the other hand, Iran is supposed to receive China's support in various areas, including military, security, banking, telecommunication, infrastructure development, education, technology, and science.<sup>19</sup> Specific details of the program have yet to be publicly disclosed, but some believe the deal will give China a military foothold in the region. Ironically, this situation was created by Washington's maximum pressure campaign that devastated Iran's economy and, subsequently, led its leadership to look to China. Thus, engagement with Iran is inextricably linked with the Quad Plus narrative.

## **Pakistan: CPEC as the Main BRI Project**

### ***China's Increasing Influence***

Likewise, Washington's harsh policy toward Pakistan has led Islamabad to further deepen its strategic, political, and economic relationship with China. China's partnership with Pakistan is nothing new, as China has placed importance on this relationship to counter India's influence since the 1960s. With China's economic growth in the early twenty-first century, the relationship between both countries has upgraded over time. For instance, in April 2015, President Xi visited Pakistan. In his interactions with Pakistan's prime minister Nawaz

Sharif, Xi agreed to upgrade China–Pakistan relations to an all-weather strategic partnership of cooperation.<sup>20</sup> The prospect of greater Chinese presence via the CPEC and Gwadar project poses greater security concerns for New Delhi and other members of the Quad.<sup>21</sup>

From Islamabad’s perspective, China’s financial support is invaluable for Pakistan, which has been suffering from a financial crisis for quite some time. Pakistan has asked for the IMF’s help several times, as it is faced with a trade deficit, a declining foreign currency reserve, and a drop in the value of the Pakistani Rupee. Under such circumstances, China’s proposal to develop Pakistan’s infrastructure via CPEC is a meaningful offer. The Trump administration further drove Islamabad toward China through Washington’s hardline stance toward Pakistan, regarding it as a sponsor of terrorism in Afghanistan and other places.<sup>22</sup> The members of the Quad Plus should counter China’s strategic outreach by countering Beijing’s efforts in Pakistan.

### ***Gwadar Port Development***

Since the Gwadar port plays an important role as a gateway to the CPEC, finding a way to diminish Gwadar’s importance is a matter of concern for the Quad Plus. Although the development of the Gwadar port by the Pakistani authority can be traced back to the 1950s,<sup>23</sup> China’s interest in the port emerged only in 2001. A Chinese company drew a masterplan for the development in October 2001 and won the contract to construct multipurpose berths.<sup>24</sup> Although the Port of Singapore Authority took charge of the management and operation of Gwadar port in January 2007, the lack of notable progress in development led Islamabad to end that contract in February 2013, again awarding stewardship to the Chinese Overseas Ports Holding Company.<sup>25</sup> President Xi announced that China would commence the BRI during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November 2014 and placed CPEC as one of the key connectivity projects in China’s strategic vision.

It would not be easy to precisely specify China and Pakistan’s strategic intent to promote Gwadar port development, but it is certain that both countries place importance from a strategic perspective.<sup>26</sup> First, the Gwadar port is expected to function as an alternative transit route to circumvent the Malacca Straits. This matters greatly to China. Indeed, it is true that connecting with the Gwadar port and opening access to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan might produce economic benefits for the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, the relatively underdeveloped western part of China. However, the Khunjerab Pass, located on the border of China and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, is usually closed for 3–4 months in the winter every year; thus, a land route from Gwadar to Kashgar does not seem to be

a stable and reliable path for traders. It is also not cost-efficient for traders, as shipping goods by container is much cheaper than transporting by road.<sup>27</sup>

Second, as Gwadar is located far from the Indian border, it serves as an alternative port to Karachi for Pakistan in case of an emergency. During the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, India blockaded Karachi and there was a very significant chance of this happening again during the Kargil War of 1999. For this reason, focusing on Gwadar enables Pakistan to expand its naval capabilities and to have more strategic options.<sup>28</sup> In the short term, China does not have to rely much on Gwadar port for military and strategic purposes, as China opened the Chinese People's Liberation Army Support Base in Djibouti in 2017. The Chinese navy can resupply and refuel at Djibouti. Having said that, as mentioned above, the value of the Gwadar port cannot be measured from its accessibility and feasibility in normal situations alone. It would be fair to state that China invests in Gwadar port with an eye toward its military and strategic potential in the long term.

### ***“Strategic Depth” and Afghanistan Connection***

In fact, the members of the Quad Plus should be wary of Pakistan's irresponsible and aggressive behavior in the region. Under the concept of “strategic depth,” Pakistan is believed to covertly support the Taliban in Afghanistan and jihadist groups fighting to “liberate” Kashmir in India. As Ahmed Rashid mentions, Pakistan started supporting the Taliban in the early 1990s,<sup>29</sup> with Pakistan's military establishment providing the Taliban with sanctuaries and resources even today.<sup>30</sup> Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan is likely to increase in the aftermath of the 2020 US-signed Doha peace deal with the Taliban, which paves the way for the Taliban to play an active role in Afghanistan's future political system, where it might even emerge as the leading political faction in Afghanistan (see section three for more details). In parallel with the Taliban's political rise, Pakistan's influence will proportionally grow bigger in the region. This is particularly worrying for India, a core member of the Quad Plus, and should bring New Delhi to revisit its foreign policy toward Afghanistan.

## **Afghanistan: Economic Integration after the Withdrawal of the US Troops**

### ***Chabahar Port Development as a Leverage to Pakistan***

The withdrawal of the US troops, as agreed upon in the Doha Agreement, could create a power vacuum, which might result in China and/or Russia gaining substantial influence in Kabul. Thus, continued engagement by the Quad Plus is

crucial to maintaining security and stability in Afghanistan. In this context, the members of the Quad Plus should take Afghanistan into consideration when shaping their strategy in the Indo-Pacific because Kabul is one of the main stakeholders in the Chabahar port development. Iran signed a memorandum of agreement with Afghanistan to lease 50-hectore of land for Afghan businesses in May 2012.<sup>31</sup> In this context, Afghanistan is supposed to play a role as a user of the Chabahar port. Ports are only a means to transit goods, so it could be said that connecting them with markets is more important than building infrastructure. Here, Afghanistan’s significant role can be pointed out.

First, Afghanistan views the Chabahar port as a strategic project primarily because Kabul aims to shift Afghanistan from being an aid-dependent to a self-reliant country.<sup>32</sup> Since the Bonn Agreement on 5 December 2001, the international community has attempted to democratize and liberalize Afghanistan in the political and economic spheres. Nevertheless, it turned out that politicians played a political game, distributing vested interests to their own patronage networks, and corruption has remained prevalent. Additionally, revenue from the Afghan government heavily relies on the donor countries/agencies—far from the self-reliant state envisioned. It is imperative for Afghanistan to sell its own products, such as natural agricultural resources, to foreign countries, gaining foreign currency on its own. The Chabahar port can be categorized as one of many projects that provide better connectivity, along with the Lapis Lazuli corridor, which opened in 2018 and links Afghanistan to Turkey via Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; the Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan–Tajikistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan power interconnecting project, which aims to export power from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan; the Central Asia–South Asia (CASA-1000) power project, which will allow for the export of surplus hydroelectricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan; and others.

Second, Afghanistan commits to Chabahar port development to evade the influence of Pakistan. For a long time, Afghanistan and Pakistan have had diplomatic disputes, including skirmishes over the Durand Line. One example is that the diplomatic relations between both countries were terminated in 1961 due to heightened tension. In recent years, the relationship has worsened because Afghanistan publicly accuses Pakistan of supporting terrorist organizations operating in Afghanistan. A strategic calculation allows Afghanistan to move toward bypassing Pakistan in trading activities. In fact, for a long time, Pakistan had been the country that traded with Afghanistan, but starting in 2014, Iran replaced Pakistan as Kabul’s primary trading partner.<sup>33</sup> The Chabahar port is being used as a leverage to Pakistan to counter Islamabad’s influence in Afghanistan.



### ***Doha Agreement and Aftermath***

Regional dynamics should be noted, because the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan will certainly present a new challenge to members of the Quad Plus. On 29 February 2020, Zalmay Khalilzad, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconstruction, and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, deputy leader of the Taliban,<sup>34</sup> and chief of the Taliban Afghanistan Political Office in Doha, Qatar, signed a peace deal that guarantees the Taliban will not allow its members, other individuals, or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use Afghanistan's soil to threaten the security of the United States and its allies, while the United States will reduce the number of US forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 within 135 days, ultimately completing withdrawal of all remaining forces by May 2021.<sup>35</sup> What the international community had been concerned about was that Afghanistan might once again become a safe haven for foreign terrorist organizations because of the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of foreign troops. This deal partially resolves such concerns; however, the Taliban has agreed to neither a reduction in violence nor a permanent ceasefire. For this reason, security in Afghanistan is a grave concern for the Quad Plus.

Although violence in any form must be condemned, it is highly likely that, in the long term, the Taliban will either be part of the political system or a leading governing political faction in Afghanistan after the Doha Agreement, which, in a way, guarantees the Taliban's future political status. In this context, it is imperative to economically integrate Afghanistan into international markets and contain Pakistan's influence. First, as mentioned above, for Afghanistan to cease being an aid-dependent country, it is necessary for Kabul to stand on its own feet and earn adequate revenue for the country's economy. The Quad Plus could consider offering business opportunities or investing in Afghanistan to explore its vast natural resources, such as oil, gas, iron, copper, and rare earth and utilize its abundant agricultural products, such as fruits and vegetables. This will ultimately lead to a more stable situation in Afghanistan by providing economic stability and prosperity.

Second, as it is inevitable that Pakistan's influence will increase in parallel with the Taliban's rise, the Quad Plus must maintain a channel with Pakistan's military establishment so that peace negotiations in Doha will move in a positive direction. In this regard, Khalilzad's meeting with Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, Qamar Javed Bajwa, on 14 September 2020 was meaningful,<sup>36</sup> illustrating that Washington views Pakistan as an influential actor in the Afghan peace process.<sup>37</sup> While peace negotiations must be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, third parties can have an influence on the process, as a similar case was evident in the 2014

presidential election. These regional relations should be reflected in the regional policies of the Quad Plus.

### ***Dilemma between Belt and Road Initiative and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific***

While Afghanistan tries to diversify its trade routes, it does not necessarily mean that it is turning its back on China’s BRI. It may be true that, considering Kabul’s relationship with Pakistan, Afghanistan prefers to export and import products through Iran via the Chabahar port. However, it only means that Afghanistan is fond of possessing more options rather than limiting itself by selecting only one. In fact, Afghanistan was among the first countries to sign an agreement with China for the joint construction of the BRI.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Afghanistan is considered to be in favor of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative favored by the Quad, as the United States, Japan, India, and Australia were major donors in reconstructing Afghanistan after the Bonn Agreement. Given Afghanistan’s unique geographical location, it is important for members of the Quad Plus to make a strategy that engages Afghanistan in connectivity projects so that it does not lapse back into isolation and become a safe haven for terrorism again.

## **Policy Implications for the Quad Plus**

### ***Accelerant Factor***

Discussions have so far led to an interim conclusion that the Quad Plus should be concerned about China’s growing influence in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran; thus, rejoining the JCPOA and promoting Chabahar port development is likely to produce a positive outcome for stability in the region. However, this issue needs to be argued with accelerant and suppression factors in mind. First, considering China’s heavy investment in CPEC, the Quad Plus must act to contain China’s growing influence. As mentioned earlier, Gwadar port development has been almost unilaterally promoted by China to ensure an alternative route in case of the closure of the Strait of Malacca. In recent years, China has strengthened its naval capabilities and constructed alternate sea lanes. This matters to Japan, a member of the Quad Plus, as it faces China’s aggressive behavior in the East and South China Seas.

Second, allies of the Quad Plus, except the United States and Israel, have had favorable relationships with Iran. Thus, engaging Tehran will surely be a diplomatic asset for these countries to ease US–Iran tensions. It is evident that US–Iran military confrontation is a threat to the international community; so, third parties,

such as Australia, Japan, India, and South Korea, can play a mediation role. In particular, Prime Minister Abe's visit to Tehran in June 2019 and Iranian president Hassan Rouhani's reciprocal visit to Tokyo in December in the same year illustrate the ability of Quad members' leaders to facilitate productive interaction. Likewise, channels for dialogues should be open.

Third, it is important to recognize that Afghanistan is a part of the tripartite agreement on Chabahar. Stabilizing Afghanistan is a common benefit for the Quad Plus, and developing Chabahar will result in Afghanistan's self-reliance help bypass Pakistan's increasing influence.

### ***Suppression Factor***

On the other hand, it is too early to conclude that the Quad Plus should abruptly change its policy toward Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. First, seeing the Trump administration's hardline policy toward Iran, it is not feasible that the Quad Plus can become actively engaged with infrastructure development in Iran. The United States and Iran terminated diplomatic relationship on 7 April 1980 after Iranian students seized the US Embassy in Tehran and took its staff hostage on 4 November 1979.<sup>39</sup> Although Chabahar port is exempted from US sanctions, it is not an easy path for the Quad Plus to choose a drastic change in policy making toward Iran, given 40 years of hostility between Washington and Tehran.

Second, the Quad Plus should be cautious regarding Iran's intent. On 27 December 2019, a joint naval exercise was conducted among Iran, China, and Russia, utilizing Chabahar port during the military exercise. This strongly implies that Chabahar port is developed not only for commercial purposes but also military purposes. In addition, the Rouhani regime aims to open a pipeline project connecting to Jask port, which is also on the Makran Coast.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps is expanding its naval capabilities with the opening of a new port at Sirik.<sup>41</sup> Taking these developments into account, developing Chabahar port could be a double-edged sword for the Quad Plus.

### ***Prospects and Challenges***

Based on the pros and cons of this discussion, it turns out that members of the Quad Plus might consider Chabahar port as a potential joint cooperation projects because for India the port could serve to counter the Gwadar port under CPEC. For other Quad Plus members, getting involved is beneficial because it serves as a breakwater toward China's expansion in South Asia and the Middle East. Aside from infrastructure, other potential areas of cooperation include research and development, nurturing human resources, environment, and investment (heavy industries, tourism, and so forth).

However, the Chinese-sponsored CPEC could be a potential risk for the Quad Plus because it can be concluded that China and Pakistan view it from a strategic rather than economic viewpoint. In an emergency situation, the CPEC and Gwadar port could be utilized to benefit China and Pakistan. At the same time, rejoining the JCPOA would greatly reduce the current tension between Washington and Tehran. Last but not least, the Afghanistan issue and the repercussions of the Doha Agreement should be considered. Stability in Afghanistan is a common goal for Quad Plus members; so, supporting the peace negotiations is one of the potential areas for Quad Plus cooperation.

Having said that, uncertainty remains as the United States and Iran lost trust in one other as a result of the Trump administration’s maximum pressure campaign. It will not be easy for Teheran to return to compliance with the JCPOA because the Rouhani regime would face opposition from anti-US political factions and must appease his own base in the lead up to the Iranian elections. Nevertheless, Tehran has expressed its readiness to comply with the JCPOA, if the United States apologizes for its past mistakes, compensates financial losses incurred as a result of Washington’s maximum pressure campaign, and returns to the JCPOA.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, the Iranian presidential election is to be held in June 2021, and hardline candidates are expected to run. The United States and Iran must use this limited window of opportunity wisely.

## **Conclusion**

This article discussed the Trump administration’s policies toward Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran and argued these policies led to diplomatic losses for Washington. In the case of Pakistan, Washington’s South Asia and Afghanistan policies have cemented Pakistan’s deepening relationship with China. Likewise, Iran is looking east to resolve the worst financial crisis in its history. In Afghanistan, the withdrawal of US troops will certainly culminate in a fluid security situation and the future presence of China and Russia. Keeping in mind that Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran collectively represent a “missing link” in the FOIP vision, this article pointed out potential areas of cooperation by members of the Quad Plus in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.

The measures taken to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in Iran, should be discussed among members of the Quad Plus. As of 7 November 2020, COVID-19 cases in Iran have reached 673,250, with 37,832 deaths, which ranks Iran as the fourteenth-worst stricken country in the world.<sup>43</sup> As the Quad Plus was originally convened to counter COVID-19,<sup>44</sup> this issue could be one of the pillars for ongoing discussion.

The relationship between Afghanistan and Iran is another point of concern, because Iran is believed to support pro-Iranian proxy forces in the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> It is of concern that Iran might expand its ties with the Taliban to exercise more influence in the region and to kick the United States out of the region.

Considering all these discussions, this article proposes that engaging Iran and supporting the Afghan peace process is the way forward to bring peace and stability. President Trump's foreign policy toward Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, above all, benefited China, which is seeking a bigger role in the region, in access to oil and power.<sup>46</sup> It is urgently needed for the Quad Plus, including the next US administration, to form a consistent approach, recognizing that apparently separate issues are, in substance, interrelated. 🌟

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