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“Quad” from the Japanese Perspective

Yasushi Tomiyama*

Abstract

The idea of strategic cooperation between four major democracies in the Indo-Pacific region — Japan, the United States, Australia and India — was born under the initiative of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The Abe government places the quadrilateral cooperation as a pillar of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”. The strategy has two main purposes: to offer an alternative to a China-centric regional order that China as a rising economic and military power is trying to build, and to keep the inward-looking United States committed to Asia. Even though the quadrilateral cooperation is an important attempt to respond to the dynamic shift in the Indo-Pacific, it will have many twists and turns.

Moves towards a strategic quadrilateral cooperation between Japan, the United States, Australia and India, because of their shared fundamental values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law are gathering pace. The Japan-led initiative, also known as the “Quad,” is an attempt to have an inward-looking America stay committed to Asia along with providing countries in the Indo-Pacific region with an alternative to a potential China-centric order. The Quad was getting into gear in 2006-2007, but collapsed before making a comeback in 2017. This article looks back at the history of the four-way cooperation and examines the opportunities offered by the Quad, as well as the challenges it faces.

Quad-1

In December 2004, the United States, Japan, Australia and India formed a “core group” at US initiative, to coordinate international humanitarian

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-assistance and disaster-relief efforts following the Boxing Day tsunami that left over 300,000 people dead or missing in the Indian Ocean region. It was the first time that the four countries had collaborated for conducting military operations, providing a precedent for the quadrilateral partnership.

It was Japan's Shinzo Abe who first as a politician advocated a Japan-US-Australia-India strategic cooperation. In his book *Utsukushii Kuni-e* (Toward a Beautiful Country), published shortly before he became prime minister for the first time in 2006, Abe wrote, "It will be wonderful if the four countries [that share universal values such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights and the rule of law] can hold talks from a strategic point of view". Expressing his willingness to host quadrilateral strategic dialogues between top government leaders or foreign ministers, if he became Japan's prime minister, he added: "Japan should exercise leadership for the purpose."

..In 2006, Abe wrote, "It will be wonderful if the four countries [that share universal values such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights and the rule of law] can hold talks from a strategic point of view".

After forming his first cabinet in September 2006, Prime Minister Abe lost no time in moving toward the four-way cooperation. The joint statement by Abe and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who visited Japan in December of that year upgraded the Japan-India relationship to a "strategic and global partnership," declaring that the two prime ministers "share the view on the usefulness of having dialogue among India, Japan and other like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region on themes of mutual interest" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006). It was clear that they had the United States and Australia in mind as dialogue partners, even though they were not named.

In March 2007, at a joint press conference following the signing of the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, Abe said, "We also emphasise a relationship with India with whom we share basic values. We promote Japan-US-Australia [dialogue] and the dialogue with India as well" (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2007). Australian Prime

Minister John Howard said Australia shared democracy not only with the United States and Japan but also with India.

Among the leading figures of the then George W. Bush administration, Vice President Dick Cheney was said to be particularly eager to include India in the trilateral US-Japan-Australia strategic dialogue that began March in 2006, before Abe's inauguration (Shanahan, 2009).

In May 2007, officials from the US, Japan, Australia, and India, of the rank of assistant secretary of state met for the first time (Chellaney, 2007) on the sidelines of the Senior Officials Meeting of the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila. The Quad that had been nothing but an idea became a reality. In August 2007, Abe delivered a legendary speech on the "Confluence of the Two Seas" in the Indian Parliament. In the speech that launched the geopolitical concept of the Indo-Pacific encompassing the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, he suggested that Japan and India by coming together to form a "Strategic Global Partnership," could develop an immense network spanning the whole Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States and Australia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 2007). In September, Japan and Australia, along with Singapore, partic-

India did not want the Quad to be seen as constituting an encirclement of China.

ipated in the US-India *Malabar* naval exercise. Having the experience of coordinating international relief operations after the Boxing Day tsunami three years earlier, the Quad expanded its wings to the military field. It was at about this point when the Quad-1 was at its peak.

China poured cold water on the four-way cooperation. China had issued demarches to each participant of the quadrilateral senior officials' dialogue days before it took place in May, expressing its concerns that the meeting meant to contain China (Varadarajan, 2007). India did not want the Quad to be seen as constituting an encirclement of China. Indian Prime Minister Singh had to explain to Chinese President Hu Jintao in June, that the group wasn't "ganging up" on China (Madan, 2017). Australia was even more disturbed by the Chinese anger. Australian Defence Minister Brendan Nelson said in July that the quadrilateral dialogue did not encompass military and

security issues but was confined to the economic and cultural fields. He further added that Canberra was satisfied with its trilateral strategic partnership with the United States and Japan and did not wish to complicate its relationship with other countries by extending it to the quadrilateral (Dikshit, 2007).

The Quad-1 lost momentum with the resignation in July 2007 of Prime Minister Abe, the champion of the scheme, for health reasons. The conservative ruling coalition in Australia lost the general election in November to be replaced by a Labour government led by Kevin Rudd, a pro-China politician. Stephen Smith, Foreign Minister in the new Rudd government, said in February 2008, that he had informed Japan and China that Canberra would withdraw from the US-Japan-Australia-India dialogue (Middleton, J. and Smith, S. 2008), marking the end of Quad-1.

Quad-2

The idea of the Quad came back to life with Abe's return to power in December 2012. He had written an article on "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond" for Project Syndicate, an international non-profit organisation, which made the article public the day after the second Abe cabinet took office. The article proposed that Australia, India, Japan, and the US state of Hawaii should "form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific" at a time when the South China Sea seemed set to become a Chinese "lake" and Chinese law-enforcement vessels continued their coercive activities around Japan's Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea (Abe, S. 2012). However, Abe's proposal did not lead to the immediate revival of the Quad. Instead, the trilateral Japan-US-Australia, Japan-US-India and Japan-Australia-India cooperation took the lead.

Japan, the United States and Australia revived the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and its fifth ministerial meeting held after four years, in October 2013, was attended by the Foreign Ministers and the US Secretary of State.¹ Japan (and New Zealand) participated in the US-Australia joint military exercise *Talisman Sabre* for the first time in July 2015. Japan, the United States, and India held their first trilateral Foreign Ministers' meeting in September 2015,² while Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force participated as a

1. *Japan-U.S.-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue held the 6th ministerial meeting in July 2016 and the 7th in August 2017.*

2. *The 2nd Japan-U.S.-India foreign ministers' meeting was held in September, 2017.*

guest in the US-India *Malabar* naval exercise in October 2015, for the first time in eight years.³ Japan, Australia, and India held their first trilateral dialogue of the foreign secretaries or vice ministers level in June 2015.⁴

In August 2016, Prime Minister Abe announced a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Nairobi, Kenya. This is a far-reaching initiative to extend the success of Asia — where the economies are rapidly growing, and universal values such as democracy, the rule of law and market economy are taking root — to Africa. It also seeks to expand the potential of Africa by linking it to a free and open Indo-Pacific that would help promote the stability and prosperity of the region as a whole. The Japanese government deemed the quadrilateral Japan-US-Australia-India cooperation as an important element of its strategy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2017a).

India remained cautious about the revival of the Quad even after Abe's announcement of the Indo-Pacific strategy. The joint statement issued after the meeting between Abe and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November 2016, recognised the potential for synergy between Abe's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and Modi's Act East Policy and welcomed the trilateral dialogue between Japan, India and the United States, and between Japan, India, and Australia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016). But nothing was mentioned in the statement about the possible enlargement of the trilateral framework into the quadrilateral structure. However, the two Prime Ministers' joint statement in September 2017, went further by saying that they would align Abe's strategy and Modi's policy but failed again to mention anything about the Japan-US-Australia-India quadrilateral framework, pledging only to "strengthen trilateral cooperation frameworks with the United States, Australia, and other countries" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2017b).

Australia, compared to last time, has been more receptive about the quadrilateral cooperation now. In a joint media release after the meeting between Abe and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in January 2017, the two leaders said, "Japan and Australia will continue to work proactively, alongside the US and other like-minded countries, including India, to maintain

3. Japan participated in the Malabar 2016 also as a guest and became a permanent member of the exercise from Malabar 2017.

4. Japan-Australia-India Trilateral Dialogue held the 2nd meeting in February 2016, the 3rd meeting in April 2017 and the 4th meeting in December 2017 at the level of foreign secretary/vice minister.

the rules-based international order and support a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2017c).

What contributed greatly to the revival of the Quad was the clear support of Washington. In his speech before visiting India in October 2017, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson quoted Abe's original phrase "free and open

Indo-Pacific" repeatedly, indicating his willingness to get on board Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy. Tillerson called for greater cooperation among Indo-Pacific democracies, saying "there is room to invite others, including Australia" to the trilateral engagement between the United States, India, and Japan (US Department of State, 2017). Tillerson blamed China for continuing to militarise the artificial islands in the South China Sea, subverting the sovereignty of neighbouring countries and for imposing heavy a debt burden on them through "predatory" financing to obtain equity in relevant facilities. He made no secret that behind his support for the Quad lay the determination that Chinese encroachment of other countries' territories by using its military and economic power and the destruction of international order will not be forgiven.

US President Donald Trump also mentioned "free and open Indo-Pacific" in a speech he made in Da Nang, Vietnam, during his 12 day Asian tour in November 2017, which took him to Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines, in that order. However, he mostly spoke about how other countries took advantage of a free and open US trade policy, without regard to reciprocity and insisted his administration would put America first. In one part of the speech, Trump pledged to build trust and ensure the security of democratic nations based on the three principles of rule of law, individual rights and freedom of navigation, bearing in mind the differences of values with regard to China (White House, 2017). But he failed to deliver what can be

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termed a comprehensive Asian strategy, betraying the expectations of many.

Nonetheless, the revival of the Quad, supported by Tillerson, became a reality two days after the Trump speech. On November 12, 2017, senior officials from Japan, the United States, Australia and India met in Manila before the opening of East Asia Summit in which all of the four countries were participating. The quadrilateral senior officials' dialogue that had been held only once in May 2007, was revived after ten years. A press release from Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the officials "discussed measures to ensure a free and open international order based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific," (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2017d). Thus making clear that the Quad was an important part of Abe's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

The Japanese Foreign Minister, Taro Kono expressed his willingness to upgrade the quadrilateral dialogue to the level of Foreign Ministers and eventually to the level of top leaders (Hayashi and Onchi, 2017), as Abe himself had proposed in his book twelve years earlier. In this regard, a senior Foreign Ministry official said, "The quadrilateral officials' meeting can be regularised. But it will be difficult to have a meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers or top leaders right now. Some of the four countries do not want the Quad to be seen as an anti-China block."

Following the revival of the four-way dialogue, Prime Ministers Abe and Turnbull reaffirmed at their meeting in January 2018, that Japan and Australia should "continue close coordination to advance cooperation among Australia, India, Japan and the United States" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018). On the same day as the Japan-Australia summit, top naval officers from Japan, the United States, Australia and India appeared together for the first time as panellists in a multilateral conference in New Delhi. Attending the Raisina Dialogue were Admiral Katsutoshi Kawano, Chief of Staff, Joint Staff, Japan, Admiral Harry Harris, Jr., Commander, US Pacific Command, Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, Chief of Navy, Australia and Admiral Sunil Lamba, Chief of Naval Staff, India (Raisina Dialogue, 2018). This could possibly lead to a dialogue among quadrilateral top military leaders in the future.

Quadrilateral military exercises have not yet been resumed. Australia offered to send naval ships as observers to the *Malabar* exercise for a trilateral

drill with Japan's official participation in July 2017. But the offer was reportedly rejected by India (Miglani, 2017). India seems to harbour a strong distrust of Australia as it had unilaterally withdrawn from the Quad in 2008, bowing to pressure from China. (Anil Wadhwa, Senior Fellow of the Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, at a conference with the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals in Tokyo on March 7, 2018, stated that Australia could not participate in *Malabar 2017* because it had missed the six month deadline of filing its application prior to the exercise.)

Japanese concept of the Quad

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According to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Prime Minister Abe's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, an important part of which is Japan-US-Australia-India quadrilateral cooperation, has three pillars: to establish and expand basic values such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, the freedom of navigation and market economy; to seek economic prosperity through infrastructure building, trade and investment promotion and human resource cultivation in the region from East Asia to South Asia, the Middle East and Southeastern Africa;

and to ensure maritime security by building up regional coastguard capabilities and cooperation in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations. The Foreign Ministry emphasised that the strategy is not aimed at any specific country. But the three pillars themselves reveal that Japan is deeply conscious of China's expanding influence in recent years and that Japan, in partnership with the three other major Indo-Pacific democracies, would like to provide an alternative to a potential China-centric regional order that is presented as mutually beneficial but in reality would only be for China's economic benefit. The "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) scheme, will lead to the expansion of an authoritarian political model and a coercive maritime expansion supported by strong Chinese military power, that is different from liberal democracy,

Abe's Indo-Pacific Strategy appears modest and does not talk about a great game as the OBOR does. China made a great show about the OBOR at an international conference and established new financial institutions such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund. In contrast, Japan's Indo-Pacific Strategy includes no plans to set up a bank or a fund to finance infrastructure building and other projects, but seeks to utilise existing financial institutions like Official Development Assistance (ODA), Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and Manila-based Asia Development Bank (ADB). Agendas set in the maritime security area of the strategy — assistance to strengthen maritime law enforcement capabilities and cooperation in the HADR operations — are also modest. Japan has provided patrol ships to South East Asian nations such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia — all of which are threatened by China's maritime advancement — to help them boost their coast guard capabilities. Japan is also likely to provide anti-submarine and maritime surveillance aircraft P-3Cs to the Malaysian navy in the near future. If cooperation goes among the Quad countries goes well, Japan, the United States, Australia and India will be able to coordinate their activities better to enhance the coastguard capabilities of regional countries, with related training opportunities. Also, in the event of a major natural disaster the Quad troops are likely to coordinate their HADR operations in the region in an effective way. However, Japan does not anticipate quadrilateral maritime patrols or quadrilateral "freedom of navigation" operations in the South China Sea as it believes that the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), not the quadrilateral group of Japan, the United States, Australia and India, should assume the principle role in the South China Sea.

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Japan's Indo-Pacific Strategy has another important purpose — to keep the United States committed to Asia. We must not think that the "America First" approach avowed by President Trump would end up as a one-off phenomenon. The United States' tradition of isolationism, became apparent, especially during the second term of the Obama administration when the

country became increasingly inward-looking and hesitated to intervene in international issues. Trump won the presidential race by taking advantage of such an inward-looking electorate. We should expect the introvert tendency in the United States to remain unchanged in the post-Trump years. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy is, therefore, an important mechanism to keep the United States engaged and committed to Asia. And the Quad is an important part of the strategy. Even though Trump used the same phrase — “free and open Indo-Pacific” — as Abe’s in his speech in Vietnam, it was difficult to say whether Trump shared Abe’s strategy of exercising vigilance with regard to China. Still, according to a senior Japanese official, it is important to: “Look at what they have in common, instead of what they don’t have. I think it’s positive that Trump did use the same words and come personally to Asia.”

As for the revival of the Quad, there seems to have been no strong reaction from China to date. Although a spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry said in November 2017, that his government hoped the four-way dialogue

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would not damage “a third party’s interest” (Dasgupta, 2017), China has not been reported to have either delivered any diplomatic demarche to Japan, the United States, Australia and India, as it did 10 years ago, or expressed concern during top leaders’ meetings. As far as Chinese media commentaries are concerned, China appears to be confident that President Trump is so busy prioritising the re-acceleration of the US economy that he has no geopolitical policy to form an alliance with other key democracies in the region.

Opportunities and challenges

Behind the revival of the Quad after ten years is the changing dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region because of rising Chinese military and economic power and the inward-looking tendency of the United States. China has been conspicuously active in challenging the existing international order in recent years. In the South China Sea, Beijing has categorically ignored the ruling of an international arbitration tribunal and has

continued to militarise seven artificial islands in the Spratly Islands. In the East China Sea, Beijing routinely deploys China Coast Guard ships in waters around the Senkaku Islands in an attempt to break the effective control of Japan. In the summer of 2017, the Chinese People's Liberation Army unilaterally began road construction in the Doklam area east of the Himalayas, triggering a standoff with Indian troops. Australia is now increasingly wary of China because Beijing has been gaining influence in the Australian political system and universities by pumping in money. Within the "One Belt, One Road" zone, China constructed a deep sea port in Hambantota in Sri Lanka. But the burden of the debt is so heavy that Sri Lanka has recently handed over the operating rights of the port to a Chinese state-owned company on a 99-year lease. This development has revealed predatory nature of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative. The quadrilateral group of Japan, the United States, Australia, and India are aware of the danger posed by China as a "revisionist power," following a series of such actions.

Meanwhile, President Trump's "America First" policy, especially the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement, has alarmed US allies such as Japan and Australia who saw it as a sign of declining American interest in Asia. Both Japan and Australia are among the 11 countries who on March 8, 2018 agreed to keep the agreement alive despite the American withdrawal. The efforts to keep the United States committed to Asia should be in the national interest of not only the US allies, but also India. If the strategic partnership between Japan, the United States, Australia and India deepens, it will be easier for the four governments to share analyses relating to Chinese power, intentions and behaviours, and to exchange information about the "One Belt, One Road" initiative. On the naval domain, US-India-Japan trilateral naval exercise has focused on anti-submarine warfare (ASW) in recent years (Panda, 2017), in view of Chinese submarines vigorous activities. It is now possible that Australia, which has specific plans to improve its ASW capabilities (Department of Defence, Australia, 2016), could also participate in the exercise and therefore enlarge the scope of training. However, it is still unclear how far the quadrilateral cooperation will forge ahead.

In the field of economics, Japan, as I mentioned earlier, plans to utilise

the existing financial institutions for infrastructure construction and other projects. But, given the fact the ADB's loan criteria have been too strict to satisfy the enormous demand, prompting the setting up of the Chinese-led AIIB, it is not very sure if the existing institutions would be suffice. In the security field, Japan imposes many restraints on the military activities of its Self-Defence Forces (SDF), preventing it from making military contributions on par with US, Australia and India. Japan needs to revise its Constitution to get rid

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of the post-World War II tradition of absolute pacifism. Even if it becomes possible for the country to hold a national referendum in a couple of years to determine whether the Constitution should be revised, the pro-revision advocates are not optimistic about the referendum's result. Additionally, as the Quad has been promoted by the

personal sponsorship of Prime Minister Abe, it is uncertain whether his enthusiasm will be inherited by the next government.

In the United States, President Trump has not announced a comprehensive Asia strategy. The National Security Strategy, published last December by the White House designated China and Russia as "revisionist powers" and stressed that the United States is in a "strategic competition" with the two countries. But it is still unclear if the president himself shares this long-term perception. To what extent the America-first president will stay committed to Asia is yet unknown. Will the United States not be inclined to form a Group of Two (G2) with China, to jointly determine the fate of Asia if the North Korean nuclear crisis is resolved thanks to China's cooperation?

India, known for its traditional policy of nonalignment and strategic autonomy, apparently does not want the Quad to be seen as an "anti-China block." While seeking closer relations with Japan and the United States in recent years, India has been conducting hard-nosed diplomacy, seeking cooperation with China and Russia, within the framework of BRICS (emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

In Australia, as the incumbent government is a coalition of two conservative parties with a weak support base, we should not take the

presence of pro-Chinese politicians in Australia lightly. If China chooses to force the Quad to collapse it is likely that Beijing will first bring pressure to bear on Australia, as it did ten years ago.

The Quad forms an important part of Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy, but its progress will have many twists and turns. Therefore, it is also important for Japan to maintain and strengthen the Japan-US alliance as the lynchpin of national and regional security structure, while promoting multilayered arrangements. These include bilateral ones, such as: Japan-India, Japan-Australia, and Japan-ASEAN; trilateral ones: Japan-US-India; Japan-US-Australia; and Japan-Australia-India, and multilateral frameworks such as the East Asia Summit (EAS); as well as partnership with external democracies, including the United Kingdom and France.

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